Vol. 80 | No. 6/1 | Jun 2024
DOI: 10.21506/j.ponte.2024.6.1
PONTE Florence, Italy
International Journal of Sciences and Research

OLTU (JET) STONE IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABILITY OF TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFTS: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Abstract
Oltu Stone, which is one of the symbols of Erzurum located in the eastern part of Türkiye and has a significant share in tourist products, is a valuable ornamental stone and is used in the production of many jewellery and decorative items, especially prayer beads (tasbih). It is acknowledged that this stone, also known as Erzurum amber, was first extracted from small mines in the Oltu district and its surroundings in the 1870s and processed. Within this study, the processing of Oltu stone extracted from various villages within the boundaries of the Oltu and Olur districts of Erzurum province and documented by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a Geographical Indication Product, has been discussed considering its evaluation within the traditional handicrafts and its sustainability in the future. In this study, the case study design, a qualitative research method, was adopted to thoroughly explore the topic in a detailed and holistic manner. The data used in the study was gathered directly from seven Oltu Stone craftsmen who agreed to be interviewed for the field study. The stages of Oltu Stone handicrafts were observed through participant observations, and the study was thoroughly examined by conducting interviews with semi-structured questions. Traditional and modern methods used in the crafting stages of handicrafts, the tools and materials utilized, as well as the resulting products, were observed to highlight their significance and sustainability in terms of cultural heritage value. Traditional and modern methods used in the crafting stages of handicrafts, the tools and materials utilized, as well as the resulting products, were observed to highlight their significance and sustainability in terms of cultural heritage value. The study is important for preserving cultural values by ensuring they are passed down to future generations in their original form and for safeguarding traditional handicrafts as part of our cultural heritage. Oltu stone, which is one of the most important tourist products of Erzurum province, has been produced in some villages of Oltu district and in Erzurum since the 19th century, using traditional methods in household and workshop-type facilities, and in recent years, modern tools have also been used in the crafting process. Based on the research findings, it has been observed that the traditional methods of processing Oltu Stone, along with the tools utilized in these methods, are still actively employed in the present day. In addition, it has been observed that with the development of certain tools due to technological advancements, particularly in craftsmanship, time is saved, and more professional and high-quality products are produced, especially in fine craftsmanship. It has been noted that in terms of ensuring the continuity of the profession and art, there is generally an apprentice-master relationship passing down from father to son. Regarding the sustainability of Oltu stone handicrafts, institutions such as the Erzurum Maturation Institute and the Oltu Public Education Center, as well as workshop projects like One Master, Thousand Masters, have made significant contributions. It has been found that these mentioned institutions offer courses in Oltu stone handicrafts to participants, thereby training artisans and contributing to the sustainability of cultural heritage. To prevent the loss of this art form and ensure its recognition as a cultural heritage by future generations, it is crucial to protect it, ensure its sustainability, and facilitate the transmission of Oltu stone traditional handicrafts to future generations.
Keywords: Oltu (Jet) stone, traditional handicrafts, cultural heritage, sustainability.

Introduction
The most distinctive element of a society is its culture. Culture, in its broad ethnographic sense, is a complex whole that encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, morals, art, customs, and traditions acquired by an individual as a member of society (Tylor 1920:1). Culture consists of

elements such as people's beliefs, traditions, customs, clothing styles, food, habits rituals, and unique lifestyles. The concept of heritage, on the other hand, encompasses all elements worthy of preservation from historical, artistic, ethnological, sociological, anthropological, and linguistic perspectives (Doğaner 2003:1). Cultural heritage is defined as *the set of values belonging to a society, including works of any kind with a physical existence, inherited from the past and desired to be passed on to the future for various reasons* (Can 2009:3). The better the tangible and intangible values within cultural heritage are preserved and sustainably maintained, the more significant these sources of richness will be preserved for future generations. Among the measures necessary for the continuity of cultural heritage is the preservation of artistic elements, particularly traditional handicrafts, which hold a significant place within them (Kılıçarslan & Cansız 2021:142). According to the definition provided by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, effective transmission of intangible cultural heritage involves ensuring the active and effective transmission of oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship, along with the language that serves as a carrier, in a manner that addresses intergenerational disconnects (UNESCO 2023).

According to the definition provided in the Convention, "Intangible Cultural Heritage" refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and related instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO 2023). When we look at the content of the Convention, we see that intangible cultural heritage domains are grouped under five headings (UNESCO 2023, Figure 1). These headings are as follows:

- Oral traditions and expressions in addition to language serving as a carrier for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage.
- Performing arts
- Social practices, rituals, and festive events
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship

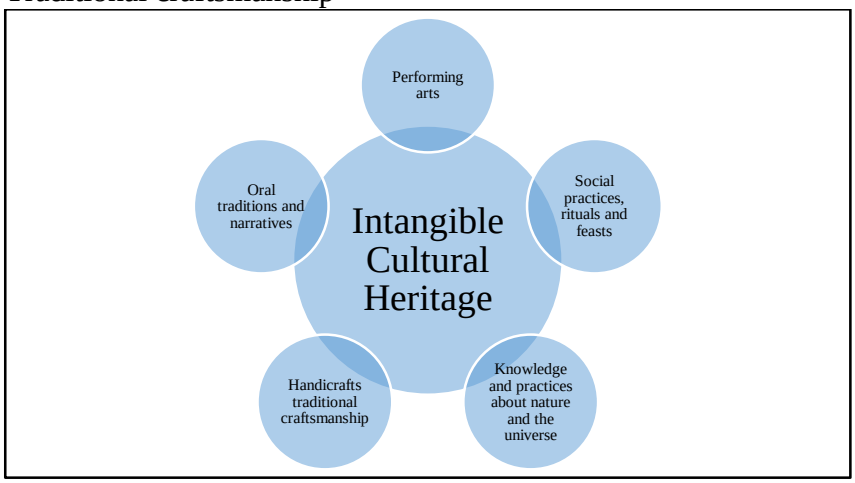


Figure 1. The Elements that Constitute Intangible Cultural Heritage

Traditional handicrafts are a part of cultural heritage that showcases itself with characteristics such as the common identity of society and the sense of belonging, and they are a component of cultural memory formed by the codes of this heritage. They are the products that reflect the indispensable items and aesthetic values of social practices and ceremonies, as well as the traditions, customs, and rituals that a society carries out from birth to death and at every stage of life (Arıoğlu & Aydoğdu Atasoy 2015:112). Handicrafts are cultural treasures that portray

the economic, social, and cultural lifestyle of a society in the most enduring and meaningful way, serve as an important bridge in transferring the past to future generations, and reflect the characteristics of different cultures (Sarıkaya-Hünerel & Er 2012:180). These cultural treasures include some of the most important cultural and artistic values that reflect a society, such as ceramic craftsmanship, the art of marbling (Ebru), ehram (which is woven from wool) weaving, traditional shoemaking (yemenicilik), quilt-making, stone craftsmanship, pottery, and so on. Discussing and promoting these cultural values, determining their cultural value, revealing their touristic potential and sustainability are important for the future and preservation of the cultural heritage. Traditional architecture, religious motifs, settlement elements, land use, clothing styles, handicrafts, cuisine, music, and works of fine arts are not only part of the cultural geographical landscape but also serve as focal points for geography, culture, and tourism (Emekli 2006:53). Moreover, handicrafts can vary from region to region due to the diversity of geographical conditions (such as climate, topography, types of soil and rocks, geological structure, availability of raw materials, etc.) in the regions where they are produced (Sarıkaya-Hünerel & Er 2012:181). There are many forms of traditional craftsmanship: tools and equipment that are part of daily life; clothing materials designed for special occasions; jewellery and accessories made from different stones and wood; items used for transportation and shelter; decorative items; musical instruments, kitchen utensils, and toys made from materials obtained from rural environments (such as clay, stone, and wood); and household and decorative items that reflect the years of experience in their patterns. Many of these objects represent accumulations that reflect a sense of identity, space, and collective memory passed down from generation to generation (Arıoğlu & Aydoğdu Atasoy 2015; Arı 2021; Deniz & Çelik 2020; Naguib 2013; Özbek & Çevik, 2018; Pelit & Türkoğlu 2019).

Depending on the variability of geographical location and characteristics, handicrafts in each region can be influenced with the use different materials or raw materials. Stone craftsmanship, which is included in traditional handicrafts, holds significant importance. Since the dawn of humanity, people have used stones for purposes such as creating shelter environments and producing defence tools. Many civilizations have left traces of their own cultures in the architectural works they constructed. Stone craftsmanship has thus assumed an important role in carrying the cultural heritage throughout this process. Among these, the craftsmanship of Jet (Oltu) stone, Meerschaum (Lüle stone), Hacıbektaş stone, and Ahlat stone are considered cultural heritage in Türkiye. “Traditional Ahlat Stone Craftsmanship” was included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2022 (UNESCO 2023). The Oltu stone handicrafts discussed in the study were recorded in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Türkiye under the code 1.002.26 as “Oltu stone craftsmanship” (Ministry of Culture 2023).Some academic studies have been carried out in terms of evaluating stone craftsmanship within the context of traditional handicrafts, discussing as a cultural element, being a value to be promoted for tourism, being a profession in danger of disappearing, assessing the products obtained from it from a tourism perspective, and highlighting its geological significance (Akbulut 2013; Algan 2015; Alparslan 2010b; Davulcu 2015; Demir 2011; Doğanay 1997; Köşker & Karacaoğlu 2019; Özdemir & Dudaş 2018; Sökmen 2015).

Oltu stone falls under the category of ornamental stones, specifically classified within the group of opaque gemstones. *It is considered the finest organic ornamental stone in Türkiye. One of the most notable characteristics of Oltu stone is its softness when extracted from the Earth’s crust. It retains this softness as long as it does not come into contact with air. Due to this property, it is an easily workable gemstone* (MTA 2023). Oltu stone is also referred to as “black amber” in some sources (Doğanay & Altaş 2022:258).

It is known that the history of Oltu stone manufacturing and craftsmanship dates back to the 1870s (T.Parlak 2001:21). In the 19th century, artisans known as “jewellers” were involved in Oltu stone craftsmanship. This art gained its true significance after the Republic, and today, it is practiced in the homes of artisans located in various parts of the city, including the Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai, also known as the Taşhan (Photo 1), Vakıf İşhanı, Stone Stores, and some other locations (Alpaslan 2009:31). Oltu stone is extracted from small mines called galleries in villages such as Dutlu, Güllüce, Sülünkaya, İğdeli, Güzelsu, Alatarla, and Gökçedere within the district of Oltu, as well as in villages such as Yeşilbağlar, Ormanağzı, Taşlıköy, and Çataksu in the Olur district (Figure 2). Due to the extremely challenging and laborious process of extracting Oltu stone from the mines, the number of families engaged in extraction has been decreasing in recent years. They either completely cease their activities or shift towards Oltu stone craftsmanship. In Oltu stone craftsmanship, Tutmaç village in Oltu district is prominent in terms of numbers. Oltu stone received a geographical indication certificate in the source product class on 27 November 2015 upon the application of the Oltu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Turkpatent 2022).



Photo 1. The view of the western entrance and interior of Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan) (The photos were taken by the author).

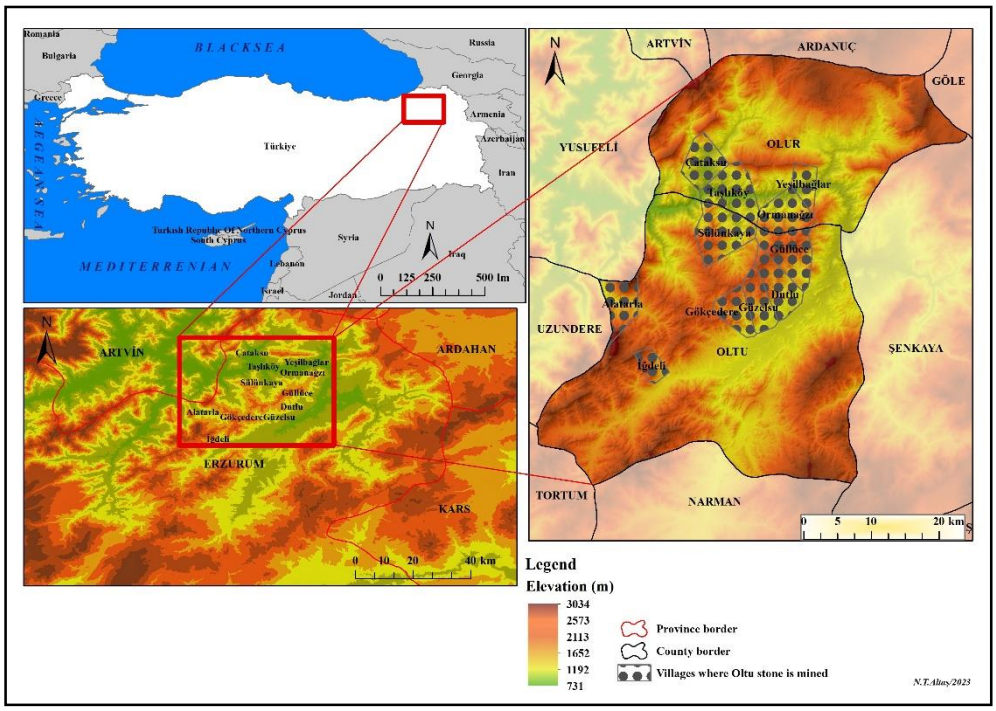


Figure 2. The location of the villages where Oltu stone is extracted.

When we look at some of the academic research conducted on Oltu stone, we find studies that address its petrographic characteristics (Doğanay & Altaş, 2022; Doğanay 1997; Dönmez & Işık 2000; Kazancı & Gürbüz 2014; Özen et al., 2013; Toprak 2013). There are also studies

that discuss the variety of products made from Oltu stone, emphasizing its importance in tourism, and highlight that Oltu stone craftsmanship is a fading profession (Alparslan 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Altınay & Dinçer 2017; Kayserili 2016; Kocaman 2011; Akpınar-Külekçi & Bulut 2012; Özav 1995; Y.Parlak 2018; Toy et al., 2017; Zaimoğlu & Kaplanoğlu 2012; Zaman et al., 2018). The fact that Oltu stone craftsmanship is not evaluated within the context of intangible cultural heritage makes the study distinct.

This study focuses on how Oltu stone can be sustainable within the context of intangible cultural heritage regarding traditional handicrafts. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with seven participants engaged in Oltu stone craftsmanship and trade in various locations of Erzurum, including the Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and observations. During the interviews, while interview questions were being asked, the production stages of products obtained from Oltu stone were personally identified by the researcher. The technical names that have been passed down from past to present were noted, and photographs were taken by the researcher to document them. The study was evaluated using the case study method, which is one of the qualitative research methods, to comprehensively address and present the subject in detail.

Purpose and Method

The aim of the study is to determine the current status of Oltu stone traditional handicrafts and to identify what can be done for its sustainability. In this context, the research will attempt to determine the answers to the following questions: What methods are used in Oltu stone craftsmanship? How have technological advancements affected Oltu stone handicrafts? To what extent have social, cultural, and economic changes influenced the diversity of products produced? How can the sustainability of Oltu stone, a valuable ornamental stone, be ensured?

The research was conducted using the qualitative research method. The case study design, commonly used in qualitative research, was adopted. A case study can be defined as a research method that examines a current phenomenon within its real-life context (adapted from Yin, 1984, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013:313). In the research, a holistic single-case design of the case study was used (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2013:326-327). The reason for conducting the research using the qualitative research method is the desire to comprehensively address and present the topic in detail. The participants of the research consist of individuals engaged in Oltu stone craftsmanship and trade in the city of Erzurum. The study was conducted with seven Oltu stone craftsmen. In determining the study group, the purposive sampling method, specifically the snowball sampling technique, was adopted (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2013:139-140). In the research, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations, which are frequently used methods in qualitative research.

After collecting the data, they were transferred to a Word document on the computer and then analysed. The research data were analysed using descriptive analysis method. In this form of analysis, the data are first described in a clear manner. Then these descriptions are explained, interpreted, and examined in terms of cause-and-effect relationships, and certain conclusions are drawn (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2013:256-258). In explaining the data, direct quotations from participants, coded as P1, P2, ...P7, were also included. The data were presented and supported with detailed findings obtained from the participants' opinions, descriptions related to the observations, and visuals obtained from on-site observations.

Findings

The findings regarding the methods used in Oltu stone craftsmanship

It was found that all participants engaged in Oltu stone craftsmanship initially worked with traditional methods when they first started their craft. It was revealed that there have been significant changes in the methods used for extracting, processing, and preparing Oltu stone for sale from the past to the present. The changes in methods primarily involved the adoption of time- saving tools such as electric lathes and fine-tipped drills, which allow for more detailed work.

It was observed that the methods expressed by the participants were generally similar, with only some participants applying different methods depending on the products they produced (such as silver or gold engraved prayer beads) compared to others. It was found that all participants in the production of prayer beads (tasbih) used the same processes, including crushing, rough shaping (gobut), drilling, crafting, polishing, and stringing (Figure 3).

As a result of the interviews conducted with the participants regarding where they learned these methods, seven participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7) stated that they generally learned their handicrafts from master craftsmen in their families, and they also emphasized the importance of the master-apprentice relationship, which plays a crucial role in this work.



Figure 3. Production stages and visuals of Oltu stone prayer beads.
Source: The results of the on-site interviews and observations (The photos were taken by the author).

P1 stated, *"I learned from the master craftsmen I worked with"*, and P3 expressed, *"I learned by observing my masters"*, indicating that they learned the craft without attending any courses. P6 stated the following: *"This profession is learned from generation to generation, those who practice this craft teach it to their children, and the profession progresses in this way*"; P4 stated, *"From my father, my brother, my uncle*", and P7 stated, *"My father handed it down to us when he retired"*. With these statements, the participants highlighted that this profession was generally inherited from the family, passing down skills from father to son.

P2 stated, *"Oltu stone craftsmanship is very important because it is a laborious and challenging task requiring a lot of effort"* and with this statement, the participant expressed that Oltu stone crafting demands patience and skill in mastering it due to its labour-intensive nature. P6 mentioned, "*The Ministry of Culture had a 392-hour course. I attended that. We*

learned everything from the production to the sale of this stone at all stages." This statement indicates that unlike others, P6 learned craftsmanship by attending a course. Such courses are regularly organized in a practical manner every year by the Oltu District Public Education Centre and the Erzurum Maturation Institute.

The findings regarding the impact of technological advancements on Oltu stone handicrafts

Especially in recent years, rapid advancements in technology have profoundly influenced and impacted every aspect of our lives. While these advancements have undoubtedly made our lives easier and more convenient in many ways, they also sometimes have posed risks and challenges. According to the findings, we can categorize the technological developments affecting Oltu stone handicrafts into two different categories: The first category involves the development of tools and equipment used from the extraction of the stone from the mine to the production stage. The second category pertains to the development and usage of internet services (such as social media, websites, etc.) for marketing, presentation, and promotion of the produced items.

P3, with 41 years of experience, stated, *"I have been working with an electric lathe machine for 25 years; before that, there was only a machine operated manually"*; P3, with his statement, indicates that electric tools have been used in Oltu stone craftsmanship for a considerable period. P2 mentioned, *"We used to make prayer beads with machines operated by hand, then we started using some tools used by dentists"*; he indicated with his statement that over time, there has been a diversification in technological products. P4, with the following statement, expressed, *"For example, in the past, we could only produce very simple items by hand. However, with the advancement of technology, we began to produce more professional and diverse products"*; P4 determined that depending on the technological developments, they started to produce more professional and diverse items. P6, another participant, stated the impact of the technological opportunities as follows: *"It has improved incredibly. Human labour decreased, and mass production was achieved with machines. We benefited from machines to create different patterns that hands couldn't make."* P7 stated, *"New technology lathe machines have been produced to make very high-quality and beautiful prayer beads. Previously, they were made with simple hand-operated wheels, but now, lathe machines capable of millimetre precision have emerged. With these machines, Oltu stone craftsmanship has been taken to a different level."* With this statement, P7 emphasized that Oltu stone has diversified into a much wider range of products with the integration of technology.

In addition to the contributions of technology to the production field, it has also contributed to the product promotion and marketing process.

The participants' opinions on this matter are as follows: P5 stated, *"With the involvement of technology, our market has expanded. Previously, we mainly catered to walk-in customers. Now, we have started to address all of Türkiye and even the world. For example, online sales have positively impacted us."* With his opinions, P5 indicated that Oltu stone can be marketed to potential customers worldwide through the internet. P6 expresses with the following statement that with technological advancements, their business has become much more convenient through social media: "*The internet and social media have made our work much easier. Previously, we used to try to sell a product by describing it to people who hadn't seen it. But now, I send photos and videos of the product to my customers in Europe, they like it, and I ship it on the same day."* P5 mentioned, "*We have our website. We also use social media. Thanks to the internet, we have customers in many countries. Especially during the pandemic when our workplaces were closed, we used the internet more. This also developed*

us in a different direction." With these statements, P5 emphasized the effective use of the internet and social media tools once again in the promotion and marketing of Oltu stone.

Findings on the impact of social, cultural, and economic changes on the diversity of produced goods

Oltu stone holds a significant place among traditional handicrafts. As an important element of Turkish culture, the art of prayer bead making has a distinct place within Oltu stone handicrafts. A prayer bead (tasbih) is a valuable item typically carried by hand, consisting of number of beads in oval, spherical, or cylindrical shapes and made from various materials such as stone or wood, inserted into a thread through holes in these beads. It is used for religious purposes, stress relief, or as an accessory. The largest share of materials produced by participants in handicrafts belongs to prayer beads. For example, P1 associated the abundance of prayer beads in their product range with cultural values by stating, *"Since prayer beads hold a significant place in Turkish culture, we produce the most prayer beads."* P4 expressed the cultural significance of the prayer bead with the following words: *"It holds an important place in Turkish-Islamic culture."* P6 stated, *"Some people consider the prayer bead as part of Turkish-Ottoman tradition, while others buy it for collecting purposes."* With this statement, P6 indicated that the *p*rayer bead holds a cultural significance and is valued as a piece of jewellery by collectors (Photo 2).



Photo 2. Examples of prayer beads made from Oltu stone and adorned with silver to create different patterns (The photos were taken by the author).

In the product range produced from Oltu stone, differences have emerged depending on socio-economic changes. As mentioned earlier, although prayer beads have a significant share in production, products such as earrings, rings, necklaces, bracelets, keychains, and pipes are also produced from Oltu stone (Photo 3). Regarding this matter, P2 stated, *"Various types of items such as earrings, rings, necklaces, brooches, bracelets, rosaries, keychains, pipes, mouthpieces are produced from Oltu stone. It cannot be used for household items as it has a fragile structure."* With this statement, while indicating the diversity of products, P2 also provides information about the physical properties of Oltu stone, suggesting that it is not suitable for large household items or large decorative objects.



Photo 3. Examples of earrings and rings where Oltu stone is engraved onto silver material (The photos were taken by the author).

Over time, the desire of local and foreign tourists who visited Taşhan to see the products they have seen on social media, the internet, or in TV programs as an indicator of socio-cultural change reflected in accessories and ornaments is expressed by P5 with his statements as follows: "*The product range is not the same as it was 10 years ago. In the last 10 years, people have started wanting whatever they see."* P7 stated, *"We noticed that when we produce different products, their sales are good. When I produce a product that is not available in the market, customers find me anyway."* With these words, P7 highlighted that some customers are now looking for different products. P6 stated that changes that occur in the product range are due to socio-cultural reasons because some customers request a product that they have seen in TV series and explained his opinion as follows: *"Customers are asking for the rings they see in TV series from us. We have sold these products a lot in recent years."* Oltu stone, one of the significant symbols of Erzurum and an important contributor to the city's cultural identity, is also considered as an important souvenir for local and foreign tourists visiting the city. For this purpose, generally Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan), Stone Stores, or the Foundation Commercial Complex are preferred. P2, one of the merchants at Taşhan, stated, *"Customers come here because Oltu stone is one of the most recognized souvenir jewelleries of Erzurum, and they come here to take a memento from Erzurum."* With these words, P2 indicates that Oltu stone products appeal to tourists and serve as one of the important symbols representing the city.

Findings regarding the future and sustainability of Oltu stone handicrafts

The opinions of participants regarding the recognition of Oltu stone as a cultural heritage, its local recognition, and its future promotion in national and international arenas can be evaluated as follows: Participants are concerned about the conservation of Oltu stone and the presence of counterfeit products under the name of Oltu stone in the market. The statement by P3, *"The presence of Georgian stone in the market casts a shadow on our business economically,"* indicates that the attempt to sell Georgian stone as Oltu stone in the market not only deceives customers but also diminishes trust in genuine Oltu stone. It is also noted that because the price of the aforementioned stone is more affordable, it economically narrows down the market segment targeted by the Oltu stone. The points highlighted by P6 regarding the inspection of individuals interested in selling products made of Oltu stone and the prevention of anyone engaging in this business without authorization are as follows: *"For the future of Oltu stone, it is necessary for competent people to be involved in these businesses. People who have no connection with prayer beads (tasbih) are engaging in this business on social media and the internet. People selling prayer beads in cafes can sell plastic prayer beads to unknowing customers, claiming they are Oltu stone. Consequently, deceived customers refrain from buying Oltu stone in their entire lifetime and lose trust in us. If unlicensed businesses are shut down through inspections and licensed individuals engage in this profession, this profession can be taken to much better places."*

Most participants highlight the necessity for various studies to be conducted as they feel that the true value of Oltu stone is not fully understood. The participants expressed that Oltu stone is a highly valuable gemstone and one of the symbols that come to mind when Erzurum is mentioned, with the following statements: P4: "*It has unique features that no other stone possesses. It's a stone that shines more as you use it. It's a stone that polishes itself."* P6: "*Oltu stone is indispensable for us. When you tell someone outside that you're from Erzurum, the next conversation is always about Oltu stone."* P1: *"Oltu stone is one of our most important treasures."*

The participants emphasized the necessity for government agencies to intervene in particular regarding the sustainability of Oltu stone handicrafts. P4 stated, *"Drop amber is mined in many countries across Europe. This stone is highly valued there. Although it is extracted only in Oltu worldwide, we haven't been able to realize its value. Universities and various institutions need to take action and promote it."* With this statement, P4 indicated that drop amber, primarily mined in Ukraine, holds more economic significance, whereas Oltu stone, despite its potential for greater value, has not received the recognition and importance it deserves. P5 expressed, *"It's a stone whose true value hasn't been fully realized. In other words, it's a stone that ranks at the top among valuable stones."* While P5 emphasizes the importance of Oltu stone with his words, he also states, *"there could be a lesson in Erzurum's high schools and middle schools explaining the importance of Oltu stone or courses which aim at training artisans."* With these statements, he opines that vocational training courses should be organized to contribute to the sustainability of handicrafts. Another participant, P7, expresses, *"Oltu stone is our national treasure. I'm sure if this stone were in Germany instead of Türkiye, it would be sold by the gram. I believe it's not where it deserves to be. We need to lay claim to it. It's well-known enough in our country; we need to introduce it abroad, and the authorities should take the lead. In Ukraine, a yellow drop amber stone is sold by the gram. Our stone, black amber, is even more valuable."*

With these statements, P7 explains the necessity of promotion, especially abroad, and the ministries should take action in this regard. Regarding the sustainability of Oltu stone handicrafts, P6 expressed, *"Our country should lay claim to this. If the number of artisans decreases in the future, the industry will face difficulties and gradually be forgotten. Therefore, I believe it is the responsibility of our Ministry of Culture to support this, and training courses should be organized to train new artisans."* With these statements, P6 draws attention to the necessity of taking necessary measures to prevent the future of the profession from being endangered.

Discussion and Conclusions

We can list the conclusions obtained based on four main findings in the study as follows: It has been revealed that most participants continue using traditional methods in handicrafts, while also readily adopting modern methods due to evolving technological advancements. It has been noted that the production stages of prayer beads in jet stone handicrafts traditionally begin and continue in a modern sense including crushing, rough shaping (gobut), drilling, processing, polishing, and stringing. It has been revealed that only one of the masters practicing jet stone handicrafts learned this craft through a course, while six learned it from their fathers, grandfathers, or masters. In this context, it can be stated that the future of the profession depends on the continuity of the master-apprentice relationship and the courses offered by various institutions. In another study conducted on the topic (Alparslan 2010b:45), it was noted that those engaged in this traditional profession learned it through father-to-son and master-apprentice relationships. Similar to these findings, it has been stated by Akbulut (2013:226) that Hacıbektaş stone craftsmanship is also an art passed down from father to son. With the advancement of technology, significant opportunities have emerged in the production stages, leading to time saving and the production of more professional products. One of the significant findings from this study is the fact that intangible cultural heritage has diversified, and more products can be produced due to technological innovations (Ariffin et al., 2023:144, Fu, 2023:28). Moreover, with the rise of the internet and social media, it has become evident that handicraft products can be marketed not only locally but also internationally. However, the

online sales mentioned are conducted by individuals who can actively use the internet. Other artisans prefer to sell their products through traditional methods, primarily via their shops. The majority of their crafted items are marketed at the Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan).

Local and international tourists visiting the area have the opportunity to buy various products crafted from Oltu stone, which is one of the symbols of the city. Similar studies also suggest that elements of cultural heritage contribute to cultural tourism by facilitating the production of tourist-oriented products (Alagöz et al., 2018:187). It has been revealed that the most significant product associated with Oltu stone handicrafts is prayer beads. The primary reason for the prevalence of prayer beads is their significant value in Turkish culture. Turks have attributed a distinct importance to prayer beads compared to other cultures. They not only view prayer beads as a tool for worship but also appreciate them as a form of handicraft. Consequently, they have transformed bead-making into a profession (Elaltuntaş, 2014:159). As a result, prayer beads made from various materials in Türkiye have become an integral part of our culture. According to the statements of participants, cultural shifts, the demands of both local and foreign tourists, television series, the internet, and social media platforms have influenced the diversity of products. The production of these products through the supply-demand cycle plays a crucial role in the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism. In this context, innovation in products is important for sustainability (Ahmad et al., 2023:1099). The affordability of Georgian stone in the market and its potential preference as a souvenir due to its lower cost have raised concerns among some participants regarding the sustainability of Oltu stone handicrafts. In a study related to this topic, business owners have stated that the profit margin from selling Russian stone (extracted in Georgia, also known as Russian stone in the market) is 5-6 times lower than that of Oltu stone. Therefore, customers prefer Russian stone to Oltu stone (Kocaman, 2011:123).This situation results in economic losses, particularly for craftsmen exclusively engaged in Oltu stone craftsmanship. The indiscriminate production of counterfeit products in underground workshops and their circulation in the market as genuine Oltu stone raise concerns among producers. Such practices can undermine the reputation of Oltu stone. All participants share the belief that Oltu stone is not receiving the appreciation it deserves.

Ensuring the transfer of Oltu stone handicrafts to future generations and maintaining the master-apprentice relationship is vital for the continuity of the profession. Drawing from similar studies that have yielded comparable findings, there are significant examples concerning the sustainability of traditional handicrafts. These include the urgent need for protective measures against traditional handicrafts being overshadowed by other sectors in cultural heritage preservation and transmission to future generations (Arı, 2021:201); the protection of cultural heritage by legal authorities (Akkaya & Tolacı, 2021:111, Wang 2023:47); the necessity of archiving in the transmission of cultural heritage (Bozdağ & Eroğlu, 2022:239); and the necessity for national, regional, and local public policies to ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage (Jelincic & Tisma, 2020:85). *The Oltu Stone Processing Course* offered by the Oltu Public Education Centre and the courses provided by the Oltu Vocational Training Centre play a crucial role in ensuring the transfer of Oltu stone handicrafts to future generations. In addition, within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, master instructor training courses for Oltu stone craftsmanship are offered at the Erzurum Maturation Institute (as of the 2022-2023 academic year, there were 16 participants in these courses). Designs acquired through such craft courses make cultural heritage more sustainable (Guo & Ahn, 2023:23). Based on the results obtained from the research, some recommendations can be made:

- The relevant institutions and organizations such as the Erzurum Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism and the Erzurum Chamber of Craftsmen and Artisans should create opportunities to promote *Oltu stone craftsmanship* at both national and international levels. This initiative aims to elevate the status of Oltu stone and ensure its prominent position in cultural tourism.
- Products such as Russian stone, which can be produced more easily and cheaply than Oltu stone and are indistinguishable to consumers in the market, create an unfair competitive environment. Thus, workshops selling Oltu stone should undergo inspections by relevant authorities, and individuals or businesses responsible for the sale of products made from Oltu stone should be issued an authorization document akin to a license. This measure can help prevent the sale of counterfeit products.
- Comprehensive courses should be organized to ensure the preservation of stone craftsmanship. Universities should host seminars on the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage. It is crucial to protect this art, archive rare products, and ensure the transfer of handicrafts to future generations.
- The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in collaboration with local and national institutions, should continue their efforts to include *Oltu Stone Craftsmanship*, classified under *the traditional handicrafts mastery* group in the Intangible Cultural Heritage national inventory, on the UNESCO list.

Ethics Committee Approval: Approved by the Ethics Committee of Atatürk University, Social and Human Sciences, Meeting Date: 25 March 2022
Financial Support: This study was supported by Atatürk University Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit. Project number: SBA-2022-10703
Conflict of Interest: There is no potential conflict of interest in the study.

Resource Persons

1.Ali ÇELEBİ, Elementary school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 27.09.2022, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan), Erzurum.

2.Muhammed KARACA, Elementary school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 27.09.2022, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan), Erzurum.

3.Hüseyin ALTUNKAYNAK, Elementary school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 27.09.2022, Workshop, located next to Bakırcı Mosque, Erzurum.

4.Zekerya ALTUNKAYNAK, Elementary school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 04.05.2023, Workshop, located across from Taşhan, on İslam Hoca Street, Erzurum.

5.Mücahit DOĞAN, High school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 04.05.2023, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan), Erzurum.

6.Aykut ŞAHİN. High school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 04.05.2023, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan), Erzurum.

7.Fatih ŞAHİN. High school graduate, Oltu stone manufacturer and trader. Date and location of interview: 04.05.2023, Rüstem Pasha Caravanserai (Taşhan), Erzurum.

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