

ALAHAN MONASTERY — 1970

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As had already been decided at the end of the 1968 season, when the writer left his post as Director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, the aim of the expedition to Alahan in the summer of 1970 was twofold. The first was to excavate some of the non-religious buildings and installations associated with the day to day life of the monastic community at Alahan, and the second to continue the work of conservation, repair and consolidation which had occupied so much of our time and thought in earlier seasons. The team was partly Canadian, in recognition of the Director's change of domicile, and of the generous assistance provided by the Canada Council, the Royal Ontario Museum and the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. The Reid Charitable Trust of Great Britain was again a major contributor to our funds, and continuity was provided by the participation of experienced British personnel, all with at least one, and many with three or four seasons experience of the site. The representative of the Turkish Government was Bayan Nemika Altan, to whom I am grateful for her experience and tact in dealing with such problems as arose, and for the friendly good humour with which she carried out her duties despite a recent personal bereavement. Our workmen were the familiar companions of many hot summer months, while the local officials and tradesmen were as friendly and cooperative as always.

One of our major aims at Alahan in 1970 was to discover something about

the monks' way of life when not actively engaged in religious activities, where they lived and slept, where they stored their food and prepared it, where and how they organized a water supply (for an abundance of water was clearly a major factor in their choice of Alahan as a suitable site), and to what extent, if any, they depended on the Roman *mansio* at the foot of the monastery hill for services and supplies. As a result of our activities in July and August 1970, we may perhaps claim to have as clear a picture of how the community lived in its mountain-top fastness as is possible without the aid of literary texts, numerous inscriptions and a wealth of significant small finds.

In 1963 and 1965 we had excavated a number of rooms, all with a southern aspect, between the Basilica and the Baptistery. Steps and cuttings in the rock face to the north showed that some of these rooms were two storeyed, and this led us to suppose at first that some at least were used as a hostel. This is still possible, but it is a certainty that one large basement room with a beehive oven and provision for wooden shelves was used as a bakery, while a narrow, wedge-shaped room with low ledges along the sides and a shallow channel down the centre was a store for some liquid commodity (oil or wine perhaps) for many fragmentary vessels were found in it. To prevent rain water seeping into these rooms, the monks cut channels in the rock to divert its flow southwards down the hill side, as well as protecting the walls of the lower storey with a thick rendering of plaster.

Caves in a rocky outcrop at the west end of the site provided accommodation for the monks. Several of these are connected by short passages, and steps on the outside of the crag show that the fathers came and went at will from the lower part of the monastery to the upper, and *vice versa*. The inhabitants of the neighbouring monastery of Al Oda took to the communal life equally seriously, for they too lived cheek by jowl with their fellows in a way that must have taxed the holiness of even the most saintly.

It will have been during the building of the Basilica or of the Baptistery that stone was quarried at the site itself, and one of the largest monastic cells, (just north-east of the Basilica), probably started life as a quarry, for its floor is raised at the eastern end and scored with grooves, as if in preparation for the cutting of rectangular blocks. At the north-west corner of the cell is an *arcosolium* containing a sarcophagus with a cross carved on its lid. The cell was, however, inhabited, since there are sinkings along the opening to the cave, and these must have taken upright posts to support the beams fixed in the horizontal row of holes in the back wall. The roof was tiled, and pitched to allow for the drainage of rain water that falls abundantly between November and April in the Taurus region. Amongst the sparse small finds within the cell was some local fine ware of the sixth century, which suggests an occupation early in the history of the monastery.

Immediately east of the best preserved church was another quarry, opened possibly to provide material for constructing further buildings which never, in fact, got beyond the planning stage. Two huge monoliths were found, one of them already cut and ready for removal, with the other still attached on its lower side to the bed-rock. Perhaps they were intended for use as door jambs or lintel blocks, and they were certainly large enough for this purpose. One of them was 3.00 m. long.

The bathing establishment attached to Alahan monastery was the unexpected bonus of 1970. (Fig. 1) Monasticism in the earlier centuries was never much associated with enthusiasm for bodily cleanliness, and so our discovery of a well appointed bath-house -apparently for the use of resident monks- was quite a surprise. Part of the complex had been uncovered during 1967, but summer 1970 saw the whole area fully excavated. First of all, the barrel-vaulted passage to the spring and to the shallow cistern south of it was completely uncovered. The flagged floor had been robbed away, but a drainage channel on the east side of the passage and still covered by re-used slabs, passed southwards under paving slabs still *in situ* and finally debouched down the southern slope of the hill. A narrow corridor led into a tiny steam room (0.60 m. \times 0.95 m. in area), while hot water for bathing came from a small adjacent tank of tile and mortar construction lined with tough plaster, and heated by a miniature, single pillared hypocaust, fuelled through a stoke hole in the wall of the adjacent wood storage room. This little thermal complex, suitable for only one person at a time -in complete contrast to the huge communal bathing establishments of the secular world- seems to be unique in a monastery of such early date. Perhaps it was thought more modest too to expose one's nakedness in private. (Fig. 2).

East of the shallow cistern was another, about 1.00 m. deep when full. It was approached by steps under which was a drain leading to a soak-hole which, in its turn, flowed into a drain running below the flagged floor of a subterranean store-room. This dark chamber was lit by terra cotta lamps -of which many fragments were found- and also by a handsome bronze candle holder decorated with lotus leaf mouldings and fish. In this underground 'refrigerator' it is likely that the monks kept perishable foods and, possibly, cooled their wine. (Fig. 3). From

this room ran another drain, a stone lined channel with roughly hewn cover slabs. Through this drain the water found its way—as it still does after clearance and repair work—southwards down the steep hill.

A large monastery like Alahan needed a constant supply of water in all its parts, and a large proportion of this was supplied from the spring already described, and also from a smaller one about 100 m. to the west of the bath-house. The water was distributed by means of a continuous channel about 240 m. long and 0.20 m. wide. Except where it was cut into the solid rock, it was lined with small stone blocks, and the channel followed the contour of the hillside as best it might. It is clear that it was used over a long period, for above the floor of compressed gravel a heavy deposit of lime had accumulated throughout its length. At the necessary intervals, branches of the aqueduct turned off southwards; these subsidiaries supplied individual cells or small cisterns which were very likely used to flush the latrines at the western end of the complex.

Until 1970, all our work had been confined to the monastery site 300 m. above the main road linking Karaman and Mut, and we had ignored the Late Roman/Early Byzantine *mansio* at the foot of the hill and which had been converted during the last fifteen years or so into a small village built almost entirely of ancient material. In the north-east corner of the *mansio* we excavated an area about 13.00 m. × 7.00 m., and this proved to be a store for huge *pithoi* possibly containers for grain. Pottery, including some examples of North African and Isaurian red fine wares, suggests that this storehouse was contemporary with the monastery which it probably served. Its walls were stoutly built of worked stone facing a rubble and mortar core, and the southern section was preserved to a height of nearly 2.00 m. Small finds, not yet fully examined, contained a bronze measure tag for attachment to

a *pithos*, as well as a small coin of Honorius.

Since Alahan monastery is the most distinguished early Christian monument between St. John Studion in Istanbul and Kala'at Seman in Northern Syria, the amount of architectural conservation required had been a major preoccupation of our expedition, and needed renewal each year to prevent deterioration of the structure. In 1970 we completed a major project in this regard. It will be recalled that a colonnaded walkway connects the main buildings of the monastery and is one of its most spectacular features, and that exactly opposite the tomb of the founder, the monk Tarasis who died in 462, stands a large stone shrine of considerable artistic value. Due to the subsidence of the retaining wall on which it stands, it has been in imminent danger of collapse for the last twenty years at least, and as the shrine is composed of four superimposed blocks and is no less than fifteen tons in total weight, the problem of how best to shore it up has been anything but easy to solve. This is how it was done.

Three telegraph poles, originally hired from the postal authorities in Mut, were, lashed to the back of the shrine, so that the monument became a single entity. stout ropes and chain were then tied round the shrine, which was then anchored to the rock face some 40.00 m. to the north. By means of a winch the whole mass was moved gradually to its correct vertical position, and steel shims were wedged between the base of the shrine and the topmost course of the wall of sustension below it. A tough concrete mix was then inserted into the gap, and at last—thanks to the combined skill of our architect and the members of the self-styled *Kaldırat Şirketi*—this masterpiece of early Christian sculptural craftsmanship was restored to its original setting, just as it was when the first pilgrims made their steep ascent to the monastery some one and a half millennia ago.



Fig. 1 — The bath-house complex from the south. In foreground(rt) the entrance to cool subterranean storage chamber.



Fig. 2 — The bath - house complex from the north. Bottom centre is hot water tank with steam room beyond. Lt. is fuel store.

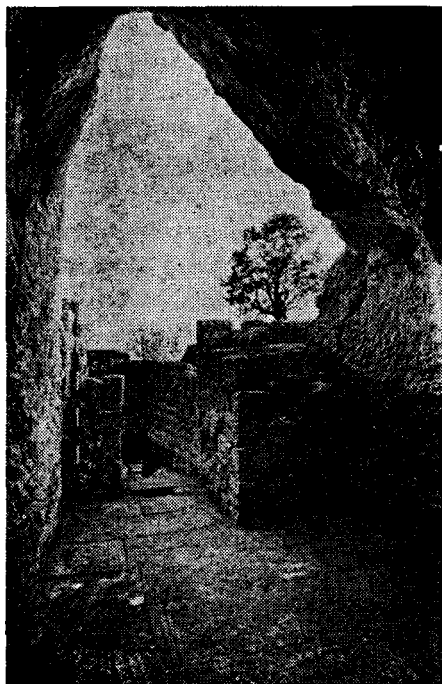


Fig. 3 — Subterranean storage chamber with paved floor from the north. N. B. Drainage channel where passage narrows to rt. of ranging - rod.