

Representation of Signs Unconscious of History

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Abstract: Colors and forms within cultural motives include important historical signs. In this study, the colors and figures on Niksar – Ayvaz mosaics are taken as examples for development of civilizations that were founded and collapsed throughout the history of Anatolia. By photographing the mosaics in Niksar region of city of Tokat, which is called “Ayvaz Mosaics”, traditional mosaic forms, colors and geometric signs of these mosaics have been examined. During the analysis of layers of cultural structure, very few mosaics have been identified as from Byzantine period and therefore it’s decided that Anatolian civilization has been proven to be a transition civilization, through the indicators of the photographed mosaics. A study on history have been carried out, using geometric signs and colors on “Niksar Ayvaz Mosaics”, which have been photographed by Lect. Orhan Tanakinci and historical signs have been analyzed in accordance with, first, W. Wundt’s “Volkerpsychologie”, i.e. “folk psychology”, which is an experimental branch of “Social Psychology”, then Claude Lévi Strauss’ “structuralism theory” and at last S. Peirce’s “thirdness” principle.

Key words: Niksar • Byzantine • Mosaic • Semiotics • “Psychoanalytical sociology”

INTRODUCTION

The Byzantine civilization period is one of the longest periods in the history of Anatolia. Ancient “Byzantine – Pontus” region, which is the most important part of the Eastern Roman Empire, involves most of the Blacksea region, where Niksar is located.

After the downfall of Roman Empire, Byzantine extended its borders in a very wide area, which had been nourished in the middle of ancient eastern civilizations, like Persian and Sassanid Empires. Due to sharing the same geography, Empire carried out effective political and cultural relations with Anatolian Seljuk Empire. The aim of this study is to carry out the semiotical and sociological “analysis” of shared cultural heritage of Anatolia through the geometrical shapes on “Niksar-Ayvaz Mosaics”, which were discovered incidentally within the ruins of *ayazma* (holy springs of Orthodox Christians) in Tokat-Niksar region. The method of the study will be using W. Wundt’s “folk psychology” along with Claude Lévi Strauss’ “structuralism theory” and also S. Peirce’s “thirdness” principle will be used to make semiotical analysis.

In its common meaning, *Mosaic* is, “a decorative and artistic method, applied by pasting color fragments, produced from glass, marble and similar suitable materials, on a surface by using cement mortar or stucco” [1]. In Ancient Greek, it was called as *abakiskoi*, in Latin, it was *abaculi*, *tesserae* or *tessellate* and Ottoman’s named it as *fuseyfis*. In broad terms, “in mosaic manufacturing method, which is also defined as a composition method of putting small fragments of one or more materials in different colors adjacently, along with glass and marbles, ceramic, wooden, porcelain and stone fragments, also paper and fabric fragments are used” [2]. According to previous studies, the word mosaic can be found from Latin to ancient Hebrew. Mosaic is figurative or nonfigurative murals or floor coverings, made by embedding small colorful glass or stone fragments into plaster adjacently. According to some other sources the word “mosaic” is derived from the word “musivum” in Latin. The first examples of mosaics are seen in Asia Minor at the beginning of 3 thousand B.C. In the city of Uruk of Sumerians, mosaic-like wall decorations, made by driving cylindrical nails in different colors into the walls, have been found. In Ancient Greece, mosaics, made of pebbles, have been used since 5th century B.C. [3].

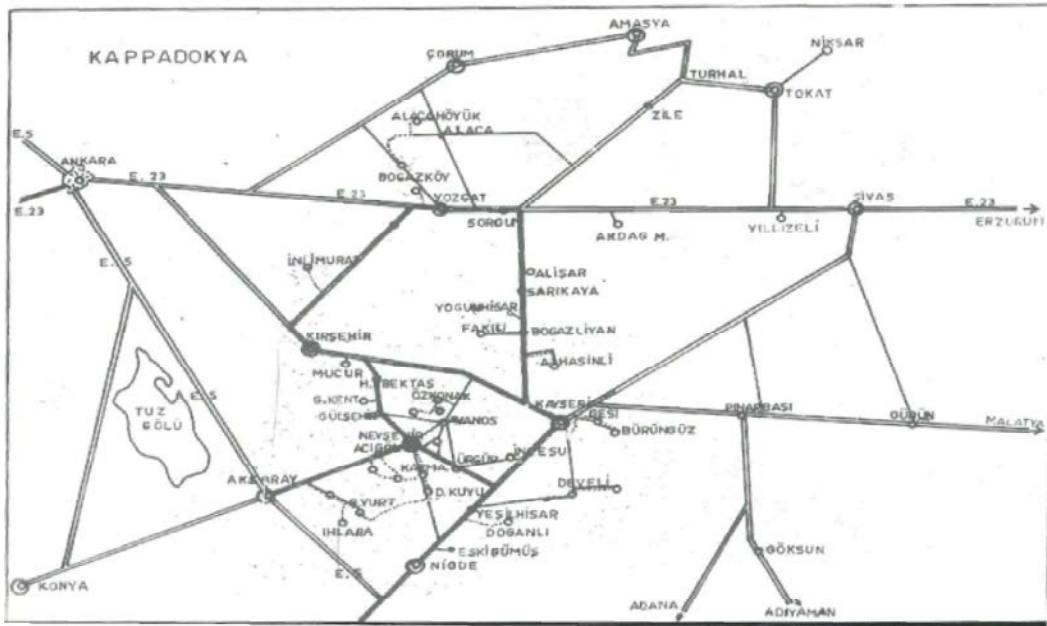


Image 2: Antique cappadocia

Etymologically, the application of mosaics has a longer history than we guessed. “In Roman Empire, making pictures with mosaic technique gained importance during 100-200 A.D. depending on the wealth and power of the empire. The quality of the mastership and mosaics can be seen on the walls and the floors of the monumental structures, where mosaics were used to cover the bleakness.” [4] According to the information received from Tokat Museum, the mosaics, found in Niksar, are likely the examples of “Early Christianity” period. According to a research of history researcher Liz James, “Mosaics can be found in every palace, villa, church and public bath ruins from Early Christianity period. In antiquity, between the 5th and 6th centuries, after the construction of wall mosaics began, pavement mosaics gained importance. During the Iconoclastic period, religious figures was applied either little if any or secretly. Mostly landscape pictures have been featured on the mosaics of this period.

Glass, the most preferred material, used in mosaics, was exported by Sassanid's in 4th century A.D. At the beginning glass was used as the basic material of dishware and window glasses, then it started to be used in the making of *tesserae* [5] The Arabian raids had a negative effect on glass production. However, in the major cities of glass production, as Bagdad, Rakka and Alexandria, the production continued. The researches on the shipwrecks from 11th century A.D. found at Serce Limani (Port Sparrow) and 30 km. offshore, proved that

not only glassware, but also second hand glassware and glass fragments were traded. The first step of glassware production is the base. The first step is to produce the glass as a raw material and the second step is processing the raw material. In 6th and 7th century A.D. there were glass furnaces for melting and processing glass in Bet Eli'ezer, with a 140 tones production capacity per year. In 13th century A.D. Venice was the center of raw glass production and glassware production. The biggest difficulty in glass production for mosaics was coloring the glass. While copper was needed for green and blue, cobalt was used for navy blue; but it was very difficult to produce opaque colors. The color of mosaic glass was acquired by four basic coloring materials; iron, copper, manganese and cobalt... A wide range of colors could be acquired through the mixture of these elements in different ratios. With 20 grams of gold, golden *tesserae* could be acquired for 6 square meters of mosaics area” [6].

However, as a result of a great destruction, we could only find the ruins of Niksar-Ayvaz mosaics, which is seen to be involving classical Byzantine mosaic forms and figures of “geometrical decoration” art of Seljuk. When the geometrical forms were examined, it's seen that the Byzantine decorations have borrowed their many features from Ancient Greece, Roman Empire and Eastern civilizations. Then these forms affected the figures of Anatolian Seljuk art. But it must be considered that before coming to Anatolia, in Seljuk Empire, whose main cities were Nisabur, Rey and Isfahan, some kind of

Turco-Persian [7] characteristic has been developed in art. The Byzantine part of this *Turco-Persian* characteristic was completed by Anatolia Peninsula. Therefore a shared culture notion should be mentioned and to see its impacts in a wider area, the monuments of Turkish states founded in Central Asia should be examined carefully.

It's not a coincidence that scientists approach geometrical shapes as similes. The "Structuralism" theory, which we used as the method of this study, offers to analyze the meaning through the relations between elements of the whole, instead of combining the meanings of the elements to analyze the meaning of the whole. It's originated from the ideas from the Courses in General Linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure's theory, which is based on meronymy, has had a great effect on contemporary structuralist linguistics, semiotics and structuralism trends and also sheds light on structuralism theory and structuralist applications. "The doctrine offered by structuralists, *'through the relations and bonds between the elements, the whole organizes itself'*, has brought a need for new analysis for all scientific areas, including human sciences. Claude Lévi Strauss, who started a new era in anthropology by applying structuralism in human sciences, identifies structuralist approach as *'researching the constant one, or the constant elements between shallow differences.'* He was influenced by Saussure and applied structuralism to anthropology" [8].

"Leach had always on the side been interested in the objects and artifacts of the so-called "premodern" / "primitive" societies which had simultaneously aesthetic and religious/ ritual and practical significances and which in any case must be understood in the context of their use" [9].

Methods are mostly a way of seeking than exact principles. The basic and unique principles of classical archeology and art history studies *remnants* and *remaining* within the area of history. While it can't be argued, whether structuralism will make contributions to "new-history" studies or not, with utmost certainty, it'd be favorable to accept that interdisciplinary studies would bring different perspectives to new approaches. After all, if all the historical remnants were made by human beings, then why would it be impossible to analyze psycho-anthropological approaches together with archeologists?.

Since Strauss, the scientific opinion, which accepts that all observable physical cultures have evolved into other physical culture and come to this day and never have disappeared, gained more acceptance. Therefore

historical remnants can surely be approached and a historical semiotical analysis can be made. As Edmund Leach stated, "when archeology stated that it will follow the methods of social anthropology and will turn to structuralism rather than functionalism, structuralist archeology have already been formed" [10]. However, where structuralism can't give satisfying answers to archeology – this is also a conflict with the fact that unlike linguistics, the signs of archeological discoveries have *physical* functions, rather than *abstract* notions -, through formal analysis this problem can be handled. The other method, used in this study, Wundt's "*cultural psychology*" or "*historical psychology*" notion is derived from entire comparative studies on social life in different periods and different cultures. Wundt has tried to combine psychology with the context, consist of philosophy, cultural theory and history. According to him, human mind has been formed by the history of development and consciousness consists of a cultural network. Wundt stated that, frame of human mind and its unique characteristic were formed by the mediations between the individual and the world [11].

"The first steps toward a structuralist archaeology were taken by James Deets in the 1960s. In his popular book *Invitation to Archaeology* (1967), he defined anthropological archaeology as the study of past peoples in terms of their physical, cultural and psychological aspects. By identifying the psychological as a legitimate topic of investigation, he immediately broadened the focus of processual archaeology beyond its narrow adaptationalist agenda. He devotes an entire chapter to structure defined as the rules which produce artifacts and govern the combination of their attributes. [...] He writes "in view of the close similarity between the way in which words and artifacts are created, might not words be but one aspects of a larger class of cultural products which includes all artifacts as well?" (Deetz 1967,87)" [12].

Within cultural studies, these mediations and similes originated from a long period of cultural associations. "Intertwined production of cultural differences in senses creates the universal experiences" [13]. Therefore, some classifications in art history are originated from the type of the material or the symbolic significance of the figure. During the research of the meanings of the figures, it was found out that the classifications of symbolic significances have been made in this way. For example: "A figure, which consists of one big and one small isosceles triangles, merged from the bottoms, has been named as "*arrowhead*" and a figure, which consists of angled "S" shaped band, has been named as

“lovers’ lane”, “drunks’ lane” or “meander”. [14]. *Meander* (a curly shape, the natural form of a running river), which was used as a wall curb figure by Byzantine, can be seen in many church engravings. This figure passed to Roman Empire and Byzantine from Ancient Greek art of intaglio. It’s stated that, *Fret* (lovers’ lane or detour) engravings, the very essence of Ancient Greek art of decoration, is originated from Ancient Egyptian art.

“Egyptian and Eastern artists have believed that it was not essential to use *Fret*-like engravings all the time to obtain the beauty, but within Ancient Greek art, these elements were engraved and drawn continuously to create edgings” [15]. When Niksar mosaics are carefully examined, it can be seen that they’re entirely covered with edgeless spiral geometrical shapes, running towards and attached to each other. These figures give a dynamic impression. In terms of aesthetics, there really is a *dynamic* and spiral impression.

If we analyze the Meanders in the center of red edgings through Peirce’s “thirdness” approach, it’d be possible to interpret them as signs of “water” or representation of the possibility of the term “water”. The inlaying of the figures of the floor mosaics as in a “carpet” form shows that this place was an “Ayazma” area. Water has always been an important element for Niksar. Even today, it’s well known that there is Niksar water basin in the area.

Another mosaic form, we encounter, is a twisted cross, which is a curved, intertwined figure, used in mosaic decorations frequently and named as “Roman Knot” or “Solomon’s Knot” within mosaics terminology. On Ayvaz mosaics, these figures were placed at the center of square shaped mosaic figures, which are linked to each other like a labyrinth. Through the visual and literal researches, same figure has been found at several places around the world. The most important place, where this figure has been used, is *Aquileia Basilica*, which belongs to early Christianity period and built in Italy in 4th century A.D.

These circular shaped mosaics are the best examples of mosaics, crafted in Europe in 4th century A.D.

The examples of these mosaic works, whose both colors and materials were chosen carefully, have been found in Pompeii, within the remnants from first centuries A.D. in England, remnants from 2nd century in Northern Africa, especially in Tunisia and Libya. See Image 5 for mosaic samples of this kind from Sabratha region of Libya [16].



Image 1: Lect. TANAKINCI Orhan, Tokat Niksar Ayvaz Mosaics – Close Up



Image 2: Aquileia Basilica (Italy)



Image 3: Aquileia Basilica – Close Up (Italy)



Image 4: Lect. TANAKINCI Orhan, Tokat Niksar Ayvaz Mosaics – Close Up



Image 5: Libya Sabratha Mosaics – Close Up, This photo was taken on November 27, 2005 in Sabratha, An Nuqat al Khams, LY, using a Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT

When we examine these figures, we can see that red frame was painted along with light blue and black edgings. Unfortunately, the colors of the *Niksar mosaics*, which resembles with the colors of *Aquelia mosaics*, have become indistinct. Yet, the colors of *Aquelia mosaics* are still can be identified. As a result of its usage in big churches, this figure, which was made in some kind of “diamond”-like form, was crafted in a large scale and with a great care.

It can be seen that terra-cotta color and black and blue colors, obtained from limestone, have been applied over veined marbles [17]. All these colors on Niksar – Ayvaz mosaics, have been disappeared. However, some photos have been processed to distinguish the colors (Image 4). This figure, which is called “*Roman Knot*”, “*Solomon’s Knot*” or “*Menorah*”, is an “*ancient*” figure. It was also discovered in a Roman village named *Bove Marina*, which was a settlement between 2nd and 5th centuries A.D. and was named as “*Delia*” in antiquity and at Ostia Synagogue in Palestine. Later these forms were used in Early Christianity period basilicas like *Aquelia* and *Grado*. And it’s called as “*Hercules’ Knot*” in Ancient Greek Mythology [19]. This knot figure is a reflection of another mythological cult that symbolizes the 12 Labors of Hercules in Ancient Greek Mythology. Another figure we see on Niksar - Ayvaz mosaics is a *tulip*-like plant form. According to other sources, “*Roman Knots that were believed to be holy symbols were decorated by plant figures in sanctuaries.*” [19].

Antiquity humanism has been found in Early Christianity period through this kind of figures and the figures in the churches frequently, natural and aesthetical beauty were involved in these figures than latter period. “Byzantine potters liked to decorate their wares with subjects taken from the world of the nature, with animals and with plants, freely drawn and often brightly colored” [20].

Dominant color, used in mosaics of 4th and 5th century A.D. was yellow. Golden color was preferred. “Yellow was one of the most favorite colors in antiquity. After blue, green, red, black and white, it was the most important color. Yellow had a masculine characteristic and a centrifugal energy as in sun light, with which it was associated. Among with limestone and chalk white and carbon black, yellow is one of the first three colors humans have discovered. The yellow of the prehistoric period was reddish clay and ocher yellow originated from

iron clay yellow. The name of this color was originated in Greek *ochros*, which means opaque color of the yellow of the egg and has been integrated with light yellow of limestone and the yellow color of the earth which dominates the geography of the Mediterranean world. Later this color started to symbolize the color of the earth. On the other hand the *Attica yellow*, which was the best yellow ocher, was accepted to be the opposite of *Sinop red*, symbolizing fire, *white*, symbolizing water and *black*, symbolizing air. *Attica yellow*, the emblem of Ancient Greece, together with *red ocher* of Roman Empire and *purple* of both civilizations, which was also used by Byzantine Empire, turned the yellow and red into the symbol colors of polytheism.” [21] In mosaics bouquets of tulip flowers, which were painted in red and light blue, were used inside black semicircles. When the colors of these flowers are examined, the naturalist and enthusiastic behavior of Greco-Roman world can be seen.

The interconnected agonic triangles, which can be seen in Ayvaz mosaics, are passing from one circle to another spirally and by focusing the center, shows lots of figures simultaneously. If carefully examined, the *arrowheads* that were mentioned above, within the descriptions of Anatolian Turkish Architecture, can be seen in the image below (Image 8). A big mosaic figure that surrounds the circles as a “spiral spin” repeats over without intersecting with each other. Even it reminds of *Opus Sectile* technique, four cornered star form of braided figures, placed inside the circles, have brought a distinct form. Geometrical shapes can change from bigger shapes to smaller ones and through an illusion, they look like moving. Mosaics rotate around the *symmetrical circles*.

As in art, *duality* and *symmetry* looks like symbolizing the Roman and Seljuk Empires’ associated state perspectives. Intertwined, double-headed, inseparable symbols indicate both Roman and Seljuk Empires’ symbolic features. We can’t ignore that in abstract manner, these symbols are geometrical forms. In decorative arts, traditional folkloric figures create their own language in the course of the history. But their interpretations change with cultural structure. However, in accordance with geographical integration, all signs that were created within the same location form a basis for each other. If we can draw a subconscious scheme, we can envisage the Roman and Seljuk Empires’ progress in a dual social structure from the beginning to the end.



Image 6: Lect. TANAKINCI Orhan, Tokat Niksar Ayvaz Mosaics – Close Up



Image 7: Lect. TANAKINCI Orhan, Tokat Niksar Ayvaz Mosaics – Close Up



Image 8: Lect. TANAKINCI Orhan, Tokat Niksar Ayvaz Mosaics – Close Up

It's well known that dualist notions, like *East-West*, *Catholic-Orthodox*, *Greco-Latin*, have formed the social structure of Byzantine Empire. Let's imagine the state as a circular form that gathers everything around in the center. This form very much looks like state form of Seljuk Empire, which was formed by dualist developments since the foundation of the empire in *Cend* region. For example, the conflict between the paternal cousins grows too much that state becomes a dualist state, shared between brothers. Sultan Tugrul is "*the emperor of east and west*", but his brother represents the west and he represents the east. The throne of the Seljuk Empire is like a two-headed *arrow*. Just like Byzantine that involves two different political views and two different churches, fighting with each other. Both Byzantine and Seljuk are *signs* in this analysis. Signs can only be understood via the existence

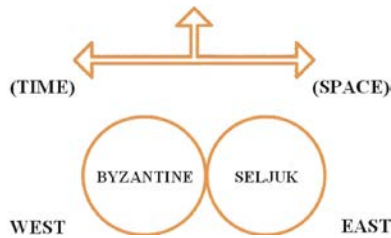
of the other. In the course of history, murals, symbols, lines and figures tell us far beyond than ordinary drawings. The simulacrum, the language of the aesthetic transfer, can't be discussed out of their historical context. With Strauss' own words, "A simulacrum can't be an idea, but it can function as a sign, more precisely, it can be included in a sign along with an idea; before the idea appears, it can respect its future position, it can reveal the idea's border lines before it exists. A simulacrum is a frozen thing. It adheres to the accompanying idea. Signs and simulacrum with an indicator attribute can't establish isochronal and theoretically eternal bonds with other identical entities. But they're suitable for *substitution*."

Only on the condition that they always form a system in which an alteration which affects one element automatically affects all the others [22] If we go back to our imaginary scheme, the form that emerged shows us that both states dynamically precess within their courses of history, instead of a unilateralism and a totalitarian monotony. As the arrows are two-headed, there is a goal for each circle of culture. However, there exists a historical dilemma: if this "two-headedness notion" not changes into one, the body dissolves within time, but maintains its existence within space. (e.g. two-headed eagle, the symbols of both empires, in which none of them can leave the other.) Byzantine tried to establish unilateralism to a certain extent, due to its eastern position than Roman Empire and deepened the diversities. This forced Byzantine to a centralization, which made contributions to its course of imperialism, but Seljuk did never have a chance to split the geography. May be Seljuk have been affected from catastrophes more for it couldn't deepen the diversities. As a result, we ask ourselves: "Can't the history be analyzed on different levels, politically and sociologically, if this and this kind of historical archetypes are read along with the symbols?" And also, if it was possible to make such semiotical analysis, would it be possible that our way of *reading* historical texts change? Or would we be able to start a new *chain of readings*?

Therefore, in this case, is it possible to talk about "a new semiotic activity? According to Wolfgang Wildgen, "The basic questions is, why did new symbolic activities like the engraving of tools and painting of caves emerge in a certain period, in some cases in areas, which were not in contact with each other? Was there a transition (catastrophe) line, which triggered the appearance of new kind of semiotic activity? This question is important because if we are able to describe and explain the

emergence of new symbolic activities, we may reach new insights into the underlying cognitive capacity of man, its potential for communication and the factors which played a role in uncovering biologically latent possibilities of sign usage” [23].

The Symmetry of History and Signs



Summary: Certainly, all these won't be enough to read the mind of a whole society. But if we accept the history as a mental process, we should accept that it is scattered as the cultural code in the same society. "Cultural psychology is adapted to classical scientific methods as a result of understanding that human behaviors and experiences are formed perceiving a decision in conjunction with making one over past experiences through the influences of genetic and experiential factors." [24] Cultural structure reveals itself visually through "remnants" and auditory through "language". Multilayered geographies create multilayered cultures. Every sign that is left inside each part of these layers evolves in the course of time. But never disappears. From the psychoanalytical point of view, similes may interchange. However, excessive symbolic expression should be avoided. With Michelet's own words, "Making history speak is making the death speak." The ones who will make this conversation are the scientists, who, through their studies, try to read everything that have been made and buried in the course of the history. History is rewritten via the *epitaphs* discovered by scientific researches [25].

The main aim of this study, which is also carried out to rethink over the Anatolian geography, is to make a new history reading via archeology and art history. Of course, this study has no claim to be ended. But the analysis of cultural structure needs lots of knowledge on history along with an interdisciplinary study. The most important result of this study, in which Niksar-Ayvaz mosaics were taken as an exemplary subject, is that history is a notion that appears in front of us and exists along with us in the daily life and it certainly shows itself within the social life.

But, as intellectual perception needs a scientific standpoint, it's derived from physical facts in this study. As most of the mosaics are destroyed, forms and colors are started to be searched through photography. Has been conferred with Art Historians and Semioticians... Sources on this area have been researched. It's understood that Tokat region, especially Niksar, has a great importance within the history of Anatolia and most of the remnants there have not been discovered yet. Nonetheless, we think that this study is incomplete in many aspects and it will be completed via the works of other scientists.

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