

Cave Dwellings of Halfeti - Urfa (Turkey)

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Abstract

Halfeti (Urfa province) is a small settlement located on the bank of Euphrates, in south-eastern Turkey. There are two dams on Euphrates on the region: Ataturk Dam, 145 km north of Halfeti and Birecik Dam, 55 km south of Halfeti. Because of the second dam, the water level of Euphrates reached up to 60 meters, with a width up to 500 meters. In this area the river is flowing through the Eocene limestones, and there are hundreds of dwellings carved in those soft limestone walls. Those structures are mostly in the northern part of Halfeti and beginning from Kızılin and Gumuskaya villages near to the northernmost part of the river, near to Ataturk Dam. As OBRUK Cave Research Group, we began to search these cave dwellings in the area during April 2013. We have been making an inventory of all rock dwellings from Gumuskaya Village to Halfeti. Our project has been executed on land and underwater on 35 km long river walls of Euphrates. We launched our work from Kızılin Village, located in the north part of Euphrates. We found 73 rock settlements in 24 different points between Kızılin and Gumuskaya villages, three of which are church or monasteries. On the other hand, another team had been working on the south part of the project: Halfeti. In this area, on both banks of Euphrates numerous rock dwellings and few village settlements exists. Especially towards the north of Halfeti, there are tens of artificial cavities around Rum kale, located on the west coast of Euphrates. Rum Kale, also known as "Hromgla", was mentioned in Assyrian scripts and had been the capital of United Armenian Church for 90 years until 1293, when conquered by the Mamluks. During our survey project each artificial cavity in the area has been marked by GPS, photographed and then surveyed. The inventory of all those rock dwellings is held by separate files. We are planning to survey the whole rock settlements within the 35 km bank of Euphrates, from Gumuskaya Village to Halfeti till the end of 2015.



Fig. 1. Location map



Fig. 2. Halfeti Village, before and after Birecik Dam

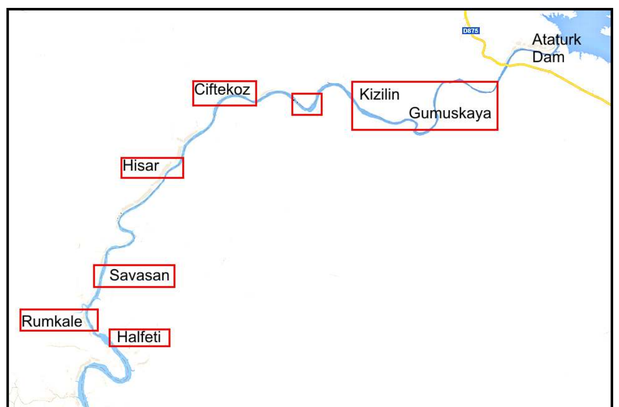


Fig. 3. Working area. Areas with cave dwellings are in red squares

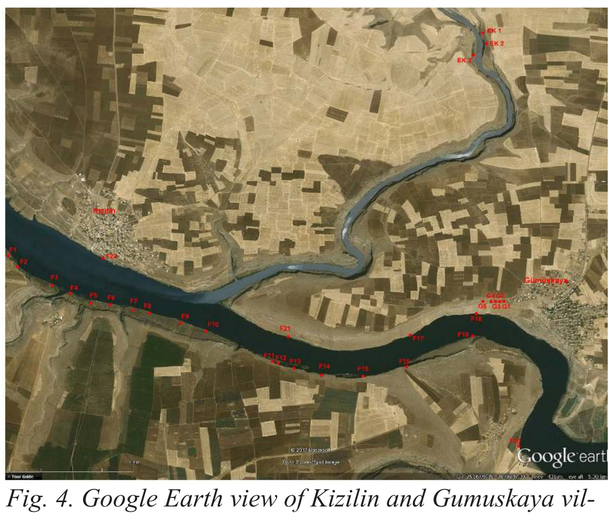


Fig. 4. Google Earth view of Kizilin and Gumuskaya villages. Cave dwellings marked with red dots.

Introduction

Urfa Province of south-eastern Turkey (Fig. 1) has a worldwide importance due to its long history. Gobeklitepe, which is located in this province is the oldest temple of the world. Urfa, whose antique name is Edessa, is a settlement frequented since the prehistoric times. Furthermore, Euphrates flowing in the west borders of the province is historically probably one of the most important rivers in the world. However, five dams have been built on this river since 1975. Today, the lake of the every dam on the river extends nearly to the previous dam wall. Only 1/3 of Euphrates, whose length is 1.260 km in Turkey, is in natural flow; the rest has become dam lakes.The five dam lakes built on Euphrates submerged hundreds of villages and antique settlements. Despite several rescue excavations in many antique settlements before the constructions, there is an incredibly huge loss in historical heritage.

After the construction of Birecik Dam in 2000, the level of the river in this region raised about 60 meters and countless rock settlements in the area were submerged (Fig. 2).

As OBRUK Cave Research Group, we began this new inventory project of the rock settlements in the north of Birecik Dam Lake, between Halfeti and Gümüşkaya villages in April 2013 (Fig. 3).

This project, covering 35 kilometers of Euphrates, is still going on. The northernmost borders of the project are Kizilin and Gümüskaya villages. During the first reconnaissance trip we had found 73 rock settlements in 24 different points between those two villages (Fig. 4), three of which were church or monasteries (Fig's 5,6,7 and 8).

Each artificial cavity in the area has been marked by GPS, photographed and then surveyed. Following these processes, its precise location has been marked on the topographical map. For the north part, the main river wall settlements named F1 through F21. The caves in a branch of Euphrates River are in this region named EK1, 2 and 3. The inventory of all those rock dwellings are held by separate files. To the south, around the villages Ciftekoz, Yenikoy, Killik and Kurttepe there are many dwellings which have not been searched yet. On the other hand, we had another reconnaissance trip at the southernmost point of our project: Halfeti Village. Although there are few rock settlements in or around Halfeti, the most important group lies at Savasan Village, 3.5 km to the north (Fig. 9).

On the south coast of this, half submerged village, we have completed the survey and mapping of another 17 rock settlements most of which are small but quite interesting (Fig's 10 and 11).

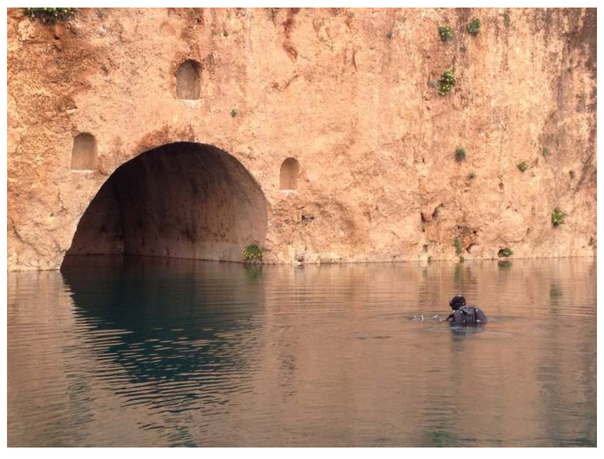


Fig. 5. Diving to F20 dwelling.



Fig. 6. Third storey of F11 dwelling.

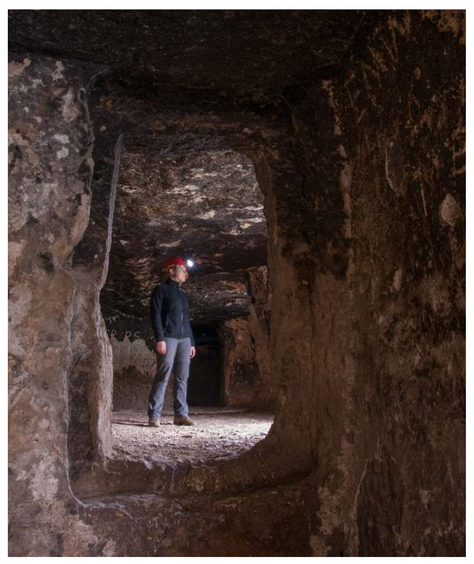


Fig. 7. First floor of F9 dwelling, presumably a monastry



Fig. 8. In a ferry (!) on Euphrates towards Kizilin Village,



Fig. 9. Google Earth view of Rumkale and Savasan Village.



Fig. 10. Some of the cave dwellings of Savasan Village.

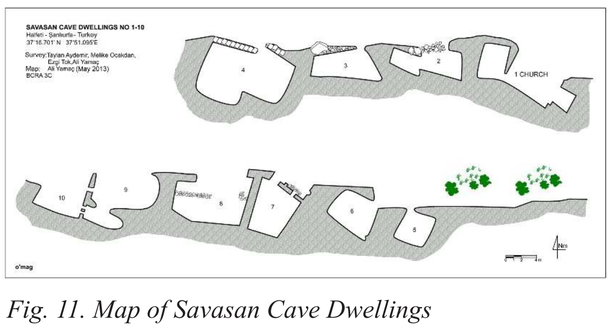


Fig. 11. Map of Savasan Cave Dwellings

Conclusion

Artificial cavity researches in this region should have begun long before Birecik Dam was built. But, even the excavation and restoration of the most important historical structure of the area (Rum Kale) have started recently. As hundreds of other rock dwellings on the rocky banks of Euphrates, the settlements on the slopes of this historical castle were submerged below the waters of Birecik Dam, without any research was carried out. We believe that this project should be completed as soon as possible, in order to survey and inventory all these artificial caves of enormous historical importance.

References

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STEWART A., 2006, Hromgla in Alan V. Murray (ed.), "The Crusades: An Encyclopaedia", vol. II, p. 607.

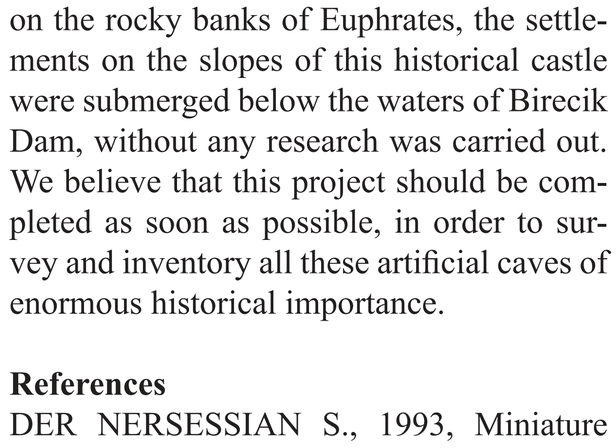


Fig. 12. Different cross reliefs on the wall of a small Armenian church in Savasan Village.



Fig. 13. Photo looking from north to south, Euphrates flowing on the left side. Rum Kale (Hromgla) Castle in the middle of photo. On the right a small branch river.