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### A TAINTED PLACE IN CENTRAL ANATOLIA: KIRKDILIM ROAD (ÇORUM-TURKEY)\*

**Abstract:** Building roads has been indispensable for civilizations from past to present. The geographies and civilizations where the roads were built played an important role in the construction of the road, ensuring its continuity and gaining an identity. The aim of this study is to reveal the construction process of the Kırkdilim road, which has been under construction for more than half a century, how it turned into a tainted road in the historical process, and the reflections of the political decisions taken in the field. For this purpose, field studies were carried out at intervals between 2018-2022. During these studies, interviews consisting of open-ended questions were conducted with the local people. The results of the research revealed that the effect of the geological and geomorphological structure in the area, technical inadequacies and political decisions are among the biggest reasons why the Kırkdilim road could not be completed for more than half a century in the historical process. Due to the slope conditions of the Mesozoic limestones and conglomerate formations in the area, their mobility is high. Tunnels and roads built in the area in previous years have become unusable due to landslides and rockfalls, and many fatal accidents have occurred. The historical process, especially the reflections of the political decisions taken, has made the Kırkdilim road a tainted place. The experiences, narratives and stories of the people who use this tainted area have been passed down from generation to generation. Today, the area is a tainted place both in terms of local people, drivers and passengers using the area, aesthetically and archaeologically, geographically and politically. The issue of how to manage this tainting is the most basic problem that needs to be addressed.

### ORTA ANADOLU'DA LEKELİ BİR YER: KIRKDİLİM YOLU (ÇORUM-TÜRKİYE)

**Öz:** Yol inşa etmek geçmişten günümüze medeniyetler açısından vazgeçilmez olmuştur. Yolların inşa edildikleri coğrafyalar ve medeniyetler hem yolun yapılışında, hem devamlılığının sağlanmasında, hem de kimlik kazanmasında önemli rol oynamışlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı yapımı yarım asırdan uzun süre devam eden Kırkdilim yolunun inşa sürecini, tarihi süreçte nasıl lekeli bir yol haline dönüştüğünü, alınan politik kararların alandaki yansımala-

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rını ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaçla alanda 2018-2022 yılları arasında aralıklarla devam eden saha çalışmaları gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışmalar esnasında yöre halkı ile açık uçlu sorulardan oluşan mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları Kırkdilim yolunun tarihi süreçte yarım asırdan uzun süredir bir türlü bitirilememiş olmasının en büyük nedenleri arasında alandaki jeolojik ve jeomorfolojik yapının etkisi, teknik yetersizlikler ve politik kararlar olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Alandaki Mesozoik kireçtaşları ve konglomera oluşumlarının eğim şartları nedeniyle hareket kabiliyeti yüksektir. Alanda daha önceki yıllarda

inşa edilen tüneller ve yollar heyelan ve kaya düşmeleri nedeniyle kullanılamaz hale gelmiş, çok sayıda ölümlü kaza yaşanmıştır. Başta alınan politik kararların yansımaları olmak üzere yaşanan tarihi süreç Kırkdilim yolunu lekeli bir yer haline getirmiştir. Bu lekellik alanı kullanan insanların deneyimleri, anlatıları ve hikayeleriyle nesilden nesile aktarılmıştır. Alan günümüzde hem yöre halkı açısından hem alanı kullanan şoför ve yolcular açısından, hem estetik ve arkeolojik açıdan, hem coğrafi açıdan ve hem de politik açıdan lekeli bir yerdir. Bu lekeliğin nasıl yönetileceği konusu üzerinde durulması gereken en temel problemdir.

## Introduction

Road building has a long history. It is known that people have created various roads on the land since ancient times and used these roads for various purposes. The technical and functional short history of the roads will be briefly mentioned in this part of the study. Horses were used on the roads that were first built especially for transportation purposes.<sup>1</sup> In later periods, oxen became used along with horses on the dirt roads of that period. Ancient roads were generally simple, narrow paths consisting of paths, often easily deteriorated by the influence of external forces. These roads largely followed mountain passes, valleys, and plains that were somewhat flatter than their surroundings. The maintenance of these first roads consisted of cutting the trees on the road, removing the stones and roughly correcting the deteriorated areas. In the following period, it is seen that these simple roads started to be expanded as a result of the increase in the use of roads especially for commercial purposes. The increase in trade made it necessary to make the primitive roads wider and straighter.<sup>2</sup> In those periods, road construction, maintenance and repair were completely based on manpower.

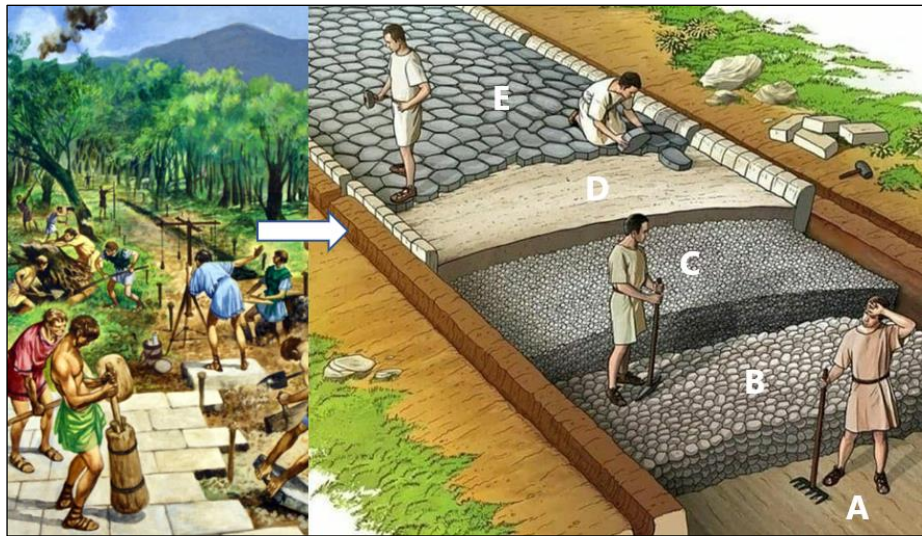
It is known that the first wheels were invented in the Sumerian civilization around 5000 BC. It is thought that these first wheels were discovered by the people of the period in the process of making earthenware such as pottery. The discovery of the wheel changed the design of the vehicles used and opened the door to the development of roads. The first two-wheeled vehicles appeared around 2800 BC, and the first four-wheeled vehicles appeared around 2500 BC; these vehicles are known to be pulled by wild horses and wild donkeys.<sup>3</sup>

The emergence of the Roman Empire was a turning point in terms of roads. In the Roman Empire, the need for relocation of the army could only be met with a smooth road network. For this reason, there was an effort to create a smooth and solid road network that would not slow down the speed of the Roman army at that time. For this purpose, the most solid and smooth roads in history were built for the first time during the Roman Empire period. Although it varies depending on the location, these engineering wonders, which usually consist of 4-5 separate layers, were built so well that many of them are still used today, even after thousands of years (Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> Lay, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Lay, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Lay, 1992.

**Figure 1.** Roman Period Road Construction Technique in Ancient Times<sup>4</sup>

**A:** Levelled base land, **B:** Stone slabs, **C:** Gravel and rubble, **D:** Sand cover, **E:** Smooth paving stones

In the 17th century, a density arose on the trade routes. This density was reflected on the roads in the form of convoys of horses (Figure 2). From the end of the 1600s, the enrichment of the states led to the construction of new and more well-maintained roads. In this period, states in different parts of the world (for example, in West Africa) paid taxes and built the first toll roads of the period they were in.<sup>5</sup> Again in this period, new wide roads and bridges began to be built in the European continent.<sup>6</sup>

The Industrial Revolution was a turning point in road construction and engineering studies. With the Industrial Revolution, the construction of more professional toll roads in terms of engineering gained weight. In particular, technical issues such as the roads being smooth in terms of drainage, being able to withstand heavy tonnage vehicles and being suitable for speeding have been studied. By the beginning of the 1900s, modern asphalt roads were started to be built.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2.** Depiction of the road through which horse convoys passed through trade

<sup>4</sup> Modified from WOL, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Herskovits, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> Lay, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Lay, 1992.

in the 17th century <sup>8</sup>

In addition to the physical features of the roads mentioned in the historical process, there were also roads with functional significance. Spice and Silk Roads were at the forefront of these roads. The Spice Road was an important trade route between India and Europe in general. Spices have been an important trade material since ancient times. Spice trade has triggered the development of new centers, cities, ports and even roads in the world. In fact, the spice trade, which was carried out over the land routes, led to the development of the sea routes over time. Similarly, the Silk Road was an important ancient route used for nearly 3000 years between China and the Mediterranean world. The fact that silk preserves its importance in almost every period in the world and is a preferred product has also made its trade important. For this purpose, silk trade between east and west was carried out on the route known as the Silk Road. Over time, these aforementioned roads have become routes where not only spices and silk, but also many other goods, inventions, ideas, diseases, cultures and beliefs are carried. This romanticism gained by the roads has also affected the way they are perceived, and various meanings and identities have been attributed to the roads throughout history.

The meanings attributed to roads or other geographical units are undoubtedly related to the human experience of the place. At this point, it should be known that the definition of “tainted place” is directly related to this. The geographer Foote coined the term “tainted place” for areas of American geography, often involving tragedy and violence. In his studies, Foote focused on how American popular culture should approach the tainted places where terrible events took place in the American geography.<sup>9 10</sup> The tainted place is actually the place to be experienced. It is the meaning attributed to the ground, what it feels and how it is felt. Therefore, the “tainted place” is a kind of disguised form of the sense of place. With the work done, the tainted places can be rearranged or eliminated. The weakening of the taintening of the tainted places by various factors may cause the thoughts and memories of the place to weaken and eventually the taintening to be erased over time. The details of the subject will be discussed in more detail in the sub-headings in the findings part of the study with examples.

### **1. Purpose, Research Questions and Method**

The aim of this study is to reveal how the Kırkdilim road, located in the central part of Anatolia (in the Central Black Sea Section), within the borders of Çorum province, has become / turned into a tainted place for more than half a century in the historical process. For this purpose in the study, first of all, a literature review was made, and then field studies were carried out in the field. Within the scope of the field studies, the field has been worked at different intervals from 2018 to the present, and the road has been tried to be understood from the eyes of the residents of Kırkdilim Village and Laçın district, which are located right next to the area, as well as the drivers and passengers who use the area in various ways in their daily lives. In this direction, interviews consisting of open-ended questions were conducted with the local people living in the area; personal stories, memories and narratives of local residents and people using the road were recorded; the studies of public actors in the field were scanned and analyzed and evaluations were made on all these data obtained by taking into account the past experiences of the author.

### **2. Location and General Historical-Geographical Features of the Study Area**

Kırkdilim road is located in the central part of Turkey, in the “Central Black Sea Section” within the Black Sea Region, within the borders of Çorum province, on the Çorum-Osmancık road route, at an altitude of 1276 meters. Kırkdilim road is located in the northern part of Çorum city center and is 22 km from Çorum, 8 km from the Laçın district in its immediate vicinity

<sup>8</sup> Modified from Huard, 1874.

<sup>9</sup> Foote, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Jordan-Bychkov & Domosh, 2002.

and 38 km from Osmancık district. Located just 1 km from the area and giving its name to the road, there is the historical Kırkdilim Village connected to the center of Çorum (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Location map of the study area



The study area is generally located on the Alpine-Himalayan mountain formation system. The area is located on the approximately 1600 km long fault line that runs through northern Turkey, known as the North Anatolian Fault. In fact, the North Anatolian Fault passes exactly 20 km north of Çorum, through the Kırkdilim region, which is the study area. Generally, two different geological formations are observed in the area. The first of these is the metamorphic series and the other is the sedimentary series.<sup>11 12 13</sup> Kırkdilim acquired its basic geological features in the end of the third geological time (Tertiary) and the fourth geological time (Quaternary). Limestones and conglomerate formations stand out in the area. Quartz intrusions are observed as veins (dyke) in places between these layers. Conglomerate formations have a very cracked structure with the effect of external forces, and a fragmented structure feature is observed in weak areas where the cement material holding large and small pebbles is eroded by external forces. In these areas, situations where large and small materials can easily take action and fall on the road often arise.

In Kırkdilim and its vicinity, a transitional climate prevails between the Black Sea climate and continental climate conditions. However, continental climatic conditions are more dominant in the area. In this climate type, summers are generally hot and dry, and winters are usually cold and snowy. The coldest month in the area is January and the hottest month is August. Temperatures often fall below freezing from November to early March. 80 years of measurements in the area show that the annual average precipitation value is about 430 mm.<sup>14</sup> It is seen that the climate conditions of the Black Sea become dominant as you go from Kırkdilim to the north, as a result of which the summer temperature values decrease and the precipitation values increase. In the same period, in winter, it is seen that the temperature values increase and precipitation begins to be seen as rain. As we move towards the south, it is seen that the precipitation values in summer decrease and the temperature values increase due to the increase in the effect of continental climate conditions. In the same period, in winter, it is

<sup>11</sup> Lahn, 1949.

<sup>12</sup> Akarsu, 1959.

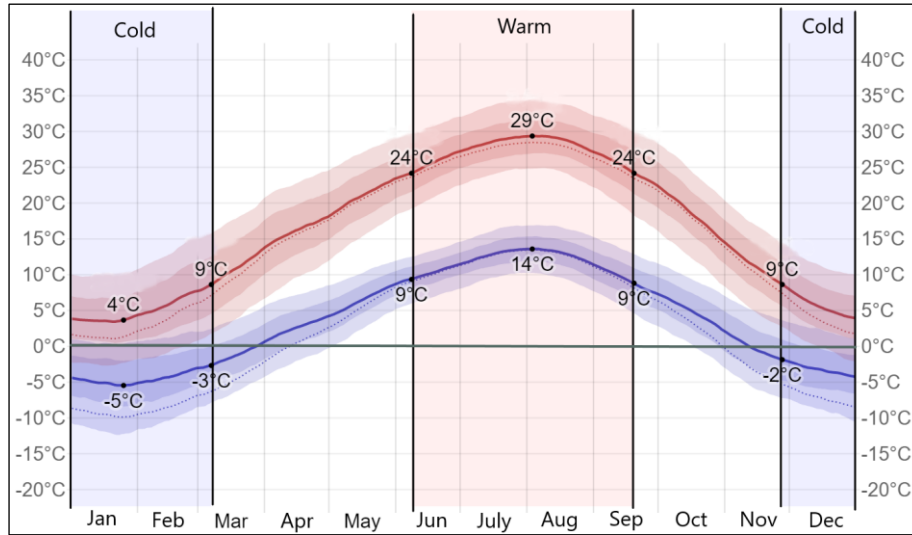
<sup>13</sup> Ketin, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> MGM, 2021.



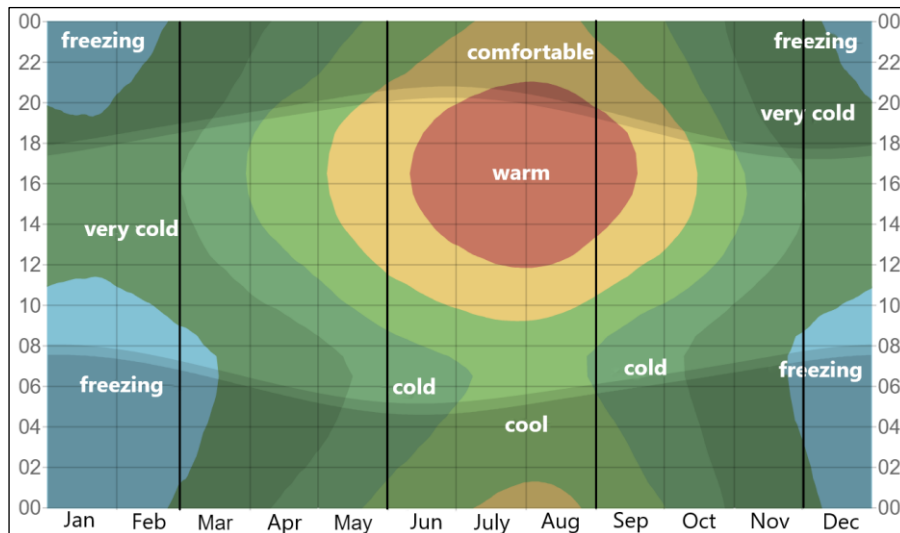
seen that the temperature values frequently drop below zero degrees and the precipitation is generally in the form of snow (Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Average temperature values of the study area (high and low) <sup>15</sup>



Wind directions and effects change seasonally in the area, which closely concerns the weather. Poyraz (cold wind blowing from the northeast in Turkey) is generally effective in the area during the summer season. In winter, the Yıldız wind from the north (cold wind blowing from the north in Turkey) makes its effect felt. In the spring, the southwesterly Lodos wind (hot wind blowing from the southwest in Turkey) is effective and these winds bring plenty of precipitation and often cause hail. It is known that a calmer weather is observed in the area in the autumn season. In fact, it is remarkable that these quiet and calm autumn months in the area are called “deaf months” among the local people living in the region. Average temperature values in the area change during the day depending on the months (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Average hourly temperature values in the study area <sup>16</sup>



<sup>15</sup> Modified from MGM, 2021 & URL 1.

<sup>16</sup> Modified from URL 1.

When the area is evaluated in terms of vegetation, it is seen that it contains different species. Steppe vegetation is common in the inner parts of the area, which continues towards the south. This vegetation generally constitutes the natural vegetation of the area, turns green with spring precipitation and dries up in autumn. There are many wild plant species in the steppe vegetation. The main ones are Crocus (*Crocus sp.*), Wild Hyacinth (*Hyacinthus sp.*), Wild Tulip (*Tulip sp.*), Chamomile (*Matricaria sp.*), Weasel (*Papaver rhoeas*), Thistle (*Silybum marianum*), Gooseberry (*Centaurea solstitialis*), Kangal Grass (*Onopordum bracteatum*), Bovine Tail (*Verbascum thapsus*), Grasshopper (*Artemisia absinthium*). However, species such as Oak (*Quercus sp.*), Wild Apple (*Malus sylvestris*), Wild Plum (*Prunus spinosa*), Hardwood (*Pyrus elaeagnifolia*), Cranberry (*Cornus mas*), Walnut (*Juglans sp.*), Rowan (*Sorbus sp.*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Linden (*Tilia cordata*), Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Sour Cherry (*Prunus cerasus*), Pear (*Pyrus communis*) are seen in the area up to 1000-1300 meters altitude. At higher elevations, Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Wild Hazelnut (*Corylus sp.*), Wild Poplar (*Populus sp.*), Juniper (*Juniperus sp.*), Black Pine (*Pinus nigra*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Fir (*Abies sp.*) species are found.

The economy of the area is basically based on agriculture and animal husbandry. Grain farming is generally carried out in the area, among which wheat and barley are the leading ones. In addition to these, forage crops such as alfalfa, vetch and oats are also grown for use in livestock. Small cattle breeding is common in the area, sheep breeding is seen in the drier and flatter plains in the south, while goat breeding is observed in the more mountainous and cooler regions in the north. Wild flowers and other rich flora elements that grow in the high lands that continue to the north create very favorable conditions for beekeeping.<sup>17</sup> In order to meet the meat and milk needs of the region, there are facilities and dairy farms in the district centers and in the urbanized areas towards the city center. The traditional black cattle breed is still raised in rural areas in the study area. When you go down to the Kızılırmak Valley towards the south, water-loving species such as water buffalo can be seen.

Çorum is not among the provinces whose population is constantly increasing. The population in the area generally shows a decreasing trend.<sup>18</sup> Most of the population migrates to nearby cities such as Samsun and Ankara for economic reasons; some of them go to other big cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Kayseri and Konya. The population of Çorum is around 526 thousand people as of 2021.<sup>19</sup> In the Kirkdilim region, which is the study area, the population is constantly decreasing. As a matter of fact, approximately 80 people live in Kirkdilim Village today. It is known that this number was around 300 people in 1985.

The area is promising in terms of industrial activities. Generally, in the area where soil industry and machinery manufacturing industry are developed, brick and tile factories, sugar factory, cement factories, fertilizer factories, agricultural tools industry, food industry, paint factories, factories producing household goods and metal industry producing other large and small metal goods are developed. The area also includes the Ahlatçı Gold Refinery, one of Turkey's two gold refineries. Thanks to the products produced and exported in these factories, Çorum is among the top 15 exporting provinces of Turkey.<sup>20</sup> Çorum is among the provinces known as "Anatolian Tiger" in Turkey.

Çorum is very rich in terms of tourism and has various resource values. The area is in an advantageous position in tourism due to its thousands of years of history, the fact that it has hosted many civilizations, especially the Hittite Civilization, and that it has an untouched structure in terms of archaeological remains. The area attracts attention in terms of its natural beauties, as well as the historical ruins of the Hittite Civilization, such as Boğazköy, Hattusa,

<sup>17</sup> Aylar, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> TÜİK, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> TÜİK, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Özbakır, 2021; TOBB, 2021.

Ortaköy, which are within the scope of UNESCO World Heritage. Known as “the center of the world” in the world, Çorum's position in the tourism market and its destination value are increasing day by day.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Kırkdilim for the Local People

The geographical unit that gives its name to the Kırkdilim road is Kırkdilim Village, where the road passes right by it. According to another narrative, the situation that gives Kırkdilim its name is the 40 sharp bends on the road. These bends start right near Kırkdilim Village and end after about 10 km near the town of Laçın. The history of Kırkdilim Village dates back to the 14th century. It is known from historical records that the settlement date in the village dates back to 1392. The “Kırkdilim War” was fought in the area in 1392 between the Ottoman Empire and the Sivas ruler Kadı Burhaneddin Ahmet State. Kadı Burhaneddin Ahmet had also taken over the reign of Eredna Principality at that time. Since the First Kosova War, there was no problem in the relations between the Ottoman State and the Kadı Burhaneddin State. However, due to the policy of establishing the Turkish Union in Anatolia, which was followed with the coming of the Ottoman Sultan Yıldırım Bayezid, the principalities were abolished one by one and entered into Anatolia. This situation disturbed Kadı Burhaneddin. The two armies under the command of the Ottoman Sultan Yıldırım Bayezid's son, Şehzade Ertuğrul, and the Sivas Ruler, Kadı Burhaneddin, came face to face in 1392 in Kırkdilim. It has been recorded that this war, which was made to dominate Anatolia, continued for 3 days in Kırkdilim, the Ottoman Empire lost the war, and the Ottoman commander, Şehzade Ertuğrul, was killed at the end of the war.<sup>21</sup>

It is known that Circassian peoples belonging to different tribes were settled in different areas of Anatolian lands during the Ottoman Empire. Circassian communities who were forced to migrate from the North Caucasus under Russian pressure and who were subjected to genocide were settled in the Kırkdilim region. Kırkdilim Village is an area that witnessed the Circassian migration. Besleney Circassians migrated and settled in Kırkdilim Village in Çorum from Hodz (Adıgey-Adıge) and Ulape in the Caucasus due to the Circassian exile and genocide activities that emerged as a result of Russian pressure between 1864-1867. In this ethnic cleansing, in which 1.5 million Circassians were displaced, Circassian population was settled in such an amount that 34 villages would be established around Çorum. One of them was Kırkdilim Village. It has been recorded that the name of the village was known as “Anejokuey (or Anjikuey)” in Circassian from the 1860s to the 1920s.<sup>22</sup>

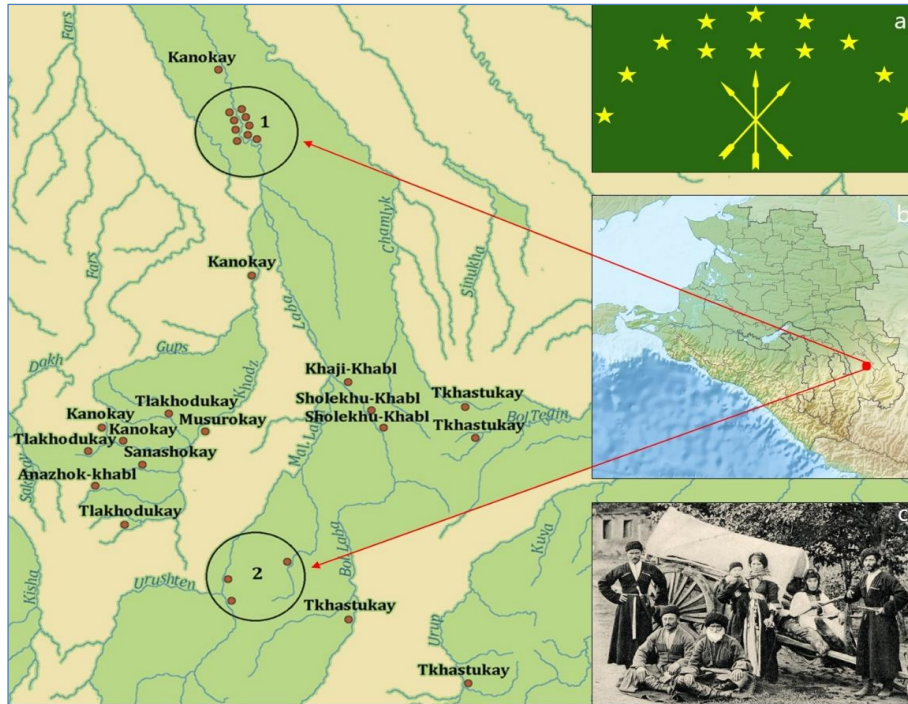
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<sup>21</sup> Uzunçarşılı, 1982; Bakırer, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Uzunçarşılı, 1982; URL 2; Bakırer, 2015.



**Figure 6.** Besleney Villages in the Caucasus in the period between 1830-1850. These villages were located on the Laba River in two groups, in the northern part indicated by number 1 (9 villages) and in the southern part by number 2 (3 villages). The Besleney people (c) living in the east of the North Caucasus (b) had their own flag (a).<sup>23</sup>



There are various arguments about why Besleney Circassians were settled in Kırkdilim. Among the reasons for these are their farming in fertile agricultural areas, after being lowered to Samsun port, they were placed within a route from north to south along the Samsun-Sinop-Adana line and it was aimed to interact with other peoples who had somehow migrated from the Caucasus. It is also stated that the Besleneys, who were settled in Kırkdilim, originally resided in a village around Amasya, but later came to Kırkdilim.<sup>24</sup> Considering the character of the migration and the mood of the Circassian people at that time, this may mean that the Circassians of Besleney consciously came to Kırkdilim and preferred Kırkdilim. As a matter of fact, considering the place where the Besleneys lived in their homeland in the Caucasus, it becomes clear that the environment, geographical conditions, geology and geomorphology there are very similar to Kırkdilim. In fact, the “Cerek Canyon” in the Kabardino-Balkaria region where the Besleneys live in the Caucasus is quite similar to the Kırkdilim Canyon. This situation suggests that the Besleneys may have settled in Kırkdilim because it is very similar to their homeland in the Caucasus. In addition, according to the narratives of the local people in the village, it was almost impossible to enter the Kırkdilim region before the Kırkdilim road was built in the 1960s. Therefore, Kırkdilim's defense line was quite strong due to its natural structure. The thought and belief that this line of defense could not be overcome, or would be much more difficult, may have triggered the Besleneys to settle in the area.

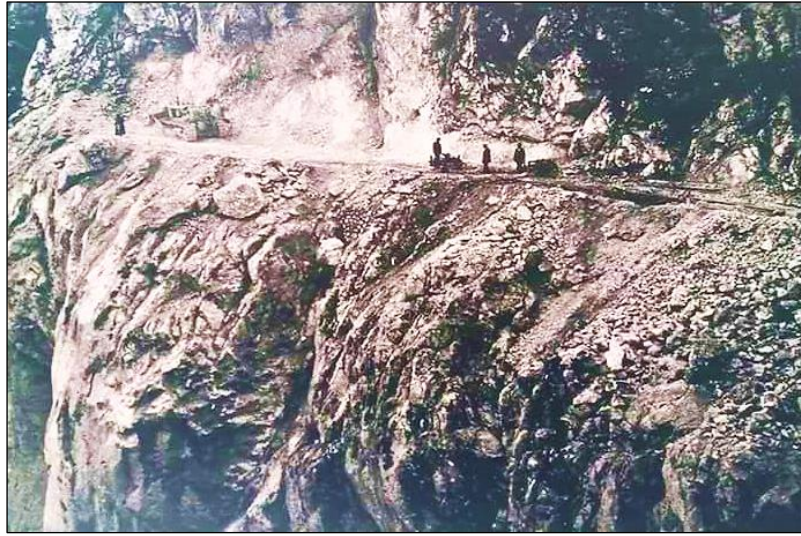
When the data obtained are evaluated, it turns out that Kırkdilim Canyon is important for the Besleneys and may even be a meaningful, perhaps sacred area for them, considering that they identify with their hometown. Coming to this area in 1962 for the purpose of road construction with the construction equipment of that period was not welcomed by the Besleneys. This situation is expressed by some elderly individuals living in the village by saying, “We did not want

<sup>23</sup> Modified from URL 3.

<sup>24</sup> Çurey, 2013; URL 2; Uğurlu, 2020.

a road to be built here". The destruction of the untouched and untouched cliffs of Kırkdilim with heavy construction equipment caused the canyon and the road to be tainted for the Besleneys. In the mental world of the Besleneys, the Kırkdilim road has been a tainted one. It was perceived as a road that crosses and destroys the canyon, which represents their hometown, and at the same time weakens the defense lines, and should not exist. Therefore, the Kırkdilim road has been a road that connects Çorum to Kargı and Osmacık (bringing them closer), but alienating the people of Besleney from it. Of course, this perception has weakened over time, and it has tended to be forgotten and erased, especially with the new generation leaving Kırkdilim and migrating to big cities. The taintedness of the road in this sense has remained a memory in the minds of the elderly representatives of the local people who live it today.

**Figure 7.** The first road construction work in Kırkdilim Canyon (1962)<sup>25</sup>



Another tainting element of the Kırkdilim road for the local people is related to the vehicles stuck in harsh winter conditions, rock falls on the road and fatal accidents on the road. Almost every year in winter, the road is closed due to harsh winter conditions, and some years remain closed for a long time. At such times, the subject of the daily life of the local people, public speaking, and evening conversations is always the Kırkdilim road. Helping the stranded passengers and their vehicles, hosting people on the road, albeit rarely today (which was common in the past), and traffic created by state officials such as the gendarmerie, law enforcement officers and ambulances, who came to the area due to various accidents on the road, keep the perception of taintedness of the local people warm. Kırkdilim road renews its tainted aspect in the minds of the local people with tragic and violent events every year.

<sup>25</sup> ÇBKA, 2021.

**Figure 8.** Views from fatal accidents that occur almost every year on the Kırkdilim road (2021)<sup>26</sup>



### 3.2. Kırkdilim in Terms of Passengers and Drivers Using the Route

Kırkdilim road connects Çorum province to Laçın, Dodurga, Osmancık and Kargı districts. For this reason, the road is located on a very busy and important route. Frequent use of the road and the fact that it is an almost indispensable transit point also increases the pressure on the road. Kırkdilim is an unforgettable and fearful place for the drivers who use the road almost every day and for the passengers who come to Çorum city center every day from the surrounding villages and towns for various reasons. Vehicle drivers and passengers pass on the Kırkdilim road, the experience they have had while traveling on this road, from generation to generation for years, and they attach special importance to the Kırkdilim road in their memories.

Kırkdilim road is known and recognized almost all over the country with its fame. When the drivers and passengers approach the Kırkdilim road, there are significant changes in their behaviors, precautions and perception levels; people are almost preparing themselves to pass through Kırkdilim. Especially in winter, this situation is more obvious and continues to increase its effect (because there is a higher probability of an undesirable situation due to snow and icing on the road in winter). Examples of this have often been encountered in the journeys made on the Çorum-Osmancık route by village and district minibuses. Namely, it has been observed that people who slept before coming to Kırkdilim road on these journeys were woken up by their relatives and friends when they came to this road. Even passengers who do not know each other wake the other. If a passenger does not wake his friend or another passenger, the person who fell asleep reproaches the person who did not wake him up, saying, “Why didn't you wake me up”. Drivers or passengers who are not wearing seat belts immediately put on their seat belts at the beginning of the road. In fact, the driver of the vehicle feels the need to warn the passengers in the vehicle: “We have arrived in Kırkdilim, everyone should fasten their seat belts, just in case, pray”. These warnings increase the level of anxiety of people even more. People are constantly looking at the road, which has high cliffs on one side and a deep cliff on the other. Some people cross the road with their eyes closed because they cannot look outside. From time to time, he glances away from his hands and fingers, which he covers over his face, and asks people if they have “crossed the road”. People are constantly praying until the end of the road, and there is a deep silence in the vehicle. People (usually women) who prefer to sit by the window or in the front of the vehicle because they are nauseous or for various reasons (usually women) move away from the window and the front of the vehicle and sit in the middle or rear of the vehicle when they come to Kırkdilim road. In some cases, passengers pile up on the side of the vehicle that is not facing the cliff (mountainous side), and

<sup>26</sup> OGG, 2021.

there are no passengers on the side facing the cliff. After the driver of the vehicle announces that “the balance of the vehicle has deteriorated and therefore everyone needs to sit down”, the passengers, especially men, go to their old places. When the road is over, everyone takes their own place in the vehicle and the passengers say “get well soon” to each other. Again, it is told that people of rural origin who travel on the road pass through Kırkdilim, when they need to toilet out of fear, they cover their faces completely with their hands or with a blanket, and they do not open their eyes until the road ends. It is also among the stories that the women and children in the village minibuses passing by on the cold winter days hide under the blankets out of fear. In addition, it is known that many trucks, which passed through Kırkdilim road in the 1970s and transported the lignite coal extracted from Çorum-Alpagut region to Çorum and the surrounding provinces, fell into the abyss here. It is told by the local people that during these events, a great number of lives and property were lost, and almost all of the vehicles that fell into the cliff were left at the bottom of the cliff because they could not be removed from the deep cliffs.

In the eyes of the drivers and passengers using the route of Kırkdilim, this tainted aspect is due to the frequent fatal accidents, rock falls, slips, collapses, cliffs and brake bursts that occur frequently in the area. For the aforementioned reasons, there is hardly a year in which a fatal accident does not occur in the area. With these features of the road, it is badly coded in people's minds. This bad code is riveted in every accident, every rockfall, every landslide, every sighting of the gendarmerie vehicle and the sound of every ambulance. This bad code has spread not only to the drivers and passengers in and around the region, but also to the whole country. So much so that even the driver or passenger who used the Kırkdilim road once in his life remembers it. Drivers who live hundreds of kilometers away from the area also know the area with the stories traditionally told by word of mouth. This means that the Kırkdilim road has a very strong sense of place. The sense of place created in the minds of the field is related to lived experience, narratives and beliefs. At the same time, this strong sense of place is accompanied by a sublimity and a sacredness.

Kırkdilim Canyon and the road through the canyon are not only a landscape of fear, but also sublime. Although it may not appear at first glance, there is a deep respect for the field. This respect mixed with fear brings many images to mind. Undoubtedly, the resulting complex abstract situation did not occur in a day. Many people in the field have been exposed to the field since childhood, experiencing the field with fear, anxiety, restlessness and anxiety. The thought of the difficulty and helplessness that the person will fall into in case of the possibility of realizing the most negative scenarios that he has established in his mind reveals the respect for the field in the person. This fear and respect is often personal, subjective.<sup>27</sup> It is a homage to nature and the supernatural powers embedded in it, which are invisible at first glance. In a way, it is the desire not to confront them under current conditions. Is this some kind of escape mechanism development method? Why not, maybe this is some kind of escape mechanism.

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<sup>27</sup> Tuan, 1979.



**Figure 9.** Kirkdilig road is badly coded in terms of accidents and passengers and drivers. Search and rescue teams (a) try to save vehicles and people (b) that fell into the abyss in the area, firefighters (c) and gendarmerie law enforcement agencies intervene in accidents in the area.<sup>28</sup>



### 3.3. Kirkdilig in terms of Geographical Landscape, Aesthetics and Archaeology

Kirkdilig region has a very mountainous and rough terrain. This faulty structure, with its untouchedness and wildness, has a landscape value that is not very common geographically. This landscape value gives the area a different identity, dignity, sublimity and sense of place. In fact, the landscape of the area is full of invisible traces as well as the extraordinary geographical elements that appear. These invisible traces, beliefs and stories created by various civilizations in the historical process of thousands of years constitute the cultural heritage of the area. When the area is viewed from this perspective, the first question that comes to mind is “Would it be better not to build a road here?” As a matter of fact, there are plainer and flatter lands suitable for road construction in the north and south of Kirkdilig. The road could easily pass through here. However, this has never been done. Was it really necessary to persistently pass the road through Kirkdilig? Did all the geological, geomorphological, technical and economic indicators point to the road passing through Kirkdilig? As a researcher studying in the field for a long time, I would like to state that this is not exactly the case. Undoubtedly, various technical, economic and political reasons can be put forward for the road to pass through Kirkdilig. However, in order to determine another road route as an alternative, it should be noted that there are lands around Kirkdilig where roads can be built under more suitable and more economical conditions.

<sup>28</sup> OGG, 2021.

Kırkdilim Canyon contains various ruins with historical and archaeological value. The most well-known value among these is Kapılıkaya. Kapılıkaya or Kırkdilim Gate is actually a mausoleum. The rock tomb, which is approximately 30 km from Çorum city center, is located on a very steep and sloping rocky slope within Kırkdilim Canyon, approximately 65 meters above the canyon floor. The ground in front of the rock tomb is trapezoidal, the first stage consists of 8 steps and the second stage consists of two different levels with 12 steps. The rock tomb was built within the limestone layer in a north-south direction, towards the northwest end of the rock mass. The period when the rock tomb was built is the Hellenistic Period and the tomb is dated to the 2nd century BC.<sup>29</sup> On the door of the burial chamber, the inscription "Ikezios" and a cross motif colored with ocher are striking (Ocher is a natural dye obtained from yellow or red iron ore, and consists of pigments ranging from red to orange, brown to yellow, depending on the nature of the ore, and also has the property of soluble in both water and oil). The burial chamber has a square plan and there are carved dead motifs in the form of niches on the right and left of the entrance.

The Hellenistic Period is a transitional period between the classical Greek period and the Roman period. It is thought that Ikezios or Ikezius was an important commander who was involved in Hellenization activities in Anatolia during the Hellenistic Period. It is known that compulsory resettlement was carried out within the scope of Hellenization policies in this period. These policies aimed at the dissemination of Greek culture were used as a method to establish sovereignty rather than humanist initiatives at that time. Kapılıkaya Mausoleum has reached the present day from the relevant period and has taken its place in Kırkdilim Canyon as a historical and cultural heritage value.

The construction of the Kırkdilim road within the Kırkdilim Canyon and the subsequent widening of the road caused the canyon floor to be covered with filling material. In order to prevent possible risks such as rockfalls and landslides during the widening of the road, a lot of material was purchased from the rocky and mountainous parts of the canyon with construction equipment. These materials were used as filling material in the areas where the road was widened. The rubble deposits used as filling material in some places have shifted towards the base of the canyon due to heavy rains, snow, hail, landslides, earthquakes, and pressure from vehicle use. This shift affects the ecological balance as well as the archaeological-historical and aesthetic values. Kapılıkaya is one of these values. The floor of the canyon, where the mausoleum is located, is constantly filled with rubble produced during road construction works. Especially in the canyon where tunnel works are carried out, the filling material produced in the last 5 years has more than doubled. The logic of eliminating the slope by constantly filling the unevenness and constructing a smooth road still prevails in the field. This situation seriously threatens the natural, historical and aesthetic values of Kırkdilim Canyon. It is not possible to regain these values in the area where the resource value is lost due to the filler material.

Kapılıkaya Mausoleum has also suffered serious damage from other human activities. The first of these is treasure hunting activities. The stories that Ikezios was an ancient king and he had plenty of gold and silver items, that he was buried by his soldiers in the rocky mass in Kırkdilim Canyon, and that no one could reach the tomb until now because it was in a steep place, his tomb is attractive for treasure hunters. made it a field. Due to treasure hunting activities, the mausoleum was seriously damaged, and even explosive materials such as dynamite were used in some areas. Stories are told among the local people that the mausoleum extends to the King's tombs in Amasya. It is also said that some local residents who went on this journey got lost in the tomb. It has been announced through official channels that the Çorum Governorate carried out a restoration work in the area after 2010 and the area was taken under protection. However, it is debatable to what extent this improvement and protection is appropriate and

<sup>29</sup> ÇVİKTM, 2013.



sufficient. The future of the mausoleum seems to be left to the initiative of the construction companies that build roads today. Unfortunately, there is still no information, direction, signage or any infrastructure service about the mausoleum today. However, the area can be easily brought into tourism and evaluated holistically by associating it with other natural-cultural resource values in and around the canyon in line with sustainable tourism principles.<sup>30</sup> For example, geotourism can be used as a very suitable tool in terms of the field.

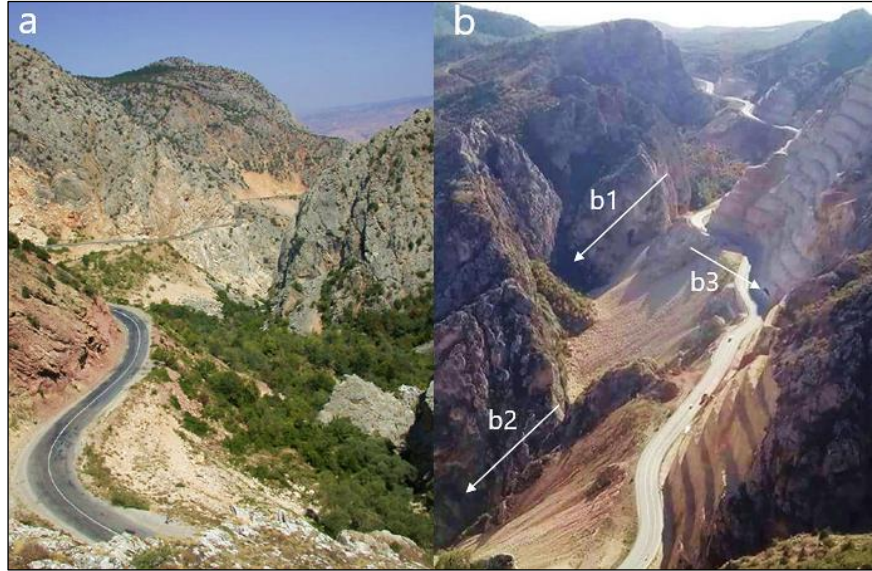
**Figure 10.** The historical Kapılıkaya Mausoleum in Kırkdilim, dated to the 2nd century BC



The recent widening works on the Kırkdilim road and especially the tunneling works made it necessary to break up the rocky areas where the road passes. The loosening of the geological structure forming the land with dynamite and some other explosives caused irreversible losses in the landscape value of the area. Not content with this, pouring the excavation obtained during the works in the field into the canyon as filling material not only killed the visual value of the canyon, but also eliminated the ecological life in the canyon. What is lost is not only the view, depth, tree, rock, plant or animal of the canyon. What is lost and will not return is also memories in the canyon, stories, memories, experiences, thousands of years of experience, sublimity, a sense of place. It is a known fact that if Kırkdilim canyon is tried to be rebuilt, it can never be restored to its original state. Its history dates back to 5-6 thousand BC, witnessed events that will go down in history books in the 14th century, is one of the 4 main regions where Circassian peoples were settled in Anatolia at the end of the 19th century, and has a well-known reputation not only in the region but also all over Turkey. It is not true that the region is destroyed only by road widening works and is the scene of irreversible value losses. When Kırkdilim Canyon is evaluated from this point of view, it has become tainted in terms of archeology and aesthetics. The area is a tainted place for archaeologists, historians, geographers, landscape architects. Kırkdilim is no longer a historical place in the minds of the local people, it is not a natural beauty, it has no ecology, it has no vitality, this place should only be filled with rubble and the road should be built. Nothing else is useless. Kırkdilim is now almost seen in Çorum as “a damn place where a road cannot be built, an obstacle that interrupts transportation”. This situation in itself means a taintiness. Kırkdilim are geographically tainted, aesthetically tainted, and archaeologically tainted.

<sup>30</sup> Derinöz, 2021.

**Figure 11.** The old (a) and new (b) versions of the Kırkdilim road. The filling material that emerged during the road widening works was used to fill the depths of the canyon. This filling material has also left various historical and archaeological values (b1, b2) in the canyon under the ground. The first tunnel used in the area in the 1960s, which was later closed due to collapse, was also destroyed. Today, this tunnel (b3) cannot be used for any other purpose.



### 3.4. Kırkdilim from a Political Perspective

Kırkdilim region is an area that has been on the agenda with road construction works from past to present. The road construction works, which started in the early 1960s in the area, have continued until today and still continue. Kırkdilim is a road that has not been completed for more than half a century. This long unending story of the road has led various governments to allocate high financial budgets to the field, but to no avail.

Kırkdilim road is a road that connects Çorum-Kırkdilim-Laçın-Osmancık settlements, located on the Çorum-Osmancık route, between the Laçın District and Kırkdilim village. The area where the road passes consists of a very mountainous mass. The road has been the source of constant troubles from the past to the present, and serious problems have been encountered in its construction and operation. In the road construction works started in 1962 for the first time, the need to open a tunnel was felt in 1967. During the 7 year period from 1967 to 1974, the difficult tunneling works continued and finally the first Kırkdilim tunnel was opened in 1974. The tunnel collapsed in 1975 due to the landslide that occurred in the area before it could be used for even a year, and 7 years of hard work and investment were wasted. Today, this first tunnel is unusable.

After the collapse of the first tunnel in 1975, the service road built at that time for tunnel construction had to be used as the main route. The deficiencies of this road have been tried to be completed over the years, new studies and additions have been made to raise the standards of the road. In the first years, many vehicles rolled over the cliff because there were no protective structures and retaining walls on the eastern side of the road, facing the Kırkdilim Canyon. In the following period, retaining walls were built in areas suitable for this part of the road, and the road was partially made safer. However, due to rockfalls and landslides in the area where the road passes, these security structures were frequently destroyed and could not function.

In order to improve the low geometric horizontal and vertical standards of the first version of the Kırkdilim road, the road was converted from a single lane to 3 lanes after 2015. While 2

lanes of these three lanes are used as going and coming directions, the other lane has been opened for use as a climbing lane. However, on this new 3 lane road, frequent breakdowns, collapses, slips have been experienced and usage restrictions have begun to be experienced due to these. Kirkdilim almost does not allow to build a road on it. In 2018, a tender was given to a private company in order to improve the road to high standards again and to construct tunnels passing through the depths of the mountain on the route where the road passes. This private company has started working on the road with a total length of around 9 km. This tunnel is planned in 4 parts. Among these parts, the right tube of Tunnel 1 (T1) is 1,3 km long, and the left tube is 1,4 km long. The right and left tubes of Tunnel 2 (T2) are both calculated as 1,1 km in length. In Tunnel 3 (T3) design, both the right and left tubes are designed in 2 pieces, each 1,5 km long (Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** 3D modeling of new roads and tunnels planned in Kirkdilim <sup>31</sup>



The construction process of Kirkdilim tunnels is quite laborious and costly. Since the geological material in which the tunnels are tried to be opened is generally metamorphic series, the structure of the rocks is quite hard. This causes tunneling works to progress very slowly. Special tools are used during the excavation of the tunnels and most of the time the work is done on a 24 hour basis (Figure 13). Cracks in the geological structure where the tunnels are built reduce the strength of the tunnel in some regions. Such areas are filled with a special filling material and its stability is ensured. Since the site is located in a region on the North Anatolian Fault line, it is necessary to be very careful in the construction of the tunnel and not ignore the slightest defect. Otherwise, it is possible to experience undesirable results in case of any activity in the area. The construction of a tunnel to Kirkdilim and the smooth operation of this tunnel are very risky and pose a serious threat. All these reasons have made the Kirkdilim road a politically tainted place. Politicians promise to finish the Kirkdilim road in almost every election period, but these promises have not been realized for half a century.

<sup>31</sup> Modified from URL 4.



**Figure 13.** A view from double (a) and single (b) arm excavators digging Kirkdilim tunnels <sup>32</sup>



High split sections were produced while road and tunnel planning was being made in the area. These sections consist of sections over 200 meters in height. Excavation material obtained from these sections is also used for filling the canyon. Although these studies were carried out to ensure the continuity of transportation, new unforeseen problems emerged. These problems can be grouped as landslides, rockfalls and stability of the slope layer. These problems also jeopardize the safety of today's roads and raise the need for new solutions in the field.

The Kirkdilim road tunnels (Figure 14), which were put out to tender and works started in 2018, collapsed in 2021. The collapse continued in the retaining walls built at the entrance of the road from the Corum direction, and the retaining walls (curtain concrete) that hold the slope materials collapsed. It is not the subject of this study whether there is any deficiency in the method used in the occurrence of these adverse events, in the choice of material, in the amount of material used or in other calculations. These technical issues will definitely be investigated by the relevant disciplines. However, it is an important problem that the road construction, which was put out to tender in 2018 for approximately 700 million Turkish Liras (about 130 million dollars considering the dollar exchange rate in the relevant period), collapsed just in the period when the road construction was planned to be completely completed in 2021. In fact, it's a complete disaster. This collapse caused the failure of the works and caused serious public damage. This event has made the Kirkdilim road a completely tainted place politically and economically.

As a result of the failure of the tunnels built on the Kirkdilim road, the idea of building a double-section road, this time as 2 arrivals and 2 departures, emerged as a solution. This method has been evaluated by the construction companies as the most appropriate method to be applied in the field for now. This means that the studies carried out so far in the field, the ideas of opening high rifts, the methods of filling the canyon with the material from here and the public capital spent have not worked. Studies in the field from past to present have been suggested as appropriate methods in terms of facilitating and accelerating the construction of the road in economic-political terms. However, the latest situation is the fact that the natural, historical, cultural and aesthetic aspects of the canyon have disappeared. What remains is a colossal failure and a loss of geographical-historical-cultural-aesthetic value.

When the recent situation of Kirkdilim road is examined, the area stands as a trial and error board for private companies, a place to learn how to make roads and tunnels, and an area to prove how a road cannot be built. Although it is stated in the commitments of the companies that build roads and tunnels in Kirkdilim that “the road to be built will be a contemporary road that is compatible with the history, culture and nature of the area”, in reality this is not the case at all. In the construction of Kirkdilim road, the nature, history and culture of the area

<sup>32</sup> Modified from URL 4.

were completely destroyed. Therefore, Kırkdilim is a politically tainted place as an area where “a road cannot be built”. This political taintiness is related to the geographical-aesthetic-cultural-archaeological taintiness described in the previous part of the study. The main reason for the taintining in Kırkdilim and the registration of the area as a landscape of fear is the political decisions taken. The situation that emerged as a result of these decisions brings with it problems that do not only have political consequences, but are very difficult to solve in many areas.

**Figure 14.** Tunnel entrances (a) starting from the steep slopes of Kırkdilim Canyon are constructed as right and left tubes (b).<sup>33</sup>



#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The geographical units that exist on the earth have been intertwined with human beings for thousands of years. Humanity has attributed various meanings to these geographical units with which they have mutual and complex relations in different periods. Kırkdilim Canyon is among these regions that have a special meaning. Kırkdilim is one of the rare areas in the central part of Anatolia, which has been intertwined with history, culture and geography for thousands of years, in terms of landscape value. The road construction works started in the area since the 1960s have lasted for more than half a century and are still not completed today. This unending story of the Kırkdilim road produces various meanings on its own. The difficulties encountered during the construction of the road, the loss of life and property, the problems that arose after the road was opened for use, affected the people who use the road for various reasons, especially the local people. This effect took a place in people's lives, processed the area as a landscape of fear in their minds, and transformed the area into a tainted place.

There are multiple reasons why Kırkdilim road is perceived as a landscape of horror and has become a tainted place. However, the most important reason was the political decisions that

<sup>33</sup> Modified from OGG, 2021.

revealed the will to make a road to Kırkdilim Canyon. Persistent political decisions implemented despite the failure in the field ensured the continuity of the taintining. The studies initiated as a result of the political decisions taken regarding the field have in a way been the starting point of everything. The road works initiated in the area primarily affected the local people and drew the reaction of the first members of the Circassian population who came from the Caucasus and settled in the region. For the Besleneys who came to the region to escape from the Russian pressure, making a road to Kırkdilim, which was a defense area, meant breaking the defense of the area in their minds. Subsequent studies and emerging problems caused the Kırkdilim road to be increasingly disliked and tainted.

The risky situations caused by the geological and geomorphological structure of the route where Kırkdilim road passes, combined with other technical deficiencies, have caused many tragic events over time. These events include road collapses, slips, landslides, fatal accidents, vehicles rolling off a cliff, and tunnel collapses. These negative events have deeply affected the local people in the area and the people of the region who use the area in various ways. This effect was sometimes weak and sometimes strong enough to change people's behavior. The area first turned into a landscape of fear in the eyes of the local people, and then the continuity of this situation made it a tainted place. Although the studies in the field and the technological facilities used sometimes appeared as a show of power over nature, the people who experienced the field did not feel safe again. Because the power possessed over the natural environment does not always produce a sense of trust. Only the character and frequency of the taintining or the fear that causes it can be changed.

When the area is evaluated from a political ecological point of view, it can be asked how the political decisions taken affect the Kırkdilim Canyon and the resource values in it. If we think in this direction, whose decision is the Kırkdilim road, whose path is it? Whose nature is the new nature that is manipulated, altered, destroyed in various ways to build the road? Kırkdilim road is a tainted place both in terms of local people, drivers and passengers who use the road in their daily lives, geographically, historically and archaeologically, aesthetically and politically. Unsuccessful tunnel studies in the recent period have increased this taintining. Kırkdilim is now the answer to the question "where can't a road be built". The persistence of road construction in the area and the repeated unsuccessful results in the area strengthened the taintining of the area and made it almost indelible. The situation in Kırkdilim is further taintining of the area due to the failure of successive efforts to erase the tainted structure of the area. The studies carried out to remove the taintining in the area have increased the taintining even more each time. What is the solution to this? Should this vicious circle be resolved? Or is the situation valuable as it is? Of course, areas can be removed or rearranged to erase the tainted areas. At the point reached in Kırkdilim, is it easier to remove the taintining or to rearrange it? Taintining in the area is more difficult to remove. Instead, this taintining can be managed and brought to the fore. Can this taintining in the field be used as a value in itself? Of course, it can be used. The taintining in Kırkdilim can be considered as one of the reflections of the culture in the geographical landscape. Kırkdilim is an indicator of how popular culture is spatially diversified. Within the scope of the arrangements to be made in the field from this point of view, the tainted floor theme can be processed and even marketed. The area can be treated with themes such as geotourism, which has recently become widespread in Turkey. Doing these will also mean removing the taintining to some extent with new regulations in the field.

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