

The Lower Göksu Archaeological Salvage Survey

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The Göksu river valley, in Rough Cilicia, is a landscape rich with heritage and history. It is perhaps best known for its spectacular Byzantine and medieval remains, but archaeological relics from many different historical periods can be found here. Hittite texts and rock carvings imply that the valley was an important route between the plateau and the sea in the Bronze Age, and a distinctive indigenous culture appears to have taken root here in the Iron Age. In recent years, the results of several projects, including the Upper Göksu Survey and the Kilise Tepe Archaeological Project, have brought the valley's dramatic past to light.

The lower part of the Göksu valley is due to be flooded in 2016, with the construction of a dam at Kayraktepe, approximately 10km northwest of the town of Silifke (ancient Seleucia ad Calycadnum). The dam will bring new development to the region, but one unavoidable consequence will be that several known archaeological sites will be completely or partially submerged, including Kilise Tepe, Çingen Tepe, Mal Tepe, Ören Tepe and At Tepe. In addition to the loss of these known sites, a rich archaeological landscape will be submerged, including an unknown number of other ancient sites and monuments.

In 2013, an international team of Turkish and British archaeologists set up the Lower Göksu Archaeological Salvage Survey. Our aim is to document as much as we can of this unique archaeological landscape before it is lost beneath the waters of the dam. We plan to undertake a systematic survey of the flood zone, recording the archaeological remains for posterity. We are racing against time to learn as much as possible about this crucial area, which has been both a channel for communication and a distinctive region in its own right throughout its long history.

With generous support in the form of a Project Grant from the British Institute at Ankara, we have been able to complete our first season of archaeological survey in the field. On 30 September 2013, a small team began work from its headquarters in Taşucu, led by Tevfik Emre Şerifoğlu of Bitlis Eren University. The team worked in different areas of the valley, which includes parts of the districts of Silifke, Mut and Gülnar. This season's work had two objectives: to visit known sites that need further investigation and to visit potential archaeological sites which were determined using satellite images and maps.

Thus we conducted intensive surveys at the sites of Çingen Tepe, Mal Tepe, Ören Tepe and At Tepe, which were all recorded during surveys conducted by James Mellaart and David French. Of these, Çingen Tepe and Mal Tepe are located where the Kurtsuyu river joins the Göksu, while Ören Tepe and At Tepe are located where the Ermenek river meets the Göksu. All four sites were occupied from the Early Bronze

Age until the Byzantine period; at Mal Tepe, however, pre-Byzantine material was scarce and At Tepe may have been first settled before the Bronze Age.

These sites were divided into smaller areas in which archaeological materials visible on the surface were recorded by drawing and photography. Most of our time was spent at Çingen Tepe as this site will be flooded before the others and is already badly damaged due to illegal excavations. The western slope of the mound was investigated by dividing the whole surface into 322 2m by 2m grid squares, counting all the sherds in each, and drawing and photographing all the diagnostic pieces. It should also be noted that Çingen Tepe is located relatively close to Kilise Tepe (just on the other side of the Göksu river), and the archaeological material from there closely resembles that from Çingen Tepe.

During our investigations at these four sites, we spotted late Roman/Byzantine pottery scatters at fields near Ören Tepe and At Tepe, which point to the existence of extensive villages near these sites at this period. We also discovered a late Roman/Byzantine bridge, which is still in use today, near the site of Mal Tepe, and the remains of a Hellenistic or early Roman building very close to Ören Tepe.

In addition to this work, we visited numerous site candidates in the vicinity of Anamurlu, Aşağı Köşelerli, Hisar, Evkaf Çiftliği and Karahacılı villages during the 2013 season. Of these, two to the west of Aşağı Köşelerli and one to the north of Hisar proved to be late Roman/Byzantine villages or farmsteads. A stone-paved water canal was found in the vicinity of Anamurlu, which was probably built during the Byzantine or medieval period. Besides these, a Byzantine or medieval castle, which the locals call Ak Kale (White Castle), was discovered to the south of Karahacılı, which, based on the pottery scatters around it, seems to have had a small settlement attached to it.

Probably the most exciting discovery of this season was Dam Tepe, a mound located very close to the village of Evkaf Çiftliği on a terrace overlooking the Göksu river. The archaeological material implies that this site was occupied from the Early Bronze Age until the Byzantine period. The site will not be flooded, but the new road to be built as part of the dam project will partially destroy it. This discovery was reported to the local museum, and we have been informed that the measures necessary to protect it will be taken immediately.

Before the end of the season, we also paid a short visit to the famous Çolakkız rock relief (Late Bronze Age or Iron Age) near the village of Keben. A stone-paved trackway, which may have been built sometime during the Byzantine or medieval period and which links the river valley to the plateau above, passes just in front of the monument.

We would like to thank the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for granting us a permit, and the Director and staff of the Silifke Museum for their kind help and hospitality. We very much hope to continue our work along the Göksu river valley in 2014.