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Nomadic Memory and Death Rituals: A Thematic Ethnographic Synthesis of Yörük Mourning Practices

Abstract: Objectives: This study aims to produce a literature-based ethnographic synthesis of death-related beliefs and ritual practices among nomadic Yörük communities in Anatolia. It seeks to (i) map recurring patterns across the literature, (ii) classify the practices under analytically coherent thematic clusters, and (iii) identify under-researched dimensions to guide future interdisciplinary work in folklore, anthropology, and intangible cultural heritage studies. **Methods:** The research employed qualitative document analysis and qualitative content analysis within a secondary ethnography/meta-synthesis design. Postgraduate theses, peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters were retrieved through multi-source searches (e.g., YÖK National Thesis Center, Google Scholar, and academic indexes). Publications without direct ethnographic or descriptive data on death-related practices were excluded. Included texts were coded through an iterative process (open coding → thematic clustering → category refinement) and organized under five theme codes: (4.1) ritual time and mourning calendar, (4.2) food and charity practices, (4.3) mobility and burial space, (4.4) gendered roles, and (4.5) sacred-ecological beliefs. **Results:** The synthesis demonstrates that the literature is most concentrated on ritual time (3rd–7th–40th–52nd-day cycles) and food/charity practices (funeral meals, halva/lokma distribution), followed by gendered roles largely documented through lament performance and domestic labor in mourning. Nature- and ecology-related beliefs (trees/plants, animal omens, sacred ecology) are present but are frequently treated descriptively, with limited cosmological or cultural-ecological interpretation. By contrast, mobility-based burial strategies and the relationship between migration routes, cemeteries, and spatial belonging remain comparatively underrepresented, indicating a notable gap in the field. **Conclusion:** Yörük death rituals constitute a multi-layered cultural system that reorganizes social life through time, food-based solidarity, gendered labor, ecological symbolism, and spatial mobility. Beyond “folkloric detail,” these practices function as mechanisms of collective memory, social cohesion, and cultural continuity, aligning with community-based intangible cultural heritage perspectives. The study contributes by offering a thematic map and comparative analytical model for the literature and by outlining priority areas for future research, particularly on mobility-based burial logics, intergenerational mourning experiences, and cross-cultural comparisons across nomadic Turkic communities. **Keywords:** Yörük communities; death rituals; mourning calendar; ritual food and charity; mobility and burial; laments; sacred ecology; qualitative content analysis; literature-based ethnographic synthesis; intangible cultural heritage.

The Yörük communities, who maintain a nomadic lifestyle, are among the living bearers of intangible cultural heritage in Anatolia. Livestock-based mobility determines settlement patterns, social organization, and ritual practices. Death is not treated as an individual end within this cultural system; it is organized as a public transition process involving burial, mourning, hospitality, and commemoration practices. These practices strengthen solidarity and keep collective memory alive.

Anthropology and folklore literature evaluate birth, marriage, and death within the scope of “transition periods.” These thresholds regulate the individual's status change through rituals. Van Gennep explains the process in terms of separation–threshold–reintegration stages (van

Gennep, 1909/2022). Death represents the most intense liminal phase within this system. Funeral and mourning practices enable the community to reunite in the face of loss.

The social function of rituals has been supported by classical theories. Durkheim interprets funeral ceremonies as areas where collective consciousness and solidarity are produced (Durkheim, 1912). Turner shows that the *communitas* experience that emerges during the liminal period creates a shared emotional bond (Turner, 1969). Malinowski and Gluckman state that rituals reduce uncertainty and maintain social balance in times of crisis (Malinowski, 1922; Gluckman, 1962). Rappaport, on the other hand, evaluates these practices as regulatory mechanisms that ensure the continuity of cultural systems (Rappaport, 1967, p. 20). This framework reveals the direct relationship between death rituals and social order.

Turkish folklore studies also treat transitional periods as areas where cultural memory is concentrated (Örnek, 1977, 1995; Artun, 2005). Studies on Yörük and Turkmen communities show that nomadic life produces mobility and spatial flexibility in rituals (Eröz, 1991; Kalafat, 2010). The relationship between burial sites and migration routes, the spread of mourning over specific cycles of days, and charity meals are typical indicators of this pattern. However, these data have mostly remained within individual field descriptions; no thematic and comparative synthesis has been produced.

This study is a literature-based ethnographic synthesis aimed at addressing the aforementioned gap. The dataset was constructed using multiple sources. Theses, articles, books, and book chapters available on the YÖK National Thesis Center, Google Scholar, and academic indexes were searched. Studies that did not contain data directly related to death were excluded. The selected texts were coded using qualitative content analysis, and recurring patterns were classified under thematic clusters.

As a result of the analysis, Yörük death practices were grouped under five thematic headings:

- (4.1) ritual time and mourning calendar,
- (4.2) food and charity practices,
- (4.3) mobility and burial site,
- (4.4) gender-based roles,
- (4.5) sacred-ecological beliefs related to nature.

This classification reveals how nomadic life structures the experience of death within an analytical model.

The study presents a comprehensive reading of Yörük death rituals by bringing together ethnographic data scattered across different types of publications within a common framework. The findings are consistent with the intangible cultural heritage perspective based on a community-based conservation approach (UNESCO, 2003). In this respect, the article aims to contribute conceptually and methodologically to the folklore, anthropology, and cultural heritage literature.

Method

This research is a qualitative study that aims to examine representations of death-related beliefs and rituals in nomadic Yörük communities in the written academic literature from a holistic perspective. The design is based on a comparative evaluation of the findings of previously conducted ethnographic studies rather than producing primary field data. This approach, referred to in anthropology and folklore studies as “secondary ethnography” or “literature-based meta-synthesis/literature-based ethnographic synthesis,” aims to reveal common patterns by re-reading field data produced by different researchers. It is emphasized that within the qualitative research tradition, this type of synthesis study offers a powerful analytical opportunity for deciphering contextual and cultural layers of meaning (John W. Creswell, 2014, pp. 189–193).

Document analysis was adopted as the data collection technique in the study. Document analysis is one of the basic qualitative methods that allows for the interpretation of facts within their historical, social, and cultural contexts through the systematic examination of written and visual materials, and it provides a suitable ground for studies that require bringing scattered information together (Ali Yıldırım & Hasan Şimşek, 2018, pp. 217–223)

In folklore studies, it is emphasized that the collected material should not be merely compiled, but rather analyzed within a planned research process and an analytical framework (Goldstein, 1977, pp. 10–12). Similarly, in the Turkish folklore methodology literature, it is emphasized that documentation must be supported by theoretical reading and thematic analysis (Gürçayır Teke, 2016). Therefore, this study aims not only to convey the ethnographic findings produced in the existing literature but also to carry out the steps of selection, filtering, classification, and comparison in a sequential analysis process.

The data set was created using a multi-source search strategy. The first axis consisted of postgraduate theses registered in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education. At this stage, a search was conducted using the keyword “Yörük”; then, to sharpen the focus of the study, the thesis records and texts were reviewed again using the keyword “motif.” Thus, content that could be traced to narratives, beliefs, rituals, and symbolic structures within the broad pool of theses on Yörük culture was identified. The second axis consists of peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters found in Google Scholar and academic indexes. This expansion aimed to establish an academic corpus that encompasses interdisciplinary and different types of publications, rather than relying solely on a thesis-based search.

The scope was determined using a content-based selection logic. Although focusing on Yörük communities, publications focusing on non-death-related themes such as birth, marriage, felt tent production, livelihood/production practices, or folk medicine were excluded from the research. In contrast, texts providing direct descriptive or ethnographic data on practices related to death, such as funerals, burial, mourning, graves, commemoration, charity meals, and lamentation, were included in the sample. This selection logic indicates that the research establishes a purposeful document sample; the focus is not on the generality of the “Yörük” heading, but on observable cultural patterns around death rituals. Within this framework, the data set has been designed as a field of study that brings together the results of field research conducted in different periods and locations as secondary data.

The selected texts were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach. Content analysis is approached as a systematic interpretation process that aims to identify recurring units of meaning in texts and group these units under conceptual categories (Creswell, 2014, pp. 197–201).

The analysis process began with a detailed reading of the texts; practices related to death were marked with open codes; recurring practices, symbolic references, functional roles, and contextual explanations were grouped into thematic clusters through codes. As coding progressed, themes were clarified to form the analytical backbone of the findings section. In the final stage, the thematic structure was placed under headings 4.1–4.5 to align with the article's findings architecture.

This analysis revealed that data on death rituals clustered around five main themes: ritual time and mourning calendar (4.1), food and charity practices (4.2), mobility and spatial burial arrangements (4.3), gender-based ritual roles (4.4), and sacred-ecological beliefs related to nature (4.5). Thus, scattered ethnographic information has been brought together within a comparative and analytical model. The methodological preference aimed to produce a synthetic reading that brings together data produced by different studies on a common analytical plane, rather than establishing a descriptive framework based on a single field site.

The thematic analysis presented in this section has been compiled using data drawn from various theses and publications. In particular, Kabataş Çetin's (2017) comprehensive field research on the Yörük communities of Antalya and Samsun provides a broad ethnographic framework within the dataset, as it allows for the simultaneous examination of the temporal, spatial, social, and symbolic dimensions of death rituals. The findings will be presented under headings 4.1–4.5, classified on the basis of this multi-layered corpus.

Thematic and Functional Analysis of Death Rituals

4.1 Ritual Time and the Calendar of Mourning

The theses, articles, and book chapters examined show that practices related to death in Yörük communities are organized within a cyclical mourning calendar spread over specific days. Prayers, Mevrit ceremonies, grave visits, and collective remembrance practices performed on the third, seventh, fortieth, and fifty-second days are repeated at regular intervals. This structure points to a cultural logic that treats death not as a singular and sudden rupture, but as a gradual transition process spread out over time. The division of mourning into different stages brings the individual dimension of loss into the public sphere and produces a collective experience shared by the community. Field data reported by Kabataş Çetin (2017), Bulut (2018), Türkan (2018), Sarı and Kaya (2019), Erdoğan (2022), Arslan (2023), Kurt (2023), and Soofizadeh (2020) reveal that these day cycles are consistently maintained in both rural and semi-nomadic settlements. Abalı (2019), on the other hand, shows that layers of oral culture and belief nourish the symbolic framework that supports these timings.

The temporal sequencing of rituals is consistent with the anthropological literature's assessment of transition processes as structures that reestablish social order. Van Gennep's departure–threshold–reentry sequence (1909/2022) demonstrates that the practices of commemoration and mourning following death gradually organize the individual's symbolic departure from the social world. Durkheim (1912) emphasizes that funeral and mourning ceremonies reinforce collective consciousness, while Turner (1969) highlights that the *communitas* experience formed during liminal periods strengthens intra-community bonds. This theoretical framework suggests that the commemorative practices repeated at specific intervals among the Yörük are not merely a religious calendar; they function as a regulatory mechanism aimed at sustaining social integration.

The visibility of mourning is not limited to verbal and ceremonial practices. Physical and material signs are also part of the ritual. Demirci and Öztürk Aykaç (2025) interpret the preference for dark-colored clothing as a public expression of mourning. Clothing becomes a symbolic sign that carries individual emotion into the social sphere. Thus, ritual time is reinforced not only by calendar intervals but also by the aesthetic and physical arrangements of daily life.

The literature remains largely descriptive. Most studies record the days in question in detail; in contrast, the relationship between this time organization and the dynamics of nomadic life is discussed only to a limited extent. However, in Yörük communities, the perception of time is shaped by seasonal migrations, the summer pasture–winter pasture cycle, and spatial transitions. Therefore, the mourning calendar should be considered not as a fixed and rigid program, but as a flexible cultural strategy that allows for the management of loss without interrupting a mobile lifestyle. The intermittent structure of ritual days allows the community to both mourn and continue economic and spatial activities. This finding demonstrates that death is organized in Yörük culture not only as a matter of belief but also as a practical and organizational issue.

In conclusion, ritual time emerges as a fundamental organizing axis in Yörük death practices. Daily cycles keep memory alive, renew community solidarity, and manage the transition process gradually. This structure provides a functional cultural framework that enables the death experience to be interpreted within social continuity.

4.2 Food as Charity, Memory, and Afterlife Belief

The theses, articles, and book chapters examined show that the most visible ritual area after death is food and hospitality practices. Practices such as roasting halva, distributing lokma or çörek, giving “funeral meals,” and setting up charity tables have been recorded as regular and recurring components of the funeral process (Kabataş Çetin, 2017; Bulut, 2018; Sarı & Kaya, 2019; Erdoğan, 2022; Türkan, 2018; Arslan, 2023; Soofizadeh, 2020). These data reveal that food is not merely a sign of hospitality or generosity; it functions as a ritual tool that enables the public sharing of grief. Collective consumption transforms the individual experience of loss into a shared experience involving the community. The table creates a temporary level playing field. Participants share the same food, gather in the same space, and grief becomes a collective emotion.

The religious dimension of these practices is also evident. Food distribution is associated with the idea of sending merit to the soul of the deceased and doing good deeds. Thus, food becomes a symbolic agent that serves to maintain the metaphysical bond between the living and the dead. Anthropological literature indicates that funeral meals serve to strengthen social solidarity and reestablish social order in the face of loss (Durkheim, 1912; Turner, 1969). In the Yörük example, this function is embodied around the concept of “charity.” Each morsel distributed gains meaning both as a religious offering and as an act of social sharing.

Field data show that these meals are repeated in relation to specific day cycles. Bulut (2018) notes that in the Dikili Yörük villages, the offering of morsels, halva, and pastries is repeated on the third, seventh, fortieth, and fifty-second days, and that these practices form a ritual system integrated with the mourning calendar. A similar structure is observed among the Iranian Turkmen. Soofizadeh (2020, p. 121) reports that prayer and meal ceremonies are held for seven days after a funeral, and guests are served tea and food. This parallel suggests that charity meals serve as a common ritual function with cross-cultural continuity among nomadic Turkish communities.

Food practices are reproduced not only in ceremonial contexts but also in oral culture. Abalı (2019) shows that the understanding of distributing food after death and pleasing the soul is conveyed through humorous narratives in Yörük jokes. Thus, ritual food also acquires symbolic value in the everyday narrative world. This situation reveals that food goes beyond being a material offering; it functions as a carrier of meaning that ensures continuity in cultural memory.

It is also noteworthy that Yörük cuisine establishes a clear distinction between everyday consumption and ceremonial consumption. The fact that traditional meals are prepared more often during threshold situations such as weddings and funerals shows that food is separated from ordinary eating practices and transferred to a ritual framework (Ersavaş & Özkanlı, 2018, p. 44). This distinction transforms the table into a special space where social order is reestablished. Food becomes a tool for managing crisis.

However, a significant portion of the literature merely describes these practices, discussing only to a limited extent the relationship between food and social equalization, reciprocity, and the sharing economy. Yet, in nomadic communities, the communal table is one of the founding elements of community identity. In this context, funeral meals are not merely a religious act of

charity. They are a mechanism for the community to reproduce itself, strengthen its solidarity networks, and manage loss together.

For this reason, food should be considered a multi-layered cultural code that operates on both social and religious levels in Yörük death rituals.

4.3 Mobility, Space, and the Nomadic Grave (Perception of Mobility, Space, and Nomadic Graves)

The nomadic lifestyle is the fundamental structural factor that directly shapes death and burial practices. The theses and ethnographic studies examined show that the deceased is often buried at the place of death or the nearest accommodation area; in some cases, they are later transferred to the family or tribal cemetery. These practices reveal that space is understood not as a fixed settlement area but as a mobile geography of belonging (Bulut, 2018; Kabataş Çetin, 2017; Büyükaşahin, 2017). This model, which differs from the concept of permanent cemeteries in settled societies, shows that the place of death was shaped by migration routes and seasonal settlement patterns.

Bulut (2018) states that in the Dikili Yörük villages, during migration, the deceased were buried in the nearest cemetery, and it was often not possible to transport them to their place of birth or former settlement. Büyükaşahin (2017), on the other hand, emphasizes that the concept of cemeteries among the Sarıkeçili Yörük remained historically weak due to nomadism; permanent cemeteries became prominent with the transition to a settled life. These data suggest that the place of burial is closely related to economic and ecological conditions. For a community in constant motion, the grave is less a fixed place requiring long-term visits and maintenance and more a temporary point of memory, practically organized within the cycle of life.

Studies such as Dulkadir (1997) and Karalar (2020) show that among Yörük groups moving along the summer-winter migration route, memory of ancestors persists not in a single cemetery but scattered across different settlement areas. This situation establishes the relationship between space and lineage not through a linear attachment to the land, but through a circulating network of memory. The grave here is not merely a physical burial site. It is a sign of the identity of the oba and the symbolic bond established with the ancestors. Therefore, the practice of burial can be read as a spatial extension of identity production.

Soofizadeh's (2020, p. 121) observations regarding the Iranian Turkmen also present a similar pattern. Washing the body in an open area, transporting it collectively to a specific location, and conducting the burial with community participation indicate that the grave is considered in conjunction with the community's temporary settlement pattern. This comparative data suggests that in nomadic Turkic communities, the place of death is organized in a manner consistent with community mobility rather than fixed monuments.

However, the literature devotes limited space to this theme. Most studies merely describe burial practices and do not discuss the relationship between the grave and spatial belonging, memory, and identity production at an analytical level. Yet, from an anthropological perspective, cemeteries are considered the material archives of collective memory. In settled societies, this archive is fixed and centralized. In nomadic societies, however, it is dispersed and mobile. This difference shows that the experience of death is not only religious but also a form of spatial organization.

Consequently, Yörük burial practices produce a flexible understanding of space that adapts to the necessities of nomadic life. The grave is not a monument claiming permanence; it is a temporary memory stop that gains meaning within mobility.

This situation reveals that in nomadic cultures, death is understood in relation to roads, routes, and lodging arrangements rather than being tied to the earth. The limited number of in-depth field studies focusing on this dimension in the literature creates a clear gap for future research.

4.4 Gendered Roles in Death Rituals

Death rituals in Yörük communities are carried out within a distinct gendered division of labor. The theses and ethnographic studies examined show that public and physical tasks such as burial, grave digging, coffin carrying, and procedures carried out in the cemetery are mostly undertaken by men; while domestic preparations, condolence organization, food production, and the verbal-emotional expression of mourning are mostly the responsibility of women (Kabataş Çetin, 2017; Bulut, 2018; Türkan, 2018; Erdoğan, 2022). This distribution reveals that death functions not only as a religious process but also as a performance space where social roles are reorganized.

Kabataş Çetin (2017, pp. 119–122) notes that among the Gömbe and Ondokuzmayıs Yörük tribes, the process of lowering the deceased into the grave and burial is carried out by male relatives; participating in carrying the deceased is seen as both a virtue and a responsibility. The same field data show that women play an active role in the organization of domestic life, such as not cooking in the house of the deceased and neighbors bringing food, as part of solidarity practices. Similarly, Bulut (2018) emphasizes that the preparation of lokma, helva, and çörek during the funeral process relies heavily on women's labor; the daily organization of mourning is carried out through the kitchen and hospitality. This situation shows that the invisible but continuity-ensuring labor dimension of the ritual is carried out by women.

The verbal and emotional dimension of mourning is particularly evident through the tradition of lamentation. Koşarca and Malkoç (2022, pp. 220–221) reveal that laments among the Bozdoğan Yörük are largely performed by women and that these performances transform individual grief into a public memory. Here, lament is not merely a musical form. It is an oral memory tool that narrates the life story of the deceased, their place within the family, and the bonds they formed with the community. Women's central position in this narrative practice demonstrates that they play a decisive role in the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.

Community-level participation reinforces the collective nature of mourning. Genç, Görar, and Görar (2020, p. 25) note that among the Yörük people in the Isparta region, not only the nuclear family but also distant and close clans are involved in funeral processes; wailing and lamentation form a common language of mourning. This picture shows that mourning is transformed from an individual emotion into an experience shared by the community. The fact that women focus on verbal expression and emotional transmission, while men focus on public and physical performance, reveals that this collective process is organized through gender.

Aksoy and Duman (2020), while evaluating the roles of Sarıkeçili Yörük women during transitional periods, state that women are the main carriers of ritual continuity; they reproduce the cultural order through food, care, and mourning practices. This finding clearly shows that death rituals are not only symbolic but also a social structure sustained by daily labor.

However, while a significant portion of the literature focuses on women's lamentations and mourning practices, men's experience of mourning, children's perception of loss, or the forms of participation in rituals by different age groups have been addressed only to a limited extent. This situation makes it difficult to understand the social diversity of death rituals. Mourning should be evaluated not as a binary distinction between “women's practice” or “men's duty,” but as a multi-layered social performance.

In conclusion, Yörük death rituals function as a space where the social gender order is reproduced. The division of labor established between public bodily labor and emotional and verbal transmission ensures the continuity of the ritual. Women are positioned as narrators and organizers of cultural memory, while men are the executors of burial and public performance. This structure clearly demonstrates that death is not merely a religious process, but a threshold at which social organization is reconstituted.

4.5 Nature, Animals, and Sacred Ecology

The theses and ethnographic studies examined show that beliefs related to death among the Yörük are not established solely within an anthropocentric framework; they are interpreted within a broader cosmological order that includes plants, animals, and the natural environment. Death is understood here not so much as a biological end, but as a transition establishing continuity between the human, natural, and spiritual worlds. This approach reveals that the close, daily relationship that nomadic life establishes with the environment is also reflected in the ritual and symbolic planes.

Some field studies indicate that burial and mourning practices were conducted in conjunction with direct botanical and spatial symbols. Çıblak (2002, pp. 605–614) states that beliefs developed around cemeteries in Anatolia are intertwined with tree and plant cults; practices such as planting branches on graves, leaving greenery, and marking graves with sacred plants are part of the belief system surrounding death. Similarly, in the Yörük region, the practice of leaving or planting myrtle branches on graves is conveyed as a symbolic practice attributed with both a pleasant scent and protective-healing properties (Bulut, 2018; Erdoğan, 2022). This usage demonstrates that the tree and plant are perceived not only as natural elements but also as cultural entities imbued with the function of spiritual purification and protection.

Animal behaviors are also among the signs interpreted as harbingers of death. Sargın (2019, p. 137) notes that among the Karahacılı Yörük people, the hooting of an owl is considered a strong sign that a funeral will take place; certain everyday behaviors are also regulated by taboos associated with death. The interpretation of chewing gum at night as “chewing the bones of the dead” and the discouragement of children from this behavior reveals that symbolic prohibitions related to death serve to discipline daily life. Such practices show that mourning is not limited to ceremonial moments but also permeates daily behavioral patterns.

Kurt (2023, p. 226 ff.) notes that among the Yörük people of Samsun, dreams, unusual animal behavior, and physical changes are interpreted as signs that death is approaching. Indicators such as dogs howling, animals behaving restlessly, or teeth falling out in dreams are read as the symbolic language of impending loss. This system of omens shows that death is understood not only as a biological process but as a rupture felt throughout the universe. The human body, animals, and nature are all parts of the same universe of meaning. This holistic conception is consistent with the idea of cosmological continuity in nomadic culture.

Studies such as those by Erdoğan (2022) and Büyükşahin (2017) also reveal that the relationship established with the environment directly influenced ritual practices; the location of cemeteries was considered in conjunction with vegetation and natural elements. Akdu and Akdu (2025), recalling the explanation of the soul's “flight” metaphor in ancient Turkish belief systems, note that the association of death with images of the sky, birds, and movement has a historical background. This symbolic repertoire demonstrates that natural elements are not incidental in death narratives but are part of a deep-rooted belief system.

However, the literature often presents such beliefs at a descriptive and anecdotal level. Symbols such as owls, myrtle, trees, or dreams are recorded; however, their mythological, ecological, and cosmological background is only partially explored. Yet, in nomadic communities, nature is not merely an environmental context. Livelihood, mobility, and belief systems are shaped within the same ecological framework. Therefore, nature symbols associated with death must be examined in conjunction with cultural ecology and sacred space theories.

Consequently, the nature and animal-based beliefs associated with death among the Yörük indicate a worldview that establishes an uninterrupted ontological connection between humans and the environment.

The branch planted at the grave, the sound of a bird, or a dream seen become effective indicators in making sense of death. These practices reveal that mourning is experienced not only as a social but also as a cosmological experience. Therefore, nature-based symbols should be considered not as complementary but as constitutive elements of Yörük death rituals.

“The relationship between thematic clusters and studies in the literature is shown in Table 1.”

Table 1. Thematic Coding of Selected Studies on Death Beliefs and Practices among the Yörük (2000–2025)

| Source | Type/Field | Main Findings (brief summary) | Theme Code | Keywords |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------|--|
| Arslan (2023) | Conference paper / Sarıkeçili | time of burial, 3–7–40–52 days, helva/lokma, neighbor meal, grave–migration relationship | 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 | ritual calendar, charity, nomadic burial |
| Demir & Baka (2005) | Article / Silifke | death omens, body arrangement, mourning color, helva, women’s laments | 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5 | omen, mourning, avoidance |
| Aksoy & Duman (2020) | Article / Sarıkeçili | gender-based division of labor, lament, 7–40–52 day meals | 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 | gender, functional mourning |
| Büyükşahin (2017) | PhD Dissertation / Sarıkeçili | burial during migration, grave mobility, animal/ecological beliefs | 4.3, 4.5 | space, mobility, ecology |
| Karalar (2020) | Book review | burial during migration, transition to fixed cemetery | 4.3 | spatial transformation |
| Sarı & Kaya (2019) | Article | announcement of death, helva, house purification, light–water practices | 4.1, 4.2, 4.5 | purification, symbolism |
| Kabataş Çetin (2017) | MA Thesis / Antalya–Samsun | 3–7–9–20–40–52 days, helva/lokma, myrtle, mourning clothing, lament | 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 | ritual calendar, charity, grave ecology |
| Sargın (2019) | MA Thesis / Karahacılı | owl, taboo, night prohibitions | 4.5 | omen, taboo |

| Source | Type/Field | Main Findings (brief summary) | Theme Code | Keywords |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Bulut (2018) | Article / Dikili | fortieth-day charity (kırk hayır), lokma/bread, short mourning, grave visit, nomadic burial | 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5 | ritual economy, cemetery culture |
| Erdoğan (2022) | Book chapter | sacrifice, incense, tree cult, funeral meal (ölü aşısı), condolence institution | 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5 | sacrifice, sacred plant |
| Cihan (2021) | Article | flag/cloth on grave, mourning symbols | 4.1, 4.5 | flag, visible mourning |
| Soofizadeh (2020) | Book chapter / Iranian Turkmen | 7-day prayer, food offering, communal solidarity | 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 | comparative context |
| Türkan (2018) | Article | almsgiving/sacrifice, mourning restrictions, ancestor spirit, spatial practices | 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 | mourning regime, belief in spirits |
| Abalı (2019) | Article | symbolic transmission of charity/food offering in anecdotes | 4.2, 4.1 | oral culture, charity |
| Akdu & Akdu (2025) | Article | concept of “uçmak” (afterlife), funeral meal, sacrifice, lament, animal omens | 4.2, 4.4, 4.5 | mythological continuity |
| Demirci & Öztürk Aykaç (2025) | Article | mourning clothing, color symbolism | 4.4, 4.1 | body, visible mourning |
| Koşarca & Malkoç (2022) | Article | women-performed lament, oral mourning performance | 4.4, 4.1 | lament, collective memory |
| Ersavaş & Özkanlı (2018) | Article | ritual food culture in the funeral context | 4.2 | ritual food |
| Kurt (2023) | Book | death omens, helva, mevlit, mourning duration, burial practices | 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 | cosmological perception of death |
| Genç, Görar & Görar (2020) | Book chapter | collective mourning, oba participation, lament, “ölgülük” | 4.4 | communal solidarity |

“The relationship between thematic clusters and studies in the literature is shown in Table 1.”
 Table 1. Thematic Coding of Selected Studies on Death Beliefs and Practices among the Yörük (2000–2025)

FINDINGS

The ethnographic literature reviewed shows that death-related practices in Yörük communities are concentrated around specific thematic axes. A significant portion of the studies focus on visible and ceremonial practices such as post-funeral meals and charitable practices, memorial

rituals performed on the third, seventh, fortieth, and fifty-second days, and the tradition of lamentation.

This trend reveals that mourning is approached as a process experienced at the community level, primarily through collective meals, prayers, and oral performances. In contrast, it is noteworthy that dimensions such as spatial mobility, burial strategies during migration, temporary burial practices, material culture elements, or the mourning experiences of different age and gender groups, which shape the death experience in nomadic life, are only represented to a limited extent in the literature. Yet, in nomadic communities, death is not merely a religious ceremony; it is a spatial experience directly related to mobility, memory, and belonging.

Similarly, there are very few comparative studies on nomadic Turkish communities outside Turkey. The limited research conducted on Iranian Turkmen points to common patterns such as multi-day mourning calendars and collective eating practices, suggesting that death rituals contain structures that are cross-culturally continuous. However, these comparisons have not yet been addressed within a systematic theoretical framework in the Turkish literature. This situation indicates that the field still holds significant research potential.

This study aims to bring together the scattered literature within a comprehensive analytical framework by re-evaluating existing ethnographic data from a thematic perspective. The review reveals that topics such as burial and temporary grave practices during migration, the relationship between the cemetery and the nomadic perception of space, the mourning experiences of children and men, material culture elements such as shrouds and tent arrangements, cross-cultural comparisons, and the impact of modernization processes on rituals have not been sufficiently addressed in the research. These areas constitute significant gaps in terms of understanding the social and spatial logic of Yörük death rituals in greater depth.

The findings obtained as a result of thematic analysis were not limited to qualitative descriptions but were supported by a quantitative distribution analysis to concretize the trends in the literature. Table 1 presents the classification of the studies examined according to theme codes, while Table 2 and Figure 1 show the numerical representation of this thematic intensity. When the table and graph are evaluated together, it is seen that the literature is most concentrated around ritual time (4.1) and food/charity practices (4.2), while studies focusing on space and burial practices (4.3) are relatively limited.

Findings related to nature and ecology provide strong data, but they often remain at a descriptive level, with symbolic and cosmological analyses not sufficiently deepened. This distribution clearly shows that research on Yörük death rituals has focused on ceremonial and visible elements, while spatial, ecological, and intergenerational dimensions offer an important area of research for future studies.

Table 2. Thematic Classification and Code Distribution of Ethnographic Studies on Yörük Death Rituals

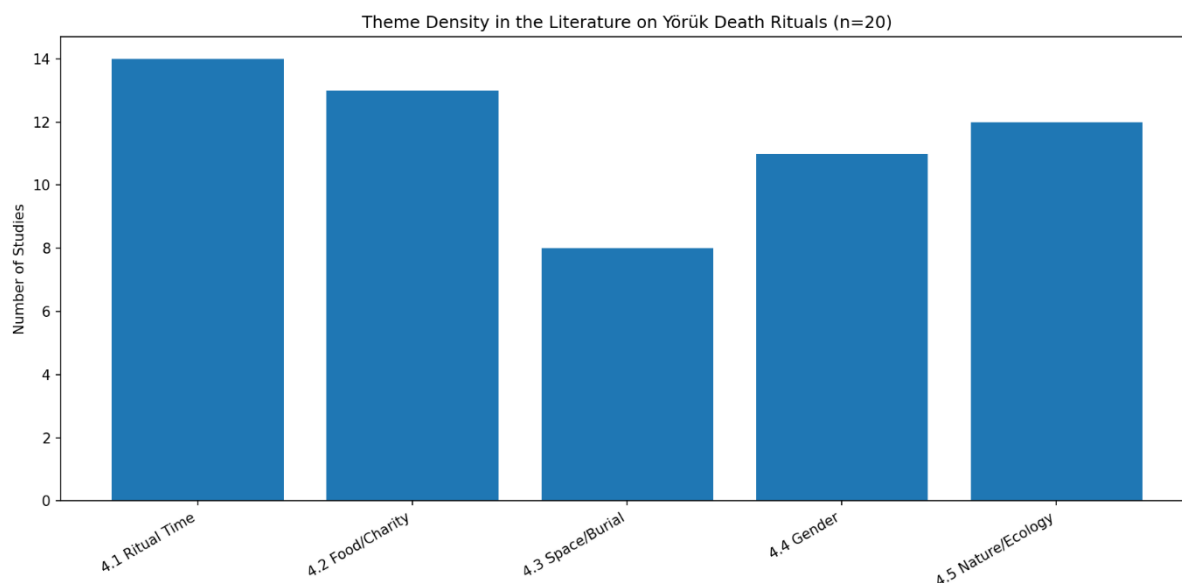


Figure 1. Intensity of Research on Yörük Death Rituals According to Themes in the Literature

| Theme | Number of Studies | Interpretation |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 4.1 Ritual Time | 14 | Most dominant axis |
| 4.2 Food/Charity | 13 | Second most intensive area |
| 4.5 Nature/Ecology | 12 | Strong but treated superficially |
| 4.4 Gender | 11 | Lament-focused, limited scope |
| 4.3 Space/Burial | 8 | Weakest and neglected area |
| | | |

CONCLUSION DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, when examining the literature on death rituals among the Yörük people thematically, reveals that existing research largely relies on descriptive field data, but theoretical, comparative, and interdisciplinary analyses remain limited. The most frequently explored themes in the examined theses and articles cluster around the mourning calendar (3rd–7th–40th–52nd days), funeral meals/halva-charity practices, and the tradition of lamentation. In contrast, areas such as space, mobility, ecological worldview, children's and young people's experiences of mourning, economic sharing networks, and cultural heritage policies in the context of nomadism are found to be quite poorly represented in the literature.

This situation shows that the death culture of nomadic societies is mostly addressed at the level of “folkloric detail”; however, these practices require more in-depth analysis in terms of social solidarity, collective memory, identity construction, and cultural continuity.

In the international literature, however, studies on pastoral and nomadic communities are approached in a more holistic manner.

For example, in anthropological studies on Central Asian steppe communities, Mongol and Altaic peoples, or nomadic groups in the Sahara and Middle East, death rituals are evaluated in conjunction with spatial mobility, ancestor cults, sacred landscapes, and ecological knowledge systems. In contrast, it can be said that studies on Yörük communities in Turkey have not yet reached this theoretical depth.

In this context, Yörük death rituals should be evaluated not only as a local folklore subject but also within the scope of “community-based cultural practices” emphasized in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage approach. Indeed, funeral meals, lamentations, mourning visits,

and grave-side practices are living cultural heritage patterns that are passed down from generation to generation, reinforcing the community's identity and reestablishing social solidarity.

Similarly, practices such as funeral meals and charity tables align with the Slow Food movement's local, community-based, and cultural memory-preserving gastronomy approach, which is based on the principles of sharing and collective production. These practices are not merely rituals; they also offer concrete examples that can be evaluated in terms of food culture, sustainability, and social solidarity. The documentation and preservation of local funeral meals also holds significant potential in terms of cultural heritage tourism and gastronomic routes.

Furthermore, the collective mourning, neighborly support, and small-scale community solidarity observed in Yörük villages are also parallel to the human-scale, cooperative, and locally-based lifestyles advocated by the Cittaslow (Slow City) approach. Therefore, the rites of passage in Yörük culture can be evaluated not only as ethnographic data but also in the context of sustainable local development and cultural policy.

From the perspective of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this heritage area is particularly relevant to:

- SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities)
- SDG 12 (Responsible production and consumption)
- SDG 4 (Quality education – cultural transmission)

Yas meals and collective practices can be considered local knowledge systems that strengthen community resilience and social capital.

In conclusion, this study reveals that death rituals among the Yörük are not merely a set of traditional practices; they constitute a multi-layered cultural system centered on time, space, gender, ecology, and gastronomy. However, most existing studies in the literature remain descriptive in nature; there is a clear lack of comparative, theoretical, and policy-oriented research.

Therefore, the following topics are suggested for future research:

- In-depth ethnographic studies on the relationship between nomadism and the place of death
- Analysis of mourning meals in the context of gastronomy and cultural diplomacy
- Children's and young people's experiences of mourning
- The mythological origins of nature/ecology-based death symbolism
- The relationship between Yörük rituals and the UNESCO ICH inventory and local development policies
- Comparative studies with nomadic communities in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Caucasus

These approaches will contribute to reevaluating Yörük death culture not merely as a legacy of the past, but as a dynamic system that supports contemporary social solidarity, sustainable lifestyles, and cultural continuity.

This study proposes a thematic and comparative meta-synthesis model for the first time in the literature by comprehensively bringing together death-related rituals in Yörük communities through scattered theses, articles, and ethnographic publications. While existing research mostly presents descriptive findings at the scale of a single field or community, this study classifies data produced in different geographical areas under common conceptual headings, demonstrating that Yörük death culture is a structural system operating along the axes of time (mourning calendar), food (charity practices), space (nomadic burial), gender (ritual roles), and ecology (sacred natural elements).

In this respect, the research conceptualizes death rituals not merely as a series of folkloric traditions, but as a form of social organization that reproduces collective memory, social solidarity, and cultural continuity. Furthermore, the study relates Yörük practices to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage approach, Slow Food's local gastronomy perspective, and Cittaslow's community-based sustainability understanding, thereby providing the literature with a new interdisciplinary and policy-oriented reading framework.

In conclusion, this article presents the first systematic literature map on nomadic communities in Turkey; it contributes theoretically to cultural heritage studies and creates an applicable basis for local development, cultural diplomacy, and sustainability policies.

In general, it is understood that academic production on Yörük death rituals has largely focused on ceremonial and collective practices such as the mourning calendar, charity meals, and the tradition of lamentation. In contrast, burial strategies related to nomadic mobility, temporary burial practices, material culture elements, the mourning experiences of men and children, and cross-cultural comparative analyses are underrepresented in the literature. This picture shows that death in Yörük communities should be approached not only as a religious ritual but as a multi-layered cultural process intertwined with space, memory, identity, and ecological knowledge. The study brings together scattered ethnographic data within a thematic framework, making these gaps visible and proposing a theoretical and methodological roadmap for future research. This comprehensive picture shows that death rituals are not merely religious or traditional practices; they create a liminal threshold experience where the community reorganizes itself in times of crisis and loss.

In this respect, the research conceptualizes death rituals not merely as a series of folkloric traditions, but as a form of social organization that reproduces collective memory, social solidarity, and cultural continuity. Furthermore, the study contributes a new interdisciplinary and policy-oriented reading framework to the literature by relating Yörük practices to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage approach, Slow Food's local gastronomy perspective, and Cittaslow's community-based sustainability understanding.

In conclusion, this article presents the first systematic literature map on nomadic communities in Turkey; it contributes theoretically to cultural heritage studies and provides an applicable basis for local development, cultural diplomacy, and sustainability policies.

At this point, Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and *communitas* provide an explanatory theoretical grounding. According to Turner, transitional periods produce temporary communal states where everyday hierarchies are suspended and individuals are equalized on a shared emotional ground (Turner, 1969). Yörük funeral meals, collective mourning visits, lament performances, and mutual aid-based solidarity practices can be read as concrete manifestations of the *communitas* experience that emerges precisely in this liminal state.

Death, in this context, is not merely a loss; it becomes a moment of reintegration in which the community rebuilds its social bonds, refreshes its collective memory, and reinforces its cultural continuity. Therefore, when evaluated from the perspective of transition theories, Yörük death rituals can be conceptualized as one of the fundamental mechanisms of social resilience and cultural continuity in nomadic societies.

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