TWO ROCK DWELLED BYZANTINE CHURCHES OF SILLE / KONYA

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Abstract

Located 8 km northeast of Konya in the Central Anatolia, Sille Village has been referred in several researches over the past 250 years with its history, antique rock dwellings and churches. The surveys began with arrival of the first western traveler Niebuhr in the region in 1766 and were accelerated by studies of Gertrude Bell in 1905 and thereafter W. Ramsey in 1911. In 1950s and 1960s, many different studies were performed in relation to Sille's churches and rock dwelled structures. Although the churches in the village and the rock dwelled church in the rocks facing the village have been surveyed many times, another rock dwelled church complex is mentioned in very few sources, which is located on the ridge of a rocky wall to the east of Sille. On the other hand, the names of all churches in Sille are confused with each other in the copied reports and a different name is mentioned in each work. In this study, we drew detailed plans of those two rock dwelled churches as well as tried to name those rock dwelled churches mentioned by different names in many works and to compare all the plans drawn previously.

Introduction

Sille Village (Fig. 1) is located 4 km northwest of Konya. This village is situated in a valley between two hills made of tuffeous and volcanic conglomerate rocks and the initial date of its establishment is not known. Many Roman architectural pieces observed in the village is a proof that the village has a history of minimum 2000 years. The village is known to be an Orthodox Greek settlement for long years and an Ottoman Registration dated 1518 shows that the village had 72 Christian and 5 Muslim families (SARIKOSE, 2009). Despite increased population, this figure changed only a little for the following two centuries. In 1800s, the irregularity of tax system and immigration from neighboring villages caused acceleration of impaired balance and the Muslim population of 20 families in 1810 reached to 400 families in 1816. Numerous books and articles have been published on the rock dwelled and constructed churches of this village since the visit of first western traveler Niebuhr to the village in 1766. On the other hand, the focus of many researchers visited the region was placed on the Hagios Khariton Monastery (St. Chariton / Akmanastır) located 3 km north of Sille. The focus was always placed on Hagios Khariton Monastery although other researchers sometimes referred to those two churches that were addressed by this article. Actually, the articles of Dell 'Oca - Pavan, S. Eyice and A. De Pascale are the only ones that have a comprehensive content in regard to those two rock dwelled churches within Sille (DELL 'OCA & PAVAN, 1956; EYICE, 1966; EYICE, 1967; DE PASCALE, 2010). C. Sezer, a student of S. Eyice, carried out a detailed dissertation study on those rock dwelled churches (SEZER, 1966). Most of the other studies are just simple drafts or short notes cited one another. The issue is that, a text written by a researcher is copied by another researcher without making a search or checking as a result of so many research that references each other. As a consequence, many faults or errors have been maintained by copying from one another over years.

Our main purpose in this article was to both draw a more detailed plan of those two rock dwelled churches than ever, to summarize the studies of previous researchers and to underline different and/or incorrect aspects. On the other hand, we believe that this article would show the change underwent by Sille and those two rock dwelled churches in time.

Panagia Church

The initial known source is the work by Ulusoy in 1951 in relation to that rock dwelled church complex located on the southern side slope of Sille Village (Fig. 2 and 3). That rock dwelled church is named as "Panagia" in this work (ULUSOY, 1951). İ. H. Konyalı uses the same name and repeats what Ulusoy expressed (KONYALI, 1964). The same church is named as 'Banaya' in the work by Özönder (OZONDER, 1998). The neighborhood of this church is also currently referred to as "Panagia".

Salvatore Dell 'Oca and Mario Pavan, who were the first to draw a plan of this church after a survey in 1956, only mentioned the church as 'La Chiesa Trogloditica Cristiana'. The article of these researchers is a kind of indicator that some parts of tombs in the church was still standing/solid during that study performed 62 years ago.

Prof. Semavi Eyice surveyed the region ten years after that study and his student Cengiz Sezer surveyed that church (EYICE, 1966). When you compare two different plans of Dell 'Oca and Pavan and Cengiz Sezer, you can see that these two plans are almost the same (Fig.4).

When we surveyed Panagia Church and drew a third plan, we considered destruction of church and took care that all graves, all underground silos, all collapsed ceiling blocks are indicated in this plan with the aim of leaving a precise document to the future (Fig. 5).

There are four different names suggested by many different researchers for that rock dwelled church: Panaya, Banaya, Panagia, and Koimesis Tes Panagias. In our opinion, it is likely that the original name of the church is Panagia although it is different in most of the sources or translated into Turkish. Therefore, we prefer to use Panagia in this article.

Despite anything, having a specific name is what makes Panagia Church very special. It is because, for example even the names of rock dwelled churches in Cappadocia have been lost in time due to historical memory loss, and replaced by the names such as "Bucked" or "Apple" given to those churches by local people influenced by the frescoes inside the churches. This issue is not highly related to Greek deportation from the region because, even when there was a Christian Greek population during 19 th century, the original names of all those thousand years old and already abandoned structures had already been forgotten.

We witnessed increased and ongoing destruction of Panagia Church even during our two visits to Sille to examine the church. The frescoes which were visible in the time of Dell 'Oca and Pavan and Eyice are now fully destroyed. On the other hand, the tuffeous rock in the region is continuously broken into pieces and collapsed. The large collapse in front of the room in the east of church took place only one month before our second survey. Considering such destruction rate and assuming that Panagia Church will be fully destroyed in the future, we both conducted a detailed survey of church and documented this structure with more than 200 photographs. (Fig's 6 and 7).

Kyriacon Church

The oldest work referring to this church is the Greek work of A.M. Lebides named *"Ai en Monolitois Monai Kappadokies Kai Lukanias"* in 1899. Lebides mentions about Virgin Mary and Hagia Helena churches in the village as well as Hagios Khariton Monastery (St. Chariton / Akmanastır) located in the north of Sille. His description shows us that 'Virgin Mary Church' is Kyriacon Church that is addressed by this article, but his work includes very little detail about that church (LEBIDES, 1899). Gertrude Bell surveyed this church dug into the south wall of a rocky hill in the south of Sille Village (Fig. 8) and the rock dwelled complex next to it in 1905. Although this article of Gertrude Bell describes the church in a very detailed manner, it does not provide any information about why the name of this church is 'Kyriacon'. We can only guess that the Christian population living in the village might have told her that the name of this rock dwelled church was 'Kyriacon' when she came to Sille in 1905. Although the sketch drawn by G. Bell for this church is quite simple, it is very similar to the plan drawn by Semavi Eyice's student Cengiz Sezer around 60 years after that (Fig. 9).

On the other hand, three different rock dwelled chambers next to that small church have not been mentioned in any of the sources to date, and have been surveyed by us for the first time (Fig. 10). Probably, those dwellings are the structures of a monastery including Kyriacon Church. The lime kiln next to the church must have been built in the late period.

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Fig. 1 Location map showing Konya, Sille and rock dwelled churches of Sille (Google Earth)

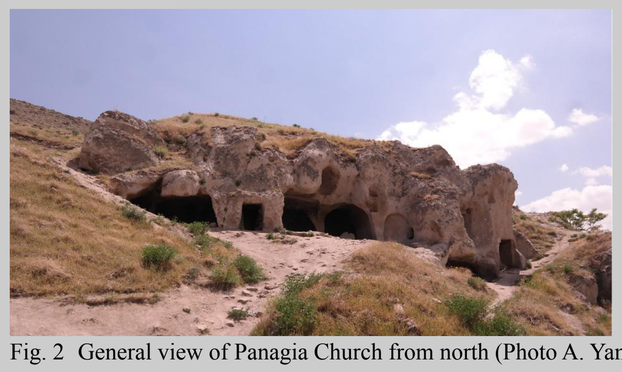


Fig. 2 General view of Panagia Church from north (Photo A. Yamaç).



Fig. 3 East part of Panagia Church, the newly collapsed part is in the middle of the photo (Photo A. Yamaç).

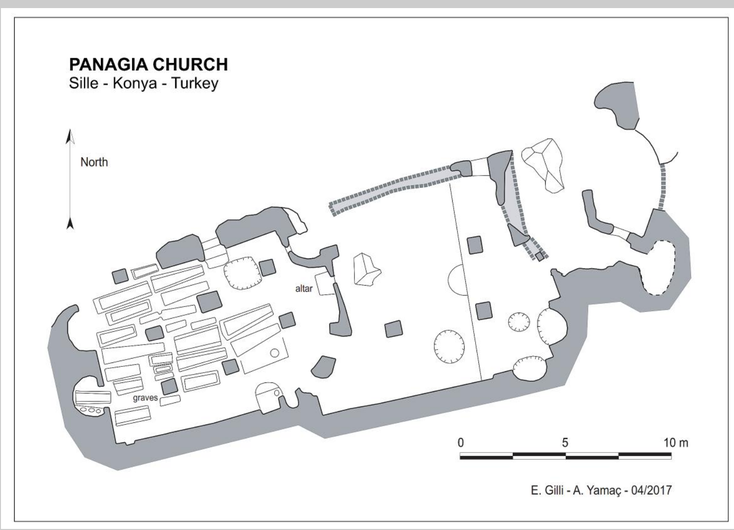


Fig. 5 Plan of Panagia Church (Drawing by E. Gilli and A. Yamaç)

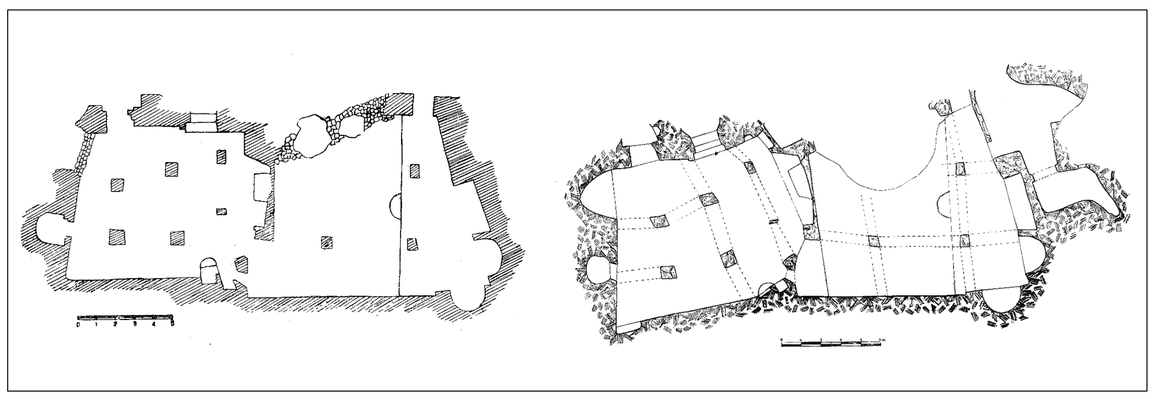


Fig. 4 Plans of Panagia Church. On the left, the plan drawn by Dell 'Oca and Pavan (DELL 'OCA & PAVAN, 1956), on the right the plan drawn by Sezer and published by Semavi Eyice (EYICE, 1966).



Fig. 6 West chamber of Panagia Church (Photo A. Yamaç).



Fig. 7 Graves on the west chamber of Panagia Church (Photo A. Yamaç).

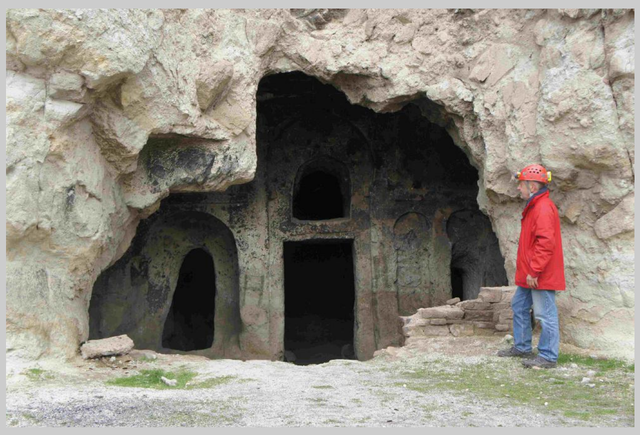


Fig. 8 Kyriacon Church (Photo E. Gilli).

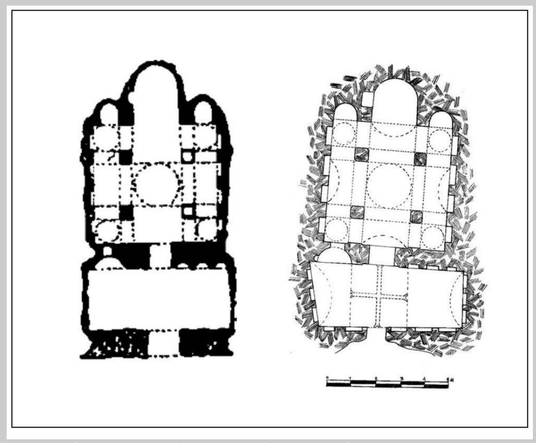


Fig. 9 Plans of Kyriacon Church. On the left, a rough sketch by Gertrude Bell (BELL, 1906), on the right the plan by Sezer (SEZER, 1966)

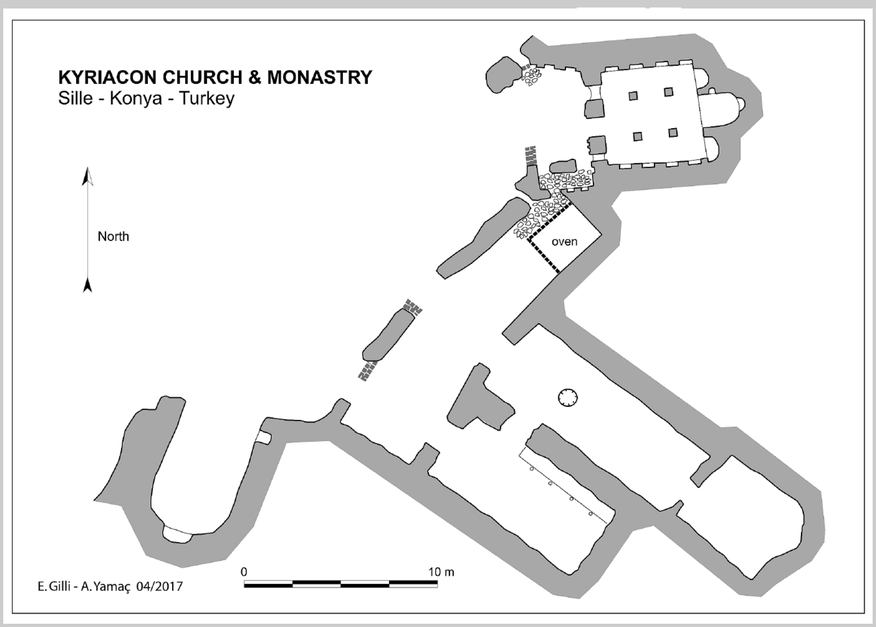


Fig. 10 General plan of Kyriacon Church and monastry buildings (Drawing by E. Gilli and A.Yamaç).