GEDIFI INI, A CHRISTIAN SETTLED CAVE IN SOUTHERN TURKEY

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Abstract

Gedifi Ini is a quite small natural cave located near Gündoğmuş District, east of Antalya Province, in the occidental part of the Taurus Mountains of Turkey. This natural cave, formed in limestone, is the unique known settled cave that dates back to Christian period not only in that area but also in all Taurus Range. Three different inscriptions on the walls in Ancient Greek have been recognized and some parts of the cave have been arranged to host a church. Actually the site is not protected and it has been subject to a severe illegal digger destruction since it's first exploration by Bean and Mitford in 1964. The objective of our study was both to conduct the first survey in Gedifi Ini to obtain its detailed map and to draw attention to such archaeological site and the inscriptions inside that are forgotten after long years.

Introduction

Taurus Mountains extends along approximately 1000 km in the east-west direction in southern Turkey. In the study area, the massif is mostly formed by Permian – Miocene aged limestone and elevations often exceed 2000 m (MTA 1963). Taurus Mountains have been subject to continuous settlement since Prehistoric times. For instance excavations in Karain Cave - located to the north of Antalya - have revealed that human settlement in this cave goes back to 28.000 BP (YALCINKAYA, 2009). Seated on the plateau immediately north of Taurus Mountain Range, Çatalhöyük is one of the oldest village settlements with history of 8.000 BP (MELLAART, 1967). In the Roman period, Taurus Mountain Range was divided into three divisions namely Cilicia, Pamphylia and Lycia from east to west, and has tens of ancient sites along the coast line. Located in the easternmost of the region and between Manavgat and Iskenderun, as they are called today, the antique Cilicia province is much steeper than Pamphylia and Lycia, both located further to the west. Taurus Mountains rise up from sea as a wall in West Cilicia and forms a barrier between southern shores and mid Anatolia . What is interesting here is that in addition to coastal settlements, West Cilicia , which is also called "Rough Cilicia" because of its geological and nature conditions, hosts smaller antique settlements. Those settlements have small Greek and Roman villages in a large part and have not been addressed in extensive research to date. Surveys and excavations of archeological structures in those highlands are complicated due to difficult access. Compared to coastal regions, no archaeological excavation has been carried out in the "Rough" section of Cilicia up to the present; and the most comprehensive one of few surveys (HILD & HELLENKEMPER, 1990; RAUH, 2009) is the survey that carried out by Bean and Mitford between 1964 and1968 (BEAN & MITFORD, 1970). The surveys of these two archeologists that they carried out either on a horse or on foot revealed numerous antique settlements and ruins in "Rough Cilicia". Gedifi Ini ('Ini' means cave in Turkish so, we prefer to use its original Turkish name of this cave throughout this article), located 5 km to Gündoğmuş Village and antique Casae city on Asar Hill to the north of this cave were first explored and revealed to the science community by Bean and Mitford in 1964. Thus, no scientific work has been conducted in Gedifi Ini and Casae for the last 53 years….

In the present study, we aimed to conduct a survey of Gedifi Ini to have a detailed map and to document degradations and pillages that this cave has been exposed to since Bean and Mitford revealed its existence.

Gedifi Ini

Situated around 5 km northwest of Gündoğmuş Village and on a mountain to the east of Karadere Village (Fig. 1), Gedifi Ini is a small horizontal natural cave that is found on a hard -to-reach, very steep land and was formed in Permian – Mesozoic dated limestones (Fig. 2). Due to the huge thickness of limestone formation around Mid Taurus Mountain Range, this region is full of natural caves and Gedifi Ini, with its 40 m length, appears as a quite small and insignificant cave for the region (Fig. 3). However Gedifi Ini is very important in some respect: Although there are many natural caves used by human on West Taurus and Mid Taurus ranges, both findings in a very large part of those caves are Prehistoric (YALÇINKAYA, 2009), and no other 'human settlement in a natural cave' has been explored yet on East Taurus Range, i.e., in Rough Cilicia. So, in a sense, Gedifi Ini is the unique 'human settlement in a natural cave' of Rough Cilicia that has been found so far as well as the only known 'Christian settlement in a natural cave' of whole Taurus Mountains. The cave was shaped by people living in the region many centuries ago and some of its part was turned into a church. In addition to rock cut niches at the eastern and southern walls of the cave (Fig's 4 and 5) the constructed apse is the only remaining part of a supposed church at the back of the cave. Construction of the apse was made with small stones attached together with lime and then covered with plaster. Although the fresco decorating the interior of construction is largely damaged, the Jesus and the holy light on his head are still visible on the main panel. The red and yellow shades dominate over the fresco (Fig's 6 and 7). The censer, oil-lamps, and the objects used for rituals that were found during illegal excavations in the cave are mostly dated to Late Roman and Byzantine periods. One year after their first explorations at Gedifi Ini, Bean and Mitford re-visited the cave and copied the inscriptions. In their comprehensive work (BEAN & MITFORD, 1970) they explained the cave with those words:

"Some 5 km. to the north-west of Gündoğmuş in the precipitous slopes which face Asar Tepe is a large cave known as Gedifi Ini. It is about 40 m. in length, 13 m. in breadth and hardly less than 20 m. high. On the right hand side is a rock-cut facade some 6 m. high with a ledge at the bottom of it, plastered over and a painted red vertical stripe on the right. At the back of the cave are sundry niches of varying size — one clearly Christian since it is frescoed and inscribed and surmounts a small tank or font — together with the ruins of a small church. Since our visit of June 17th, 1964 villagers of Karadere have shown a lively interest in Gedifi Ini and are reported to have dug up terracottas in addition to pieces of metal work — offerings clearly of pagan date. Immediately above the cave on the plateau amid rock and scattered pine are the remains of a considerable settlement exten ding perhaps over a quarter of a mile. Many pieces of well constructed wall still stand and the outlines of scattered houses can readily be detected: seemingly a village site, but neither late nor poor. No inscriptions were here forthcoming, but in this respect the cave itself was more rewarding. On the left wall of the cave an arched niche 1.15 h. and 0.95 w., carefully worked, with an inscribed panel to left and right of it. That on the left, (a), 0.61 w. and 0.37 h., carries an inscription of eight lines , the letters clear, deeply cut, from 0.02 to 0.03 h.. The right hand panel, (b), with ten lines, has identical lettering, 0.025 to 0.035 h. …. On the right wall of the cave, to the left of the rock-facade, an inscription very roughly cut on an unprepared surface."

The translation of those three inscriptions (Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11) found by Bean and Mitford in Gedifi Ini is neither available in their book nor on the only webpage that stores the inscriptions (The Packard Humanities Institute; http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/275962, http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/2759624). Though we have a rough translation for those inscriptions, a detailed work is beyond our expertise. After the survey of Bean and Mitford, particularly after 1980, Gedifi Ini is substantially destructed by illegal diggers, and one of those three inscriptions identified by Bean and Mitford is unfortunately no longer readable. Another interesting point is that differently from Casae ancient settlement located to the north of Gedifi Ini, this cave is another ancient settlement that extends along the surrounding valley, covering a very large area. There are numerous ruins and tombs in that area that have not been explored yet.

Conclusion

The whole archaeological heritage is left abandoned in those highlands and not so far protected. Not only Gedifi Ini, but also countless antique settlements in Rough Cilicia are destroyed bit by bit every day and how to preserve / protect those ruins is not known under such challenging conditions. This issue does not appear to be solved in near future.

References

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Fig. 1 Location map showing Gedifi Ini



Fig. 2 Entrance of Gedifi Ini at the north end of the cliff (Photo A. Mallard).

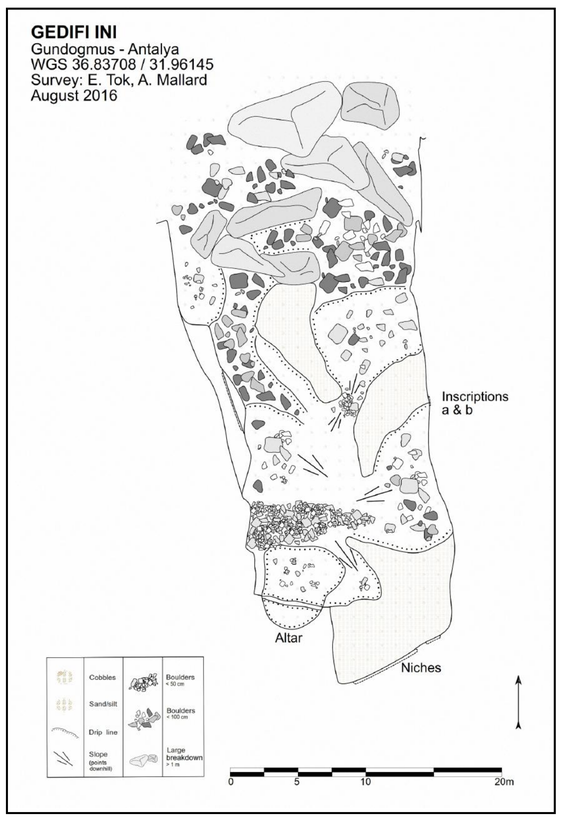


Fig. 3 Gedifi Ini plan (drawing by E. Tok and A. Mallard).



Fig. 4 (Top) General view of Gedifi Ini from the entrance (Photo A. Mallard).

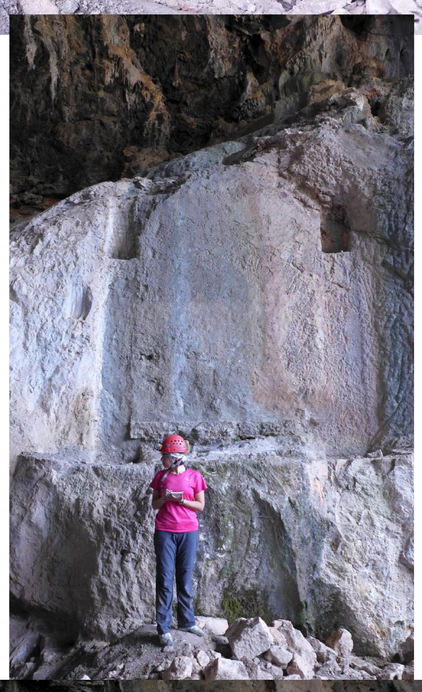


Fig. 5 (Right) Rock-cut niche at the south wall of the cave (Photo A. Mallard).



Fig. 6 Remainings of the apse at Gedifi Ini (Photo A. Mallard).

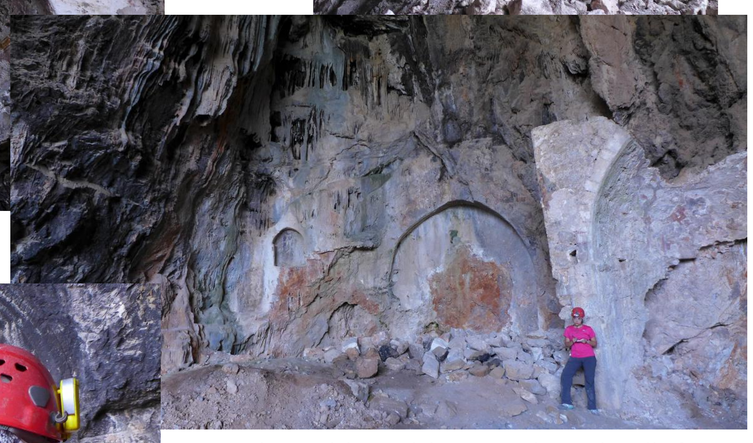




Fig. 7 Niches and the apse at the south wall of Gedifi Ini (Photo A. Mallard).

Fig. 8 Inscriptions A and B on the left and right of photo (Photo A. Mallard).

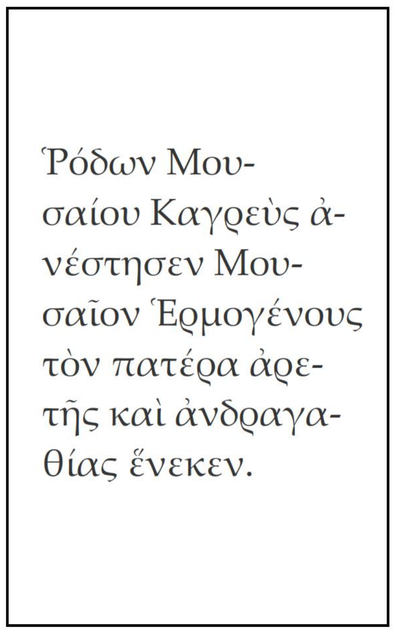


Fig. 9 Inscription A (http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/275962).

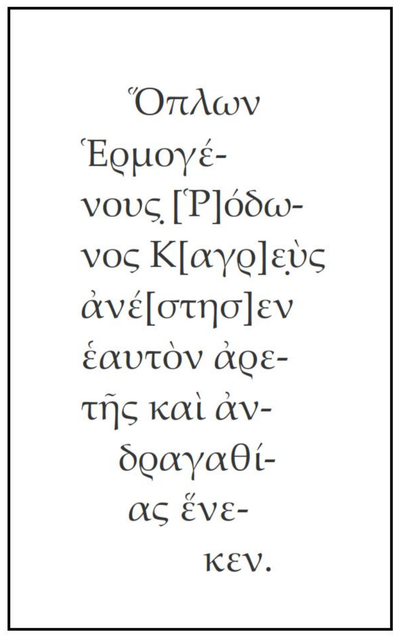


Fig. 9 Inscription B (http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/275962).

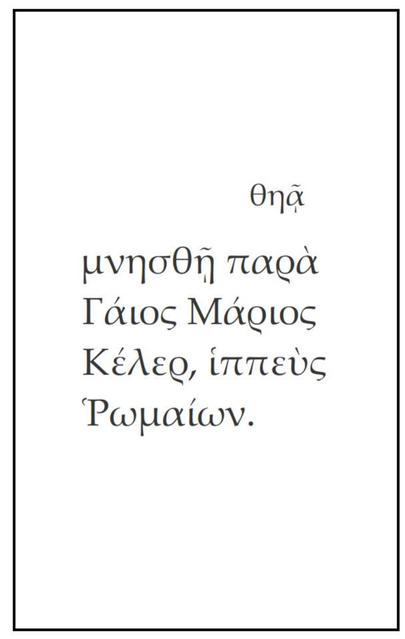


Fig. 9 Inscription C (http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/275964).