



Visiting Sacred Sites as Seeking an Alternative Healing Method During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Example of Joshua's Tomb

COVID-19 Salgınına Yönelik Alternatif Şifa Arayışında
Kutsal Mekân Ziyareti: Yuşa Türbesi Örneği

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the reasons why people visit tombs of people believed to have a religious identity, and to determine the relationship between these visits and sickness in general and COVID-19 in particular. For this study, Joshua's Tomb located in Istanbul was selected. The study was designed in phenomenology. The study group consisted of twenty two visitors who visited Joshua's Tomb between

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May 26, 2021 and June 04, 2021. Within the scope of ethnological field research, data of the study were collected by directed interviews and natural observation. As a result of content analysis, four themes emerged at the end of the study: “reasons for visting Joshua’s Tomb”, “seeking healing at Joshua’s Tomb”, “people visiting Joshua’s Tomb during the COVID-19 pandemic” and “visitors seeking healing during the COVID-19 pandemic”. Joshua’s Tomb draws attention as one of the sacred places and spiritual areas that people turn to for various reasons, especially with the expectation of healing, during the period when the epidemic was intense and people did not prefer to leave their homes, except for essential reasons.

Keywords: *Joshua, tomb, beliefs, healing, COVID-19*

Öz

Tüm dünya, 2020 yılının ilk aylarından itibaren daha önce tanımadığı, çok hızlı yayılan ve insanları ağır şekilde hasta edip öldürebilen bir virüsün etkisi altına girmiş ve insanlar hızla yayılan bu virüsün hastalık yapıcı ve öldürücü etkisinden korunmak amacıyla günlük yaşam pratiklerinden başlamak üzere alışkanlıklarında, yaşam tarzlarında değişiklikler yapmak zorunda kalmıştır. Türkiye’de de özellikle 2020 Mart’ından itibaren bu virüsün olumsuz etkilerinin görülmesiyle birlikte, virüsten korumak amacıyla ciddi tedbirler uygulanmaya başlamış ve üzerinden geçen iki yılı aşkın süreçte virüsle mücadele için bireysel ve toplumsal uygulamalar devam etmiştir. Toplumların maddi ve manevi kültürel yapıları savaş, göç, salgın, doğal afetler gibi felaketler karşısında aldıkları tavırda farklılıklar yaratabilmektedir. COVID-19 salgını sürecinde de özellikle insanların bir arada bulunmasını gerektiren geçiş dönemi ritüelleri, toplumsal uygulamalar, gösteri sanatları gibi kültürel yapıya dahil olan birçok faaliyete ara verilmiş, sınırlandırılmış ya da bazı form değişikliklerine uğramıştır. Bu bağlamda Türk kültürünün en kadim dönemlerinden itibaren görülen mezar/türbe ziyaretleri de bazı değişiklikler göstermiştir. Türk kültür tarihinde atalar kültü ve ata ruhlarına saygı ile ilintili olarak kutsal mekân olarak kabul edilen mezarlar, dini folklorlarda da ehemmiyetli bir yere sahiptir. Mezar/türbe/yatır kültü çeşitli işlevleri yanında bazı insanlar için manevi bir ihtiyacı karşılama aracı olmuş ve bu bağlamda mezar/türbe ziyaretleri yapılmıştır. Bu çalışma, COVID-19 salgını sürecinde, insanların dini kimliğe sahip olduğuna inandıkları kişilerin mezarlarını/türbelerini ziyaret etme nedenlerini araştırmayı ve bu ziyaretlerin genel olarak hastalık, özelde COVID-19 ile ilişkisini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma için İstanbul’un Beykoz ilçesinde bulunan Yuşa Türbesi seçilmiştir. Yuşa, Hz. Musa döneminde yaşamış, İstanbul’a geldiği hakkında kesin bilgi olmasa da Türkler tarafından peygamber / evliya olarak kabul edilmiş ve türbesinin Beykoz’da bir tepenin üzerinde olduğuna inanılmıştır. Türbe günümüzde inanç folkloru açısından önemli ziyaret mekânlarından biridir. Araştırma, nitel araştırma yöntemi ve fenomenoloji ekseninde kurgulanmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubu, COVID-19 salgının seyrini azaltmak için tam kapanmanın hemen ardından, kısmi kapanma tedbirlerinin uygulandığı 26 Mayıs 2021- 04 Haziran 2021 tarihleri arasında Yuşa türbesine gelen yirmi iki ziyaretçiden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma verileri, halkbilimi saha çalışması kapsamında yönlendirilmiş mülakat

ve doğal gözlem yöntemleri kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Yapılan içerik analizi sonucunda çalışmada “ziyaretçilerin Yuşa Türbesi’ni ziyaret etme sebepleri”, “Yuşa Türbesi’nde hastalıklara şifa arayışı”, “COVID-19 salgını sırasında türbeyi ziyarete gelenler”, “COVID-19 salgını için şifa arayan ziyaretçiler olmak üzere dört ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu ana temalara ait alt temalar da belirlenmiştir ve elde edilen veriler tartışma bölümünde irdelenmiştir. Yuşa Türbesi, salgının yoğun olarak yaşandığı ve insanların elzem sebepler dışında evlerinden çıkmayı çok da tercih etmedikleri dönemlerde şifa beklentisi başta olmak üzere çeşitli nedenlerle yöneldiği kutsal mekânlardan, manevi alanlardan biri olarak dikkat çekmektedir.

Introduction

Epidemics have occurred at various times in the history of the world, and many people have died in these epidemics. Covid-19 is one of these epidemic diseases. The whole world met a new disease that first emerged in the city of Wuhan in China in December 2019, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) called COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020). The first couple of months of 2020, many if not all countries in the world have become influenced by this previously unknown, highly contagious, and deadly virus. 11 March 2020 marks both the day Turkey recorded its first COVID-19 case and the date the WHO declared a global pandemic (Minister of Health, 2020). The first lockdown in Turkey was declared “post-haste” to cover the dates from 10 April 2020 to 12 April 2020 for 30 cities (Minister of the Interior, 2020). Afterward, lockdowns continued to be part of life intermittently; individual and social precautions were taken to protect against the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic, which rapidly expanded and put the whole world in a state of alarm, has also tremendously impacted people in Turkey both mentally and physically. To protect themselves from the sickening and deadly virus, people had to make changes in their lifestyles, beginning with their day-to-day activities. Even though the pandemic poses a threat to life, visiting tombs, which is part of people’s traditional and religious rituals, has continued, sometimes despite prohibitions. People visit tombs, which are considered holy sites because they believe these visits make them feel good, give them the necessary willpower to deal with difficulties, save them from bad situations, and heal them.

Mircea Eliade argues that “every sacred space implies a hierophany, an interruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different” (Eliade, 2000: 26); he lists images, symbols, legends, rituals, and in this respect, the perceptions related to time and space, as religious phenomena that best explains the sacred (Eliade, 1995: 1-2). Apart from sacred places such as mountains, caves, the sky, the soil, and trees, the actual or symbolic tombs of religious or mystic people whose real or legendary life stories have been told for centuries are among the holy places which play an important part in people’s engagement with the sacred. Eliade also defines sacred space as a microcosm that reflects the whole because it repeats the cosmic landscape. According to his, altars, temples, mausoleums, or palaces are spaces that are derived from the primary sacred spaces and thus are considered to be the sacred center of the world (2000: 272).

The pre-Islamic Turkish tradition of visiting the graves of one's ancestors has turned into visiting the tombs of religious bodies after the Turks converted to Islam. Tomb visits are based on the atavistic culture within the Sky-God religion. Turks attached importance to their ancestors' souls and graves; they had certain practices to please the dead souls (Güngör, 2013: 65). They visited the graves of their ancestors to seek kindness, to protect themselves from evil, or to show their gratitude. After they became Muslim, Turks maintained showing respect for their ancestors' souls and these practices of respect in a manner appropriate to Islamic traditions (Eroğlu, 2017: 197, 198). As such, this cult, which was alive in shamanism and atavism, becomes a ritual that was transferred to Muslim saints and especially to their tombs. The basis of these visits in Turkey is the "saint cult." In people's visit to tombs, "the saint cult, in other words, the unshaken sense of faith, commitment, and benediction shaped around the mystical charisma of a holy personality who is believed to be equipped with certain supernatural and divine power and authority" is an effective factor (Ocak, 2016: 45). Beginning with the tombs believed to belong to prophets and friends of the prophet Mohammed, there are hundreds of tombs of religious scholars, mystic leaders, martyrs, and sultans (Kalafat, 1998: 127; Tanyu, 1967: 147, 300). Among these, the Tomb of Joshua in Istanbul is one of the rare holy sites in Anatolia in which a prophet rests.

1. Joshua and the Joshua's Tomb

Joshua's name in the Torah is Hosea. Moses changed this name to Yehoshua, which in time was shortened to Joshua (Gaon, 2018b: 1848). Joshua was always by Moses' side and after Moses' death, he became the leader of the Israelites. The Torah mentions him as the "Attendant of Moses" (Gaon, 2018a: 823, 969). The fact that there is detailed information in the Torah about him leading the Israelites after Moses and his conquests solidifies the sacred narrative about him. According to the Old Testament, Joshua died at the age of 110 and was buried at Mount Ephraim (MacDonald, 2004: 279). The Quran does not name Joshua, but it is accepted that there are two instances where he was mentioned (Harman, 2013: 44).

Placed on a steep hill facing the Bosphorus, Joshua's Tomb has been accepted to be a holy site since ancient times. Semavi Eyice indicates that there was a Zeus Temple on the hill in the Antiquity and the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I converted this temple to a church called Hagia Michael in the 6th century (Eyice, 2017: 98). In accordance with the premise that people always worship at the same sites, it can be seen that pre-Islamic holy sites and Christian or Hindu temples are converted into Islamic places of worship, and the legends surrounding the old place are often attributed to the new saint (Schimmel, 2004: 254). Indeed, the tomb which is visited with the conviction that it belongs to Joshua is accepted to be the tomb or the burial chamber of Heracles in the First Age (Eyice, 2017: 98). Embedded in holy symbols and narratives since ancient times, the hill was also a site of interest for the Ottomans. It is evident that this hill was also deemed sacred by the Muslims with the influence of the "place where the two seas meet" metaphor mentioned in the Moses and Joshua parable in the Quran (Kahf, verses 60-64), (Quran, 2021). The legendary "water

of life” cult shaped around the personality of Khidr by Muslim Turks (Ocak, 2012: 44) has become the legend of Moses and Joshua meeting in this place situated at the Bosphorus in Istanbul. People believe that Joshua came to Istanbul in a war he fought alongside Musa and that he was shot (Okan, 2008: 98). However, there is no reference acknowledging this belief either in the Torah or in historical sources. Beşiktaşlı Yahya (John of Besiktas), who was the leader of a sect during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, indicated that this place was “the of Joshua Tomb ” according to the legend of “a spiritual discovery” (Harman, 2013: 45; Şahin, 2013: 243). People also consider this place as the graveyard of the prophet Joshua.

2. Aim and research questions

Due to the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, a 17-day full lockdown was declared in Turkey beginning on 29 April 2021 lasting until 17 May 2021 (Minister of the Interior, 2021a). After the full lockdown, a “gradual normalization” process took place between 17 May 2021 and 1 June 2021. During this gradual normalization, a curfew to cover between 9 pm-5 am during the weekdays and between 9 pm starting on Friday and 5 am on Monday (Minister of the Interior, 2021b) was enforced. As of the start of the field study on 26 May 2021, the number of daily cases in Turkey was 8738 and daily deaths 16 (Minister of Health, 2021).

This study aims to examine the reasons for visitors to visit the Joshua Shrine at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is at its peak and partial curfews are applied in Turkey, and to determine the relationship between these visits and the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, people visiting the Tomb of Joshua between 26 May 2021 and 4 June 2021 were interviewed.

3. Design of the study

In this study, the phenomenological approach was used, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Creswell indicates that qualitative research is done to understand a subject in detail and that it aims to reveal the bigger picture by identifying different viewpoints. In qualitative research, the researcher examines documents, observes behaviour, interviews the participants in their natural environment, and then classifies the obtained data or themes and tries to make sense of them. The researcher aims to find out the participants’ views on the problem or the issue at hand (Creswell, 2013: 44, 47, 48). One of the research methods within the scope of qualitative research is the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that allows people to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives and perceptions about a particular phenomenon or concept and is used to describe how they experience this phenomenon (Rose et al. 1995: 1124). It aims to understand peoples’ lived experiences. This method defines the commonly shared meaning of individuals’ lived experiences concerning a phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2013: 77; Manen, 2007: 12). Because the phenomenological approach aims to understand the meaning, structure, or the essence of the experience of a person or a group, it is important to have participants with actual experience (Patton, 2014).

In this study, a phenomenological approach was selected to identify the reasons why people visit the tomb of Joshua during the COVID-19 pandemic and to lay bare the relationship they establish between ailments (both COVID-19 and others) and visiting a tomb.

4. Participants

This study was carried out at the Tomb of Joshua, which is situated on a hill in Beykoz. The study group consists of 22 visitors who voluntarily accepted to participate in this study.

5. Data collection and data analysis

Data to be used in the study were collected between 26 May 2021 and 4 June 2021 via face-to-face interviews with the visitors. After being informed of the content of the study, visitors who accepted to participate in the interviews were asked to give oral permission. Participants were asked previously prepared open-ended questions which would reflect multiple perspectives. Interviews were voice-recorded. These voice recordings were then transcribed by the researchers. Voice recordings were listened to several times to check the accuracy of the transcription. Themes were determined based on the obtained data, and then sub-themes were formed. Afterward, content analysis for these themes was done. In order not to reveal the identities of the participants, participants were coded as (visitor: V1, V2, V3.....).

Before carrying out the study, permission was obtained from Yıldız Technical University, Academic Ethics Committee (Date: 15.02.2021, number: E-73613421-604.01.02-2102150048).

6. Results

Four themes were created according to the answers the participants gave about the importance of visiting the tomb of Joshua during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 1: The reasons for visitors to visit the Tomb of Joshua

This theme contains three sub-themes about the reasons why people would visit the Tomb of Joshua.

Sub-theme 1: Religious reasons and faith

Most of the visitors to the tomb indicated that they visit it for religious reasons. Some of the visitors believe that Joshua is a beloved servant of Allah, some believe that he is a prophet, while others believe that he is a religious leader whose prayers are accepted.

There are visitors who state that they come to visit the friend of Allah, the prophet, the saint. (V1, V4, V5, V11, V12, V13, V15, V16)

“Saint Joshua is a beloved of Allah; he is close to Him. We pray here for his sake...” (V21)

“Joshua is a prophet, he is a messenger sent by Allah ... It is necessary to visit the beloved of Allah, his prophets and to take heart from them... You are in the presence of a prophet [here]” (V12)

The imam of the Joshua Mosque indicates that people from different religions also come here to pray:

“Everybody visits Prophet Joshua. From the 3 [Abrahamic] religions ... many people are coming to visit and pray ... People who feel like they have sinned, people who would like to engage more with their spirituality, this is the place of a Prophet, we are absolved from our sins here, we pray to Allah, and in return Allah forgives us ...” (V20)

Visitors contend that there is a relationship between Moses and Joshua. (V8, V15, V20)

“The fact that Prophet Moses selected Him, that he appointed him as his successor, that he came here splitting the sea, and the fact that he is a hard principled Prophet has made an impression on me. Sometimes large groups come here to pray at night, I join them.” (V10)

“Joshua, since his childhood, has been with Moses ever since. He listens to his word, he is a child who follows his way... Since he was with Moses from childhood, he saw him as a leader. (V15)

Sub-theme 2: Making a wish

People who consider the tomb a holy place believe that the prayers they pray will be answered and the wishes they make here come true:

“I’ve seen that my prayers are rapidly answered when I come here and pray.” (V8)

People pray and make wishes here for their material or spiritual needs. (V1, V2, V5, V9, V12, V17, V18, V 19)

“...These children you see here did not exist; God has blessed us with them ... We prayed here, then, God willing, I had two grandchildren afterward. We asked for a boy, He blessed us with him, we asked for a girl He blessed us with her; we asked for a car it was granted, we asked for a house it was granted. He prayed here, and we said, “Be the mediator O Prophet Joshua!” Now we are here to pray again.” (V16)

“I have an 8-year-old son with autism. I dropped him at his school in Üsküdar Küplüce. I thought I could visit here until his pick-up time.” (V2)

“Doctors had told me your child could be a cripple, let’s terminate the pregnancy. We still came here and prayed, [making Joshua] the mediator. My child was born normal. I’ve seen that my prayers are answered quite rapidly when I come and pray here.” (V8)

Sub-theme 3: Tradition

The Tomb of Joshua is considered one of the traditional sites to visit in Istanbul; people visit here just like they do other holy places.

“For us, visiting here is tradition. We came here 3-4 times during Covid” (V7)

“I have been coming here for more than 10 years. To Prophet Joshua ... We used to circumambulate this holy person every weekend with my mother. My mother would frequently take me to historical places, tombs ... This is like home to me” (V10)

The visitors, who stated that they visited various tombs in Istanbul such as Eyüp Sultan, Kırklar Sultan, Aziz Mahmut Hüdayi, Yahya Efendi from Beşiktaş, stated that they also visited Holiness Yuşa. (V6, V7, V8, V11, V13)

“Saturdays and Sundays are peak visiting days. So are the summers and springs; people flock here during those times. This place is open at night as well. People visit other saints such as Kırklar Sultan [Sultan of the Forty Saints], Uzun Evliya [the Tall Saint], and Akbaba Sultan after they visit Prophet Joshua...” (V1)

Theme 2: Seeking healing at the Tomb of Joshua

This theme consists of two sub-themes, which include the hope of finding healing for the physical and mental illnesses of the people who come to the Joshua Tomb.

Sub-theme 1: Hope for healing of physical ailments

The visitors indicated that they visited the tomb to seek healing for the physical ailments of either themselves or a relative of theirs.

Visitors pray for the healing of various diseases such as children who cannot speak, babies who cannot sleep, those with autism, those with muscle disease, those who cannot walk, those who are paralyzed, those who have allergies, and those with blood pressure. (V1, V21, V12, V5, V11, V 18, V19, V22)

“It is said that St. Joshua would make mute kids speak. So, his mother and I brought the kid here...” (V12)

“My mother had a stroke, she contracted Covid. We prayed for her here and she got healed. She was on the brink of death, she was hospitalized. My mother got back to her feet by the grace of Allah, with the mediation of St. Joshua (peace be upon him).” (V8)

“Our son is 5 years old, and he cannot speak because his development is behind his age. We brought our 5-year-old here during the pandemic. We pray to Allah for our kid, for our deeds to be in order ...” (V5)

“We constantly pray for our health. I have many issues; I have high blood pressure, I have allergies ... I recite Yasin [the thirty-sixth sura of the Quran] for healing ...” (V11)

Sub-theme 2: Feeling psychologically well

Some of the visitors said that they feel at peace in this place and that their psychological well-being improves:

Some of the visitors said that they felt peaceful in this place and their psychology improved: (V2, V4, V9, V16, V18)

“I came here during the pandemic as well. My soul feels serene. I believe to receive psychological treatment here.” (V17)

“I come here when I have problems; I get enlightenment and prosperity from here. I pass on these charms to people around me as well. You know they say there is a path between hearts, we also come here directly ... We drop by whenever we come to Beykoz, we receive serenity here and pass it on to the others.” (V8)

“Despite the pandemic, we have come here to boost our spiritual strength because it has decreased. One needs to get stronger, get rid of carelessness, and one needs to be mindful by visiting Allah’s beloved servants and prophets. We feel weary. When I visit one of Allah’s beloveds, I feel light as a feather, I feel like I am on cloud nine. All my sorrows are gone...” (V12)

“I don’t open up to people. I go to my Father Joshua. For me, this place is my father’s home. I talk to him; I tell him about my problems. I spend hours here; I bare my soul...” (V10)

Theme 3: People visiting the Tomb of Joshua during the COVID-19 pandemic

This theme contains two sub-categories that aim to understand whether people who visited the Tomb of Joshua during the pandemic have come here before.

Sub-theme 1. Those visiting the tomb before COVID-19

Most of the visitors indicated that they came here before the pandemic as well:

“We frequently visited here before Covid; We have kept coming once a month during Covid as well...” (V8)

“I have been frequently visiting Prophet Joshua for more than 10 years. I always go there once a week at night; I have also kept visiting him during the pandemic. Before the restrictions, there were times that I would go there three times a week. I continued visiting the place during the lockdown.” (V10)

“I have been visiting this place for 35 years. I managed to come here only twice during the pandemic.” (V11)

“We used to come here more frequently before Covid, but we have kept coming during Covid as well ... We were unable to come as frequently due to the restrictions, but we have been aware of the importance of this place even before the pandemic.” (V13)

“This is my fourth visit. I came here twice during the pandemic.” (V5)

“We would frequent here before the pandemic; we kept visiting it during the pandemic, too.” (V6)

“We have been visiting here for the last 10 years. This is our third visit during Covid.” (V16)

Sub Theme 2. People who visit the tomb for the first time during COVID-19

Only two people out of the 22 who were interviewed said that this was their first time visiting the tomb. One of these people lived abroad.

“This is my first visit. I have heard about this tomb but had not had a chance to come before.” (V22)

“I cannot even describe this place. A Prophet’s tomb, I cannot begin to describe my emotions. We visit city after city during Covid. We pray for humankind. We have two matters here. One is religion, and the other is the pandemic.” (V15)

Theme 4: Visitors seeking healing during the COVID-19 pandemic

This theme has three sub-categories to understand whether the visitors visited the tomb before or after they contracted Covid or while a relative had Covid.

Sub-theme 1: Those who visited the tomb before contracting COVID-19

Some of the visitors stated that they did not get this disease. (V4, V5, V12, V14, V15, V16, V18, V19)

“We have not had the disease. People around us have... At the tomb, I prayed that the pandemic would end ... We prayed for health; we prayed for this pandemic to be away from the Islam nation...” (V12)

“... I have not had Covid. There has not been much of a change in my prayers because of the pandemic. I have always prayed for health anyway ...” (V10)

“We have not contracted Covid, thank Allah. Many people in our family have.” (V4)

Sub-theme 2: People who visit here because of the illness of a relative

Some of the visitors stated that they have a relative with COVID-19 and they prayed for her as well.

“Last year, there were people who made sacrifices here twice for a young child who was both sick and had Covid ... The child was healed, God willing.” (V20)

“My mother had a stroke; she also had Covid. We prayed for her here and she was healed. She almost died; we put her in a hospital. Allah granted her to us. My mother was able to get on her feet by the grace of Allah and by the guidance of St. Joshua.” (V8)

Sub-theme 3: People who visited it after getting better

Among the visitors are those who have had the COVID-19 disease. (V1, V2, V3, V6)

“I have had Covid in its very first days. We need places such as this, spiritual strength, and the ability to stand up more than ever in this time of Covid ...” (V9)

“Last year I took my wife to a hospital specialized in cardiology; she had contracted the virus there. Then she was hospitalized. My wife got better after a week, thank Allah. After this, my wife and I came here for a “gratitude visit.” (V13)

“I had a severe case of Covid because I have allergies. I had been everywhere without contracting it, but got it at one house I’d been to. This virus is a sign of the apocalypse.” (V11)

“My partner’s mother and father got Covid and died three days apart. It’s been 8 months. We have also had it.” (V3, 2)

“I got Covid ... My son also got Covid; he was very scared. He had a rather severe case. I prayed for him; and by the grace of God, he got healed. I have given a lot of thought to it; this is a test, and this, too, shall pass. And, thankfully it has. My daughter-in-law contracted it; my daughter contracted it. But they are okay now.” (V16)

Theme 1: The reasons for visitors to visit the Tomb of Joshua

In this study, it was determined that people who visit the Tomb of Joshua for religious reasons see him as a prophet or a religious leader. The spiritual pull created by the love and respect for the Prophet is felt here as well. It was seen that Joshua is revered for being the prophet and special messenger of Allah. In the interviews, there was mention of the camaraderie between Moses and Joshua. Visitors consider Joshua as one of the spiritual

guards of Istanbul. It is believed that Joshua, who rests on a hill overseeing the Bosphorus, has been protecting the city and the capital of the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. This protectiveness is an important factor in people being drawn to this place.

In the context of the “secret saints/guardians” cult, which can also be associated with the belief that saints, who are chosen servants by God, are given some miracles (Ocak, 1997: 29), it is understood that some of these saints are immortal, their spirits live, they can be seen at different times and in different places at the same time, to bring rain, war. It is believed that they emerged to help people in need in hardship situations such as famine, epidemic, etc. This cult also applies to Joshua. Some of the visitors state that they believe that Joshua’s soul is alive and immortal.

The visitors consider visiting the tomb as a ritual just like *salaat* and fasting. Regardless of whether they are religious or not, the majority of people visit the tombs or symbolic tombs of warriors, scholars, wanderers, dervishes, companions of Muhammed, or important people in Islamic history. There is a cult of tombs in Iran in the East, in the Turko-Islamic geography, in the Balkans, and Anatolia. People expect the same spiritual reward from their visit to Joshua they think they would receive from worship. It is seen that almost all demands and wishes voiced during the visit are expressed in the form of a prayer. What is asked from God is expressed as if they were asked from Joshua. The tradition of “making a wish,” which is part of many tomb cults, has transformed into a religious function in this visiting place. Visitors believe that they fulfill a ritual when they visit the tomb. By explaining otherwise inexplicable phenomena, rituals function as solutions against anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty (Schuyt; Schuijt, 1998: 400). As can be seen in many examples in Anatolia, visitors – whether they are religious or not – would like places, symbols, totems, and objects to bear witness or contribute to their wishes when they ask for it from God. Thus, in addition to places of prayer such as small mosques, they would like dervish lodges, tombs, and shrines to be holy vessels or witnesses for God for their prayers or wishes to come true. In this respect, they come to this tomb to make a wish as they believe their prayers would be more easily answered in such places.

During these visits, people usually pray for getting rid of the negative things in their lives and for protection against possible ill-wishes and illnesses. The fact that the interviews in this study were carried out during the peak of the pandemic shows that the need to get protection against illnesses and the need to preserve good health has been heavily felt by people. It was observed that routine visitors and traditional visits are more often than not focused on a healthy and peaceful life. Again, within this context, people seek healing for important issues such as infertility, premature birth, speech impediments in kids, autism, and paralysis. People also pray or make wishes for convicts to get out of prison, students to be successful in their exams, daughters to find husbands or to buy a house or a car.

The interviews made it clear that the Tomb of Joshua is regarded to be a traditional visiting site. It is among the must-see holy places in Istanbul and its surroundings. There is an especial increase in the number of people visiting the place during Ramadan as well as during the days and nights that are considered holy. There is a continuity to the frequently done visits; in other words, there is a tradition of visiting Joshua. Some visitors think of this as a

social activity, which has become an addiction, as part of their material and spiritual comfort. Most of the others, on the other hand, consider this a semi-religious activity. There have been people who visited the tomb during the pandemic to ask for protection against COVID-19. This increase in the interest in the tomb is caused by those who have already been using this place as a site to seek healing.

Theme 2: Seeking healing at the Tomb of Joshua

Prophets and saints are believed to be privileged since they are considered to be close to God (Radtke, 2002: 109). Therefore, visitors indicated that they visit the Tomb of Joshua thinking that it will be good for a physical ailment they or their relatives have. This could be regarded as a religious act as well as a crisis ritual. Events resulting in crisis rituals are known to be unexpected and surprising because they are events not repeated according to a period or a calendar. Carried out to overcome the uncertainty and anxiety created by the crisis, crisis rituals can be done to get rid of illness (Honko, 1979: 377-79). Illness is a crisis itself and people visit this place to alleviate this crisis. The expectation to get better is high here which is created by those who claim that they got better after visiting the tomb. Visitors indicated that they have seen babies and kids with illnesses brought to the tomb. Some brought their sick children. New-born babies, babies with sleeping problems, children who cannot speak, kids with autism, kids with intellectual disabilities, and those with muscle diseases were among the ones brought here to heal.

Those using a wheelchair, those with physical disabilities, those who have had a stroke, people with high blood pressure, and people suffering from allergies to name a few, visit the tomb or are said to visit it. Another frequently indicated wish is to ask for healing indirectly for those who are either far away or who cannot come themselves due to a disability by their relatives. People who have contracted COVID-19 and people with relatives who got COVID-19 also visit the tomb to wish for health.

Visitors believe that this tomb heals them spiritually. The Tomb of Joshua has been described as “a source of spiritual healing,” and “a source of spiritual strength.” Many visitors indicate that they have found bliss and peace here; they add that they miss this place when they cannot come and visit. People mention that they talk to Joshua about things they cannot talk about with other people; they maintain that they have a psychological relief by having a heart-to-heart with him.

Theme 3: People visiting the Tomb of Joshua during the COVID-19 pandemic

The majority of the visitors are people who have been to the Yuşa Tomb before the pandemic. Ritual is the repetition of certain values related to individuals or groups, at appropriate times, with symbolic and more or less unchanging successive behavior patterns (Honko 1979: 372). Considering the studies that show that people who do their religious duties and establish a spiritual intimacy with God experience less fear and anxiety in the face of trauma than non-religious people (Batmaz, & Meral, 2022), visiting the shrine as a desire to perform a religious ritual becomes even more meaningful. Visitors have tried to do this ritual during the COVID-19 pandemic as well. However, they mentioned that the number of their visits was limited both due to the pandemic and the lockdowns that were in place.

Some visited the tomb for the first time during COVID-19. The number of these people is quite low compared to the ones who have been to the tomb before the pandemic. Despite the comparatively high number of people who sought a solution to the physical and mental problems caused by the pandemic, the number of people who visited the tomb for the first time was lower than expected.

Theme 4: Visitors seeking healing during the COVID-19 pandemic

People resort to religion and religious rituals to deal with this unknown virus. Some studies focus on how religious practices and beliefs play a role in people's behaviour in relation to protection against coronavirus and its symptoms once the virus is contracted. Some studies provide recommendations on how they can protect their health by activating their beliefs (Koenig, 2020). Suggestions are presented on how people can protect their health by putting their beliefs into action during the pandemic period (Koenig 2020: 8-12). Visiting tombs is one of the ways belief can be turned into action. Assuming a universal mission upon themselves for the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the whole world, this group of visitors asked for healing not only for themselves and their relatives but also for all mankind.

Those who have visited the tomb frequently for a long period of time assumed establishing a special relationship between themselves and Joshua or developed a sense of spiritual closeness with him; they seem to believe that they could save the whole of humanity from the pandemic with this sense of spiritual tolerance. In this respect, even though they themselves did not contract the virus, they believe they are being heroic by coming to visit Joshua despite the virus and official warnings; they also believe that they act as messengers serving the human conscience as they send their prayers to Joshua.

Although not as many in numbers as those who visited the tomb seeking healing, some came there after recovering from an illness. These people are those who visited the tomb to offer their thanks after the physical and psychological difficulties experienced by themselves and their loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the morale boost felt for surviving the pandemic was also effective in people's will to visit the tomb of Joshua, which was part of their routine life anyway.

Conclusion

This study shows that people continued to visit the Tomb of Joshua even when there were partial lockdown measures in place in Turkey due to the pandemic. People consider this tomb as a holy place where their prayers are answered. Visitors pray here to eliminate certain problems they experience. The most noteworthy aim of these visits is the fact they people see this place as an alternative source of healing. It was observed that those who visit Joshua seeking healing have a high expectation for the healing of their mental and physical problems.

The following were identified as the main reasons for visitors to come to the Tomb of Joshua: his ability to heal, the expectation to be protected against diseases, its ability to provide relaxation and peace of mind against negative thoughts and fears caused by the disease or illness, steering towards the holy by asking for healing (asking for it from Allah through the Prophet;

using the Prophet as the mediator), affirming rites of passages (such as birth, marriage, death, etc.). People who want to get rid of the fears caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, people who want to avoid contracting the virus, and those who have sick people in their close circles come to visit the tomb. Those whose prayers are answered also visit the tomb to show their gratitude. It is evident that an important chunk of the expectations, wishes, and prayers, which have become a ritual, are focused on healing. People, who have visited this tomb to get rid of their troubles before, come here again during the pandemic to avert the difficulties and fears they face.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement:

This is a research article, containing original data, and it has not been previously published or submitted to any other outlet for publication. The author followed ethical principles and rules during the research process. In the study, informed consent was obtained from the volunteer participants and the privacy of the participants was protected.

Araştırma ve yayın etiği beyanı: Bu makale tamamıyla özgün bir araştırma olarak planlanmış, yürütülmüş ve sonuçları ile raporlaştırıldıktan sonra ilgili dergiye gönderilmiştir. Araştırma herhangi bir sempozyum, kongre vb. sunulmamış ya da başka bir dergiye değerlendirilmek üzere gönderilmemiştir.

Contribution rates of authors to the article: The author in this article contributed to the 100% level of preparation of the study, data collection, and interpretation of the results and writing of the article.

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Visitors names

V1: İbrahim Çiçek, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V2: Sünkar Aksoy, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V3: Savaş Aksoy, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V4: Betül Arda, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V5: Levent Yeşiltepe, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 04.06.2021.

V6: Hizbullah Nur Mohamad, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 04.06.2021

V7: Deniz Koç, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V8: Sinan Belkıs, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V9: Reyhan Beyhan, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V10: Elif Aynacı, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 26.05.2021.

V11: Faika M., Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.

V12: Semra Tiryaki, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 04.06.2021.

V13: Rıdvan Cenk, Beykoz, 04.06.2021.

- V14:** Abdullahi Mohamad Herzi, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi 04.06.2021.
V15: Mohamad Aden Hussein, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 04.06.2021.
V16: İlkey Üzümcü, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.
V17: Aysel Ayaç, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 04.06.2021.
V18: Zeliha Demirbağ, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.
V19: Leyla Demirbağ, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.
V20: Abdullah Arda, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.
V21: Kenan Ağbars, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 28.05.2021.
V22: Nuri Demirci, Beykoz-Yuşa Tepesi, 04.06.2021.

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