

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE ELEMENT GEZEK CULTURE: THE CASE OF ÇANAKKALE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to contribute to the survival of the “gezek tradition” that has continued from the past to the present during the month of Ramadan in the districts and villages of Çanakkale province, as an intangible cultural heritage element by revealing its unique characteristics and differences according to the villages. For this purpose, during the month of Ramadan 2025, gezek invitations in different districts and villages of Çanakkale were visited and what dishes were made, who gave gezek invitations in what way and according to what rules in the villages were investigated. In the research, photographs were taken of the places where gezek invitations were given, and detailed information about gezek culture was obtained by interviewing village headmen and family members who gave gezek invitations. Within the scope of the research, 2 districts and 7 villages were visited. The information obtained from the research was analyzed with content analysis.

It was found that the Gezek tradition continues in the Ayvacık district center and its villages, and that the way the dinner invitation is given changes according to the village's past traditions and current economic situation. It was found that in the economically strong villages, the dinner invitation is given in turns, in the villages where the economic situation is variable, the well-off person gives the dinner invitation (optionally), and in some villages, the Gezek tradition is continued by purchasing materials in a collective manner

KEYWORDS: Gezek Tradition, Village Charities, Çanakkale, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Qualitative Study

INTRODUCTION

Traditions and customs that transmit cultural values from the past to the present are one of the most important elements shaping social structure. The sustainability of a society's cultural memory depends on its resonance within that society. For various reasons, some traditions and customs are not practiced in accordance with past practices, while others are abandoned and still others continue in their original form. Changes in economic, social, and cultural values cause changes in cultural memory. Cultural memory acts as a conduit for the continuity of cultural values by using different means of communication to preserve the traditions and customs belonging to a community (Uğurlu, 2014, p. 43). “Cultural heritage,” which carries traces of social memory and identity, encompasses all historical, symbolic, social, artistic, aesthetic, religious, economic, and social values (Kalay, Arslan et al., 2018, p. 66). Elements of cultural heritage are classified in different ways as tangible and intangible. Traditions, one of the elements of intangible cultural heritage, hold societies together and strengthen the sense of solidarity. Intangible cultural heritage refers to practices, expressions, knowledge, skills, and the associated tools, objects, and spaces that are an integral part of the cultural identity of communities, groups, and individuals, passed down from generation to generation and constantly reshaped (<https://yakegm.ktb>). The preservation and perpetuation of intangible cultural heritage is of great importance for communities to maintain their identities and for the preservation of cultural diversity. This heritage gives communities a sense of belonging and continuity, promotes intercultural dialogue, and encourages respect for different lifestyles.

Additionally, it enhances social cohesion and helps individuals feel like they are part of their community (www.unesco.org.tr). The month of Ramadan is observed in Muslim countries in various ways, involving fasting and worship. The act of fasting evokes a sense of spiritual purification, drawing one closer to Allah
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through worship. Throughout Ramadan, various events, worship, social rituals, traditions, and customs are observed in different regions of Turkey. One of these is the “Gezek Culture.” Gezek is the name given to communal meals during Ramadan in certain districts and villages of Çanakkale province. The Gezek tradition, particularly in the district and villages of Ayvacık, is a tradition with deep roots that has survived to the present day. The aim of this study is to reveal how the Gezek Culture is practiced in the district centers and villages of Ayvacık and Ezine, where it is traditionally maintained.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Intangible cultural heritage refers to practices, expressions, knowledge, skills, and the associated tools, objects, and spaces that are an integral part of the cultural identity of communities, groups, and individuals, transmitted from generation to generation and constantly evolving (<https://yakegm.ktb>).

Intangible cultural heritage is particularly visible in the following areas:

- a) Oral traditions and expressions (epics, legends, folk tales, proverbs, fairy tales, jokes, etc.), together with the language that serves as a vehicle for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage,
- b) Performing arts (Karagöz, meddah, puppetry, folk theater, etc.),
- c) Social practices, rituals, and festivals (engagements, weddings, births, Nowruz celebrations, etc.),
- d) Knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe (traditional foods, folk medicine, folk calendar, folk meteorology, etc.),
- e) Handicraft traditions (weaving, evil eye beads, filigree, copperwork, folk architecture) (<https://yakegm.ktb>).

Gezek culture is a traditional musical gathering that has survived from the Ottoman period to the present day and continues to thrive, particularly in Bursa. Amateur music groups called “Gezek,” made up of people of different ages and professions, meet regularly within a framework of specific rules. The gatherings are events where songs are sung, conversations are held, and social solidarity is strengthened (www.gotobursa.com). This tradition not only keeps Turkish art music alive but also creates a strong bond and solidarity among the members of the group. Each meeting takes place at the home of one of the members, and a colorful lantern is hung on the balcony of the house; this lantern allows other members to easily find the house. Members contribute a certain amount of money each week to form the gezek's budget and listen to music, chat, and play traditional games during the meetings (www.gotobursa.com). Gezek Culture is listed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, and there are many gezek communities living in Bursa that continue this tradition. These communities play an important role in terms of both music and social solidarity (www.gotobursa.com.tr).

The concept of fasting is defined in the Turkish Dictionary as: “1. Abstaining from eating, drinking, etc. for a certain period of time for the purpose of worshiping God, 2. Staying away from things that are much loved or desired, 3. Not eating or drinking anything, not doing anything.” (Turkish Dictionary, 2019).

The practice of fasting, which exists in the Islamic faith, is also seen in pre-Islamic celestial and non-celestial belief systems. Although the ritual of fasting varies from society to society and between different religions, the spiritual feeling sought is similar. By fasting, people focus on feeling spiritual purification in addition to physical cleanliness (Kanık, 2016).

Ramadan is experienced differently in Turkey than in other Muslim countries due to social and cultural differences. Ünver (1967, p.3) notes that “during Ramadan, mahya, cleanliness, moral purification, abstaining from sin and harmful things, being able to enjoy oneself in moderation, rest, generosity, and consideration for everyone came together to create a ‘Ramadan Civilization,’ which was concentrated in Istanbul.”

The month of Ramadan is a period of intense social unity, togetherness, and sharing in Anatolia and its villages. The iftar tables set up in villages are considered more than just a means of satisfying hunger; they are a community ritual. As Özden (2006, p. 88) points out, during Ramadan, every family, regardless of their

economic status, hosts iftar dinners, and those who are not invited to large gatherings are not turned away. This tradition reflects the importance that Turkish people place on mutual aid and solidarity. Collective iftars during Ramadan are important both for helping the poor and for keeping alive the spirit of togetherness and solidarity. In this sense, iftar tables are not just a sharing of food, but have become part of religious rituals and social culture. Special rituals during Ramadan nourish the feeling of worship together with the community.

The meaning of Ramadan tables is that “the process of breaking the fast and returning to fasting is sustained through worship and togetherness at these special tables” (Yurdakul and Akçiçek, 2025).

TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS RITUAL ASPECTS OF RAMADAN TABLES

Communal iftar meals in villages have been preserved as a deeply rooted traditional eating and drinking practice in Turkish culture from the past to the present day. In many villages across Anatolia, iftar meals during Ramadan are set up in the gardens of houses, in mosque courtyards, or in the village mansion (Özden, 2006, p.88). For example, in the Ceceler neighborhood of Akseki District in eastern Antalya, the tradition of hosting iftar dates back to ancient times and has continued to the present day. Iftar meals are organized and held collectively at the village hall. A team of cooks prepares the iftar meals in the kitchen of the village hall. The same people also serve the meals and take care of cleaning and washing up. The villagers assist the cook and the team throughout the process. During Ramadan, one person hosts iftar every day and covers the expenses for that day by providing a meal list. Meals are delivered to the sick and elderly who cannot attend. The person hosting the iftar invites friends and relatives (www.antalya.ktb.gov.tr). As can be seen from this example, village iftars are a ritual structure that intertwines the concept of hospitality in Turkish culture and Islam with local folkloric beliefs. Similarly, in the Kavak district of Samsun, Ramadan invitations begin after the 15th day of Ramadan. Neighbors break their fast at each other's homes, and the district's residents also break their fast together at the mosque (Toprak, 2019, p. 78). In the village of Uylupınar, in the Gölhisar district of Burdur, meals are served to 250-300 people at iftar tables set up in a communal manner. Villagers gather in the mosque courtyard to break their fast, and the tradition has continued since 2015. It is stated that everyone is satisfied with the practice, which continues with the support of philanthropists (www.cagdasburdur.com).

IN A SOCIO-CULTURAL SENSE: SOLIDARITY AND HOSPITALITY

Iftar invitations during Ramadan contribute to the preservation of traditions as well as nurturing a culture of solidarity and sharing in village communities. During Ramadan, iftar meals are provided to those in need not only in villages but also in almost all municipalities and towns across Turkey by setting up Ramadan tents.

As a general practice at iftars organized in villages, families who are well-off cover the costs of iftar, cooks from the village prepare the meals, and the food is distributed, tables are set, and cleaning is done through mutual aid (Özden, 2006, p.89). Thus, iftar tables strengthen the sense of belonging and social cohesion within communities. Open to everyone, these tables ensure the sustainability of the tradition of solidarity and communal worship, based on the understanding that “the members of this community are each other's guests.”

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although Bursa may first come to mind when talking about Gezek culture or Gezek, the tradition of “Gezek Culture,” which has a distinct cultural value in some districts and villages of Çanakkale, continues throughout the month of Ramadan. In the Gezek tradition, which continues throughout the month of Ramadan in the districts and villages of Çanakkale, wealthy families invite the villagers or their friends and relatives in the district to iftar, which is called “Gezek”. In the Gezek tradition, only food is served, and there is no musical entertainment. In this sense, it differs from the Gezek culture that continues in the province of Bursa.

With roots in the past and religious purposes, village charities serve similar functions. Erol (2004) conducted a study on village charities that continue in Çanakkale and, to a lesser extent, in Balıkesir. According to the findings of the study, it was concluded that village charities are mainly held in April and May, contain religious and non-religious elements, are a Turkish cultural element with roots in the past, and strengthen the bonds of communication and solidarity among the local people. Kılıç and Buzlukçu (2023) conducted a study on the

integration of ongoing village charity events in Balıkesir into tourism. They concluded that village charity events were interrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic but resumed afterwards, that they strengthen social solidarity, and that their integration into tourism will contribute to the development of rural tourism in the region. Çavuşoğlu and Çalışkan (2015) concluded in their study on ongoing village charity events in Çanakkale that these events took place in 174 of 554 rural settlements, were organized in conjunction with spring celebrations in April, May, and June, and played an important role in meeting the sociocultural and socioeconomic needs of rural residents. Another finding from the study is that these events can be evaluated from the perspective of rural tourism.

METHOD

This research was conducted within the framework of qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods are used to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' lives, behaviors, experiences, and social phenomena or events (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2011). In this study, field research, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to obtain data. Field research includes qualitative data collection tools such as participant observation and interview techniques (Kyale, 1996). In addition, photographs were taken to document on-site observations and interviews (Pink, 2007).

The aim of this study is to contribute to the preservation of the “Gezek tradition,” which has continued from the past to the present during the month of Ramadan in the districts and villages of Çanakkale province, as an element of intangible cultural heritage by revealing its unique characteristics and differences between villages. To this end, throughout the Ramadan month of 2025, gezek invitations in different districts and villages of Çanakkale were visited to investigate which dishes were prepared and who in the villages issued gezek invitations, how, and according to which rules. Photographs were taken of the locations where gezek invitations were given, and interviews were conducted with village mayors and family members who hosted gezek invitations to obtain detailed information about gezek culture. As part of the research, visits were made to 2 districts and 7 villages, and interviews were conducted with mayors and villagers. The information obtained from the research was analyzed using content analysis.

FINDINGS

Villages	Gezek Tradition	Foods Prepared	Practices in the Village
Ahmetçe	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Salad, Soup	Families who are well off notify the village headman and arrange for a meal to be prepared.
Kayalar	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Salad, Soup	Families who are well off notify the village headman and arrange for a meal to be prepared.
Bektaş	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Salad, Soup	Families living in the village host iftar dinners when it is their turn.
Tartışık	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Semolina halva, Dessert, Salad, Soup	Families who are well-off may choose to host iftar dinners. This may not be done every day during Ramadan.

Süleymanköy	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Salad, Soup	Families who are well-off may choose to host iftar dinners. This may not be done every day during Ramadan.
Kızılköy	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Hoşmerim Dessert, Salad, Soup	Those who wish to do charity make donations to the village headman, and iftar is served every day. The cooks in the village prepare the meals.
İlyasfaki	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Hoşmerim Dessert, Salad, Soup	Families who are well-off may choose to host iftar dinners. This may not be done every day during Ramadan.
Ayvacık Merkez	Continues	Keşkek, Pilav, Nohut Aşısı, Dana eti, Patatesli Tavuk, Kemalpaşa Tatlısı, Hoşmerim Salata, Çorba Keşkek, Rice, Chickpea Stew, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Kemalpaşa Dessert, Hoşmerim Dessert, Salad, Soup	Almost every day, a family in the district center hosts an iftar dinner. The family hosting the iftar invites their relatives and neighbors.
Ezine	Continues	Keşkek, Rice, Beef, Chicken with Potatoes, Hoşmerim Dessert, Salad, Soup	Almost every day, a family in the district center hosts an iftar dinner. The family hosting the iftar invites their relatives and neighbors.

According to the research conducted, it was found that the Gezek tradition continues in the district center and villages of Ayvacık and that the manner in which dinner invitations are extended varies according to the village's past traditions and current economic situation. It was found that in economically strong villages, dinner invitations are given in turn, in villages where the economic situation is variable, those who are well-off (at their discretion) give dinner invitations, and in some villages, the Gezek tradition is continued by collecting materials through mutual aid.



Image 1: Invitation to a Gezek in Bektaş Village



Image 2: Gezek Foods



Image 3: Invitation to Gezek in Bektaş Village



Görsel 4: Invitation to Gezek in İlyasfaki Village



Görsel 5: Invitation to Gezek İlyasfaki Village

A newspaper article about the iftar held in Kızılköy states that the iftar invitation, known as the “Gezek Tradition,” has been going on for centuries, is an important part of the culture of mutual aid, sharing, and solidarity, is organized under the leadership of the village headman, and continues with broad participation. It also highlights that dishes unique to Çanakkale are prepared. Keşkek and peynir helvası are among the indispensable delicacies of iftar tables (www.kampusgazetes.com).

A similar finding was reached as a result of an interview with the village headman of Kızılköy. He stated that keşkek and peynir helvası or höşmerim are prepared for the meals, participation is increasing day by day, and this tradition in their village strengthens the sense of solidarity in the village. It is seen that the tradition called gezek is practiced in different parts of Anatolia.

Kızılköy’de verilen iftara ilişkin bir gazete haberinde, “Gezek Geleneği” olarak

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When Ramadan dinner invitations are examined from multiple perspectives, they emerge as a multifaceted tradition that encompasses the religious ritual dimension of preserving traditions, solidarity and hospitality in a socio-cultural sense, and ethnographic characteristics. In addition, it can be stated that it is a ritual that can be incorporated into tourism as an element of intangible cultural heritage.

According to the findings of this research conducted in villages in the Ayvacık and Ezine districts of Çanakkale province, it was concluded that the meal invitation given during Ramadan is called “Gezek” in the center of Ayvacık and in the villages, and that it is practiced in almost every village (except for some Turkmen and Yörük villages), and that it continues in some villages in the Ezine district. Although the Gezek tradition varies depending on the economic situation of the community, it generally continues throughout the month of Ramadan and is maintained as a tradition to which everyone contributes to a greater or lesser extent. In the Ayvacık district center, those who wish to give charity invite their spouses, friends, and relatives, while in the villages, everyone is generally invited. In some villages, Gezek invitations are given in turn, in some villages it is done by mutual aid, and in some villages, people who are well-off give Gezek invitations. This situation

ensures that people are not in difficulty and is also in line with the philosophy of charity. It can also be said that the Gezek culture is an indispensable part of the month of Ramadan, strengthening the community's feelings of solidarity, cooperation, friendship, and belonging.

The rules that emerge naturally over time in communal living are referred to as social rules. One of the most concrete examples of how social rules differ according to the geography of each society is the Gezek tradition.

It is recommended that universities, local governments, and local communities collaborate to ensure the continuation of the Gezek tradition and its recognition as a cultural heritage element. The limitation of this study is that it covers only the districts and villages of Ayvacık and Ezine. Similar rituals are observed in different villages and districts of Anatolia. By researching how the different and similar aspects of the Ramadan invitation are expressed in different parts of Anatolia, similarities and differences can be revealed.

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