



Multicultural Architecture in Anatolia: Turkish Islam and Christianity in One Rock-Cut Complex

Anadolu'da Çok Kültürlü Yapı Toplulukları: Aynı Kaya Kompleksinde Türk-İslam ve Hristiyan Mimarisi

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Öz

Aksaray İli, Güzeyurt İlçesi, Belısırma köyünün 3km kuzeybatısında yer alan kayaya oyma yerleşke İhlara Vadisindeki Orta Çağ yerleşim mimarisine ışık tutmaktadır. Yapı topluluğunda kayaya oyma bir cami, iki kilise ve yaşam alanları vardır. Cami, Peristremma kaya yerleşmesi topluluğunun merkezindedir ve kiliseler caminin yaklaşık 50m - 250m batısında yer almaktadır. Cami Selçuklu sanatı özelliklerine sahip iken kiliseler Bizans örneklerine yakındır. Yapıların mimarisinde işlev değişikliği belirlenmemiştir. Aynı yapı topluluğunda, kayaya oyma cami ve kiliselerin bir arada bulunması ender görülür. Anadolu'da kayaya oyma cami/mescit hakkında birkaç çalışma ve değerlendirme bulunurken, kayaya oyma birçok Türk-İslam yerleşkesi henüz araştırılmış değildir. İslami yapılar genellikle merkezi alanlarda inşa edilen kâgir yapılarıdır. Kayaya oyma yerleşke Türk-İslam mimarisine yeni bir görüş mü sunmaktadır? Türk-İslam mimarisi örnekleri Aksaray İli merkezinde korunmuş, Orta Çağ Hristiyan mimarisi günümüze ulaşmamıştır. Hristiyan mimarisini kırsal yerleşimlerde tespit etmekteyiz. Buna karşın kayaya oyma Türk-İslam mimarisini kırsal yerleşimlerde nadir de olsa görmek mümkündür. Kapadokya'da kayaya oyma yerleşimler Orta Çağ mimarisinde yaygındır. Ancak aynı yapı topluluğu içinde cami ve kilisenin yer aldığı birkaç kaya yerleşimi ayakta kalabilmiştir. İhlara Vadisi Kaya Camii ve yapı topluluğu de bu yerlerden biridir. Arkeolojik ve yazılı kaynaklar, farklı din ve kültürlere sahip toplulukların, herkes için ortak bir yerleşim yeri inşa etme ihtiyacı içinde olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Osmanlı arşivi kayıtlarına göre Selime, Yaprakhisar, İhlara ve Belısırma Hristiyan ve Müslümanların olduğu karma bir nüfusa sahipti. Osmanlı tahrir defteri TT 455'e göre 1522 yılında, Selime (609), Yaprakhisar (604), İhlara (606), Belısırma (s. 605), Genetala karma (gebran ve Müslüman) nüfusa sahiptir. Aynı deftere göre, Selime'ye yakın Akhisar (634), Marmasun (625), Gerveli (607), Dadasun (618), Saruatlu (619), Kafirdinek (617), Köstesün (623), Sıvasa (s. 617) gibi yerleşkeler ise tamamen gebran nüfusa sahiptir. Nüfusun tamamının Hristiyan olduğu Gelveri, ise Şeyh Mevlâna Muhyiddin Çelebi'nin malı olarak geçmektedir. II. Keykavus'un Mülknamesinde Gelveri, Selime'nin bir köyüdür. Her ikisi de 18 Ocak 1259 (21 Muharrem 657) yılında II. Keykavus tarafından, büyük olasılıkla Bizans'a sığınması sırasında (MS 1256-61) mülk olarak satıldı. Selime MS 1284-85 (H. 683)

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ve Kerfeli MS 1290 (H. 689) yıllarında yeniden satılmıştır. Kayaya oyma caminin Selçuklu veya Beylikler dönemine ait olması göz ardı edilmemelidir. Osmanlı'nın kayaya oyulmuş camileri arasında İhlara Vadisi Kaya Camii'nin bir benzerine rastlanmaz. Bilinen Osmanlı kaya camileri, neredeyse hiç mimari tasarımı veya planı olmayan kabaca oyulmuş yapılardır. Bazıları Bizans yapılarını değiştirerek (örneğin Mamasun Pir Şemmas Tekkesi, Açıkсарay Manastırı Mescid), bazıları ise kaba kayaya oyulmuş mekanlar (örneğin Başdere, Tatların, Uçhisar) veya tek kişilik küçük odalar (örneğin Yuvaköyü, Erdemli Vadisi, Sulusaray) ve kabaca oyulmuş düzensiz mekanlar (Kayırlı Köyü, Karakaya Köyü, Sofular Köyü) şeklindedir. Sade bir mihraba sahip olan bu yapılarda ince bir bezeme de yok denecek kadar azdır. Bu örneklerin aksine İhlara Vadisi Kaya Cami, Anadolu'daki kayaya oyma modellerine göre ünik sayılabilir. Ustalar tarafından incelikle yontulmuş, Selçuklu kâgîr kubbeli mescitleriyle paralellik gösteren ve Selçuklu mimari ve tezyini üslubuyla bezenmiş bir yapıdır. Mukarnaslı mihrabı olan kubbeli kare planlı mescitler, Anadolu Selçukluları ve Beyliklerinde yaygındır. Kaya yerleşmesinin ilk etabının Bizanslılar tarafından yapıldığı kabul edilse de ne kiliseler ne de cami büyük bir değişiklik göstermemektedir. Hristiyanlar büyük olasılıkla Türklerin yönetiminde kiliseleri kullanmaya devam ederken, Müslümanlar yeni inşa ettikleri kayaya oyma camide ibadet ettiler. Osmanlı arşivi, bölgedeki Hristiyan ve Müslümanların karışık bir nüfusunu kaydeder. Melendiz çayı boyunca verimli bir vadide kurulmuş olan site tarıma ve çiftçiliğe elverişlidir. Sonuç olarak, hayatta kalmak ve süreklilik için birlikte yaşamının gerekliliği bir ihtiyaç olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Çalışma sonucunda Bizans kayaya oyma mimarisinin sürekliliği kabul edilirken, Hristiyan ve Müslümanların bir arada yaşadıkları konusunun kabul edildiğinden daha yaygın olduğu, buna karşın Selçuklu ve Osmanlıların ihtiyaç ve zevkiyle şekillendiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bizans, Türk-İslam, Selçuklu, Yerleşke, Kayaya oyma

ABSTRACT

The İhlara Valley rock-cut complex, located about 3km northwest of the village of Belisırma in Aksaray, sheds light on medieval settlement architecture. The complex consists of a mosque, two churches, and housing units with large salons, storage areas and tunnels. While the mosque is in the center of the settlement, the churches lie about 50-250m to the west. The mosque conforms to Seljuk models, the churches to Byzantine ones, and they reveal no alterations. Rock-cut settlements with churches and rock-cut mosques in medieval Anatolia are not unknown. However, few examples of mosques and churches in the same settlement or location have been preserved. Although a few rock-cut mosques in Anatolia have already been studied and evaluated, most Islamic rock-cut settlements remain unexplored. Does the rock-cut complex reveal a new aspect of Islamic rock-cut architecture? While continuity in Byzantine rock-cut architecture is supported, a greater prevalence of cohabitation of Christians and Muslims than generally admitted, in accordance with the needs and tastes of the Seljuks and Ottomans, is highlighted.

Keywords: Byzantine, Turkish Islam, Seljuk, Settlement, Rock-Cut

Introduction

The complex was registered as *Ihlara Vadisi Kaya Camii ile Peristremma Oyma Mekan ve Kilisesi (Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque and the Peristremma Hewn Dwelling and Church)* by the Konya Conservation Board of Cultural Assets as entry No. 344, dated February 24, 2012.

However, neither the mosque by Islamic art scholars nor the church by Byzantine art scholars have comprehensively been studied. Islamic buildings are typically masonry buildings built in central areas¹. The mosque, perhaps because of being a rock-cut building or located in a secluded valley, was neglected by scholars. Nevertheless, Zekai Erdal, and Ayşe Budak introduced the mosque to academia by drawing a floor plan and providing a few pictures². Their description is the only known scholarly study, although it provides no information about the settlement or the adjoining churches. Nicole Thierry and Michel Thierry worked on rock cut churches around Hasan Dağı and Ihlara leaving out churches around Yaprakhisar³. Similarly, Veronica Kalas examined Selime, and Yıldız Ötügen, and Hülya Şahna focused on the churches of Ihlara, while excluding the area between Belisırma and Yaprakhisar⁴. Although researchers and scholars of Byzantine art such as Guillaume de Jerphanion, Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, Marcel Restle, Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, Robert Ousterhout extensively studied Cappadocia, the complex is not mentioned in their work⁵. Neither is it stated in the work of M. Sacit Pekak, Tolga Uyar, Nilüfer Peker, Rainer Warland, and Nergis Ataç, in which research into Christian art and architecture under the Seljuks and Ottomans was conducted⁶. Deniz Bekir focused on

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- 1 Nevzat Topal, "Anadolu Selçukluları Devrinde Aksaray Şehri" (PhD diss., Niğde University, 2006).
 - 2 Zekai Erdal, "Aksaray'da Türk Devri Mimarisi" (PhD diss., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, 2014), 194-195; Ayşe Budak, *Mimarsız Mimarlık Kapadokya Bölgesi Kaya Oyma Camileri* (Konya: L-T Academia Yayınları, 2018):42-46.
 - 3 Nicole Thierry and Michell Thierry, *Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce: Region de Hasan Dağı* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1963).
 - 4 Yıldız Ötügen, *Ihlara* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990); Veronica Kalas, "Rock-Cut Architecture of the Peristrema Valley: Society and Settlement in Byzantine Cappadocia" (PhD diss., New York University, 2000); Hülya Şahna, "Kapadokya Bölgesi, Ihlara Vadisi'ndeki Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisi" (PhD diss., Hacettepe University, 2018).
 - 5 Guillaume de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de L'art: Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1925-1942); Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Nouvelles notes cappadociennes," *Byzantion* 33, 1 (1963); Marcel Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor* (Greenwich CT: New York Graphic Society, 1967); Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, *La Cappadoce: un siècle après G. de Jerphanion*, col. Nicole Lemaigre Demesnil (Paris: Geuthner, 2015); Robert Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community: Art, Material Culture, and Settlement in Byzantine Cappadocia* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017).
 - 6 M. Sacit Pekak, "Güzelyurt'ta (Gelveri) Bulunan Bizans/Post-Bizans Dönemi Kiliseleri1," *Hacettepe Ünivertitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10, 2 (1993); "Güzelyurt'ta (Gelveri) Bulunan Bizans/Post Bizans Dönemi Kiliseleri2," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 11, 1-2 (1994); "Kappadokia Bölgesi Osmanlı Dönemi Kiliseleri: Örnekler, Sorunlar, Öneriler," *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 26, 2 (December 2009), doi: 10.4305/METU.JFA.2009.2.13; Nilüfer Peker, "Gülşehir Karşı Kilise Duvar Resimleri," in *1. Uluslararası Sevgi Gönül Bizans Araştırmaları Sempozyumu, İstanbul, 25-28 Haziran 2007, On İkinci ve On Üçüncü Yüzyıllarda Bizans Dünyasında Değişim*, ed. Ayla Ödekan, Engin Akyürek and Nevra Necipoğlu (İstanbul: Vehbi Koç Vakfı, 2010), 572-81; Tolga B. Uyar, "Art et société en pays de Rum: les peintures byzantines du XIIIe siècle en Cappadoce" (PhD diss., Sorbonne University, 2011); Rainer Warland, *Byzantinisches Kappadokien* (Darmstadt, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2013); Nergis Ataç, "Onikinci ve Onüçüncü Yüzyıllarda Anadolu'da

Islamic architecture in Aksaray but limited his comments to its castle⁷.

Although their construction dates are debated, rock-cut settlements with churches and rock-cut mosques in medieval Anatolia are not unknown. However, only a few examples of mosques and churches in the same settlement or location have been preserved (e.g., Tatların Church I and II and Tatların Kaya Camii, Mamasun rock-cut churches and Mamasun Tekkesi, Konya Akmanastır churches and maşjid, Açıksaray rock-cut churches and maşjid). Except for the Tatların Church II (AD 1215), none of these mosques and churches sharing the same complex can be securely dated⁸. Three mosques are altered Byzantine structures: a mihrab and rooms added to Mamasun Pir Şemmas Tekkesi, a mihrab added to Açıksaray winery, and a mihrab added to the narthex of Açıksaray Monastery⁹. Although they all share similar features, they differ mostly in detail. Topography, climate, trends in taste and needs, as well as war or administrative conditions may influence architectural design.

Topography and Historical Background

The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, the Church of Niches, and Church No. 2 form the main religious buildings of a rock-cut complex located about 3km northwest of the village of Belisırma, and 5km southeast of the village of Yaprakhisar in Aksaray (F.1-2). The complex itself is a four-floor rock-cut settlement carved on the slope at an altitude of 50-60m from the Melendiz River. It lies along a row of rocks facing the river and is composed of a group of rooms, tunnels, dwellings, storage, and religious buildings. The structures must be part of a rural settlement of medieval Aksaray.

Bizans-Selçuklu Kültürel İlişkileri ve Yerel (Yerleşik) Sanat” (PhD diss., Hacettepe University, 2021).

7 Bekir Deniz, “Aksaray ve Çevresindeki Türk Devri Yapıları Rehberi,” (PhD diss., Ankara University, 1976); “Aksaray Kalesi,” *Selçuklu Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (2017).

8 For Tatların Church II and its inscription see Nilay Çorağan Karakaya, *Tatların: I ve II no’lu Kiliselerin Duvar Resimleri* (Ankara: Pencüse Dijital, 2014): 47. For churches under Seljuks see Uyar, “Les peintures byzantines du XIIIe siècle”; Ataç, “Bizans-Selçuklu Kültürel İlişkiler”.

9 Fatmağül Öztürk, “A Comparative Architectural Investigation of the Middle Byzantine Courtyard Complexes in Açıksaray-Cappadocia: Questions of Monastic and Secular Settlement,” (PhD diss., METU, 2010); “Transformation of the ‘Sacred’ Image of a Byzantine Cappadocian Settlement,” in *Architecture and landscape in medieval Anatolia, 1100-1500*, ed. Patricia Blessing and Rachel Goshgarian (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 147-148; Budak, *Mimarsız Mimarlık*, 326.

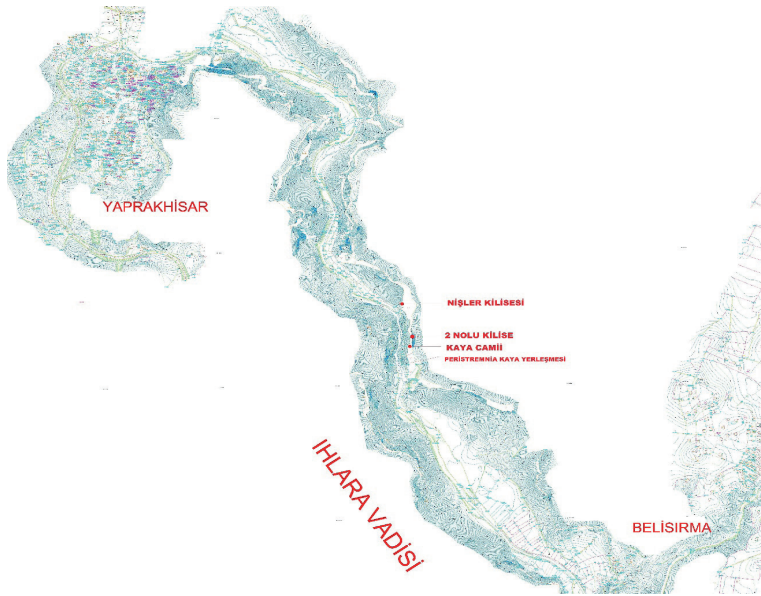


Figure 1: The Ihlara Valley (The Konya Conservation Board of Cultural Assets)

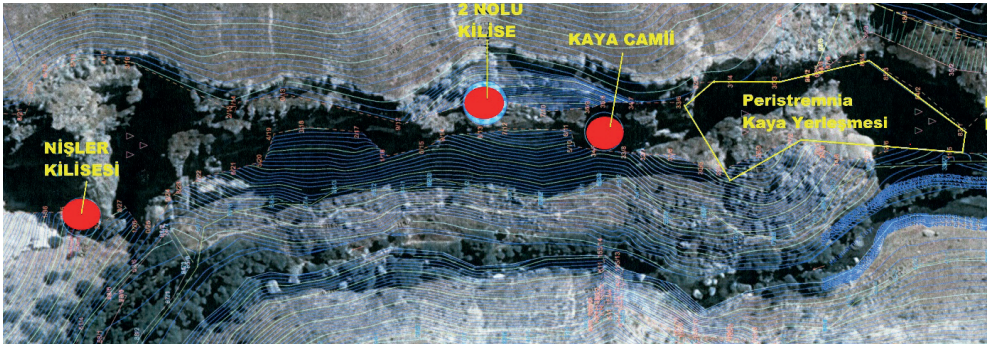


Figure 2: Panoramic view of the rock-cut complex (Google Earth, 05.02.2022)

Aksaray was an ancient city that was known as Nenessos by the Hittites; as Garsaura, Colonia Claudia Archelais by the Kingdom of Cappadocia, Romans, and Byzantines; as Koloneia Archelais, Taxara, Axara by the Byzantines; and as Taxara, Aksara, Aksray by the Seljuks, the Beyliks and the Ottomans¹⁰. According to Byzantine medieval chronicles, it was a prosperous town in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The town was captured from the Byzantines by the

10 Paul Wittek, "Von der byzantinischen zur türkischen Toponymie," *Byzantion* 10, (1935), 48-49; İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı, *Abideleri ve Kitabeleri ile Niğde, Aksaray Tarihi* (İstanbul: Fatih Yayınları, 1974); Friedrich Hild and Marcell Restle, *Kappadokien (Kappadokia, Charsianon, Sebasteia und Lykandos); Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 2, Hrsg. Herbert Hunger (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981): 207-08.

Seljuks and was named Aksara until 1476¹¹.

In the center of Aksaray it is notable that, while medieval Christian masonry buildings have not survived, Islamic ones have been preserved. Away from the city center, in rural areas, it is mainly rock-cut settlements with ecclesial structures that can be observed. Islamic structures in rock-cut settlements, however, were not uncommon. The rock-cut mosque in the Ihlara Valley is one of these unique buildings. The complex boasts Byzantine rock-cut architecture, but the mosque's structure and its decoration point to Seljuk art. Is the complex a Seljuk settlement? Although archaeological and written sources provide no certain conclusion, the architecture suggests a Byzantine-Seljuk synthesis. The question is, at a location with a Christian majority, how were the Muslim Seljuks settled and how was this mosque integrated?

Located about 20km southeast of Aksaray, the settlement lies alongside the Melendiz River. Situated between Belisırma and Yaprakhisar villages, the complex is next to Selime, Gelveri and Ihlara. While the region is identified in Arab, Seljuk, and Ottoman sources, it is barely so in Byzantine sources, where it is associated with Gregory of Nazianzus. Scholars, according to the letters of Gregory of Nazianzus, pinpointed Gelveri as Karbala, neighbor to Arianus, the birthplace of the saint¹². According to some scholars, in his text, he describes the Ihlara Valley but does not mention its name¹³. Belisırma and Yaprakhisar lie within the Ihlara Valley. Belisırma is recorded by some scholars as Peristremma, and Yaprakhisar as Ibrasa¹⁴. However, neither these nor Selime are recorded in Byzantine sources. Khoniates states that “Mas`ud, had set camp at Taxara, ancient Koloneia”¹⁵. Akropolites no longer uses Koloneia for Aksaray, but instead names it as Axara. What is remarkable about Axara in Akropolites is the union of the Nicean Empire and the Sultanate of Rum against the Tatars in the battle of Aksaray in 1256. When the Tatars plundered most of the Muslim land and were encamped at Aksaray, the sultan appointed the recently refuged Michael Komnenos “to be commander of the Christian forces”¹⁶. Although Akropolites refers to them as “Christian forces,” other sources name them “Persians” or “Romans,” and scholars suggest they were Greek subjects of the sultan¹⁷. Pachymeres refers to the war but does not mention the commandment of the

11 Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*; Niketas Khoniates, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulas (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984): 31; Kerimüddin Mahmud-i Aksarâyî, *Müsameretü'l Ahbar*, trans. Mürsel Öztürk (Anakara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000); Georges Akropolites, *George Akropolites, the History*, trans. Ruth Macrides (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 315.

12 Hans Rott, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler aus Pisidien, Pamphylien, Kappadokien und Lykien* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1908): 281; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Briefe Gregor von Nazianz*, ed. Paul Gallay (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969): 146; ep. 203-05; Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*, 90, 151; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, 201.

13 Rott, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler*, 270.

14 Levides (Λεβίδης), *Αί εν μονολίθοις μοναί τής Καππαδοκίας και Λυκαονίας* (εν Κωνσταντινουπόλει: Τύπος Αλεξάνδρου Νομισματίδου, 1899): 117; Rott, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler*, 264; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, 254-57.

15 Khoniates, *Annals*, 31.

16 Akropolites, *The History*, 315.

17 Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina Historia*, ed. Ludwig Schopen (Bonn: Impensis Ed. Weberi, 1829-55), I: 58.19-24; Georges Pachymères, *Relations historiques*, ed. Albert Failler (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984-2000), I: 45,

Christian forces while at the same time noting the families accompanying Michael Komnenos¹⁸. Other Byzantine sources list Aksaray as a metropolitan see. In the *Notitiae* of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries Aksaray is referred to as Koloneia, a metropolitan see with or without suffragans¹⁹. Nevertheless, neither the Aksaray settlements nor their suffragans are named in any Byzantine sources.

In the Arabic sources such as Al-Mas'ūdī *Kitab-üt-Tenbih v-el-İşraf* and Ibn Hurdâzbih's *Kitâbü'l-Mesâlik ve'l-memâlik* of the ninth and tenth centuries, Selime (Salambria, Salaberina, Salamun) and the Ihlara Valley (Peristremma) are listed as *Vadi Salamun* (هرواح) and Gelveri as *Falu'ari* (*Kalu'ari*)²⁰. In the history of the Seljuks of Aksarâyî, Selime is noted as Kale-i Sâlime, Sâlime, Vilâyet-i Sâlime, and in the *Mülkname* of Keykavus II, dated AD 1259, Gelveri is recorded as Kerfeli²¹. According to the written sources, Selime was a *nahiye* (district) and Gelveri was its village under the Seljuks. In the *Mülkname* of Keykavus II, Gelveri is a village of Selime²². They both were sold as an estate by Keykavus II on January 18, 1259 (21 Muharrem 657), most likely during his refuge (AD 1256-61) in Byzantium²³. The buyer was named as Ebi'l-Mahamid 'nasiru emri'l-mu'minin' (the runner of support to the emir of the faithful)²⁴. He was the governor (*subaşı*) of Iconium known as Ebi'l-Mahamid Mehmed bin el-Hüseyin bin Ebi'l-Fevâris. A few decades later, Selime and Gelveri were sold again, Selime in AD 1284-85 (H. 683) and Kerfeli in AD 1290 (H. 689) during the reign of Sultan Mesud III²⁵. But the document for the second sale of Selime and Gelveri does not provide details about the land boundaries. The same document mentions Birisima as a village of Gelveri. At the end of the thirteenth century, Aksarâyî stated that the Selime Castle belonged to him, and the

11.4–12; Dimitri Korobeinikov, "Orthodox Communities in Eastern Anatolia in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.1 Part 1: The Two Patriarchates: Constantinople and Antioch," *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 15, 2 (2003), 197, n.4, doi: 10.1080/0950311032000117494.

18 Pachymères, *Relations historiques*, I. 45, II. 4-12.

19 Jean Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Paris: l'Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1981): 377, 381, 388; Korobeinikov, "Orthodox Communities," 201, n. 67.

20 Mas'ūdī, *Kitâb al-tanbîh wa-al-ışraf*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, *BGA* 8 (Lugduni Batavorum: Brill, 1967): 178; Ibn Hurdâzbih (Ebû'l Kasım Ubeydullah b. Abdullah), *Kitâbü'l-Mesâlik ve'l-memâlik (Kitâb al-Kharâj)*, trans. Michael Jan de Goeje (BGA 6), (Lugduni Batavorum: Brill, 1967): 74, 80; Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*, 120; Hild and Restle, *Kappadokien*, 201, 270; Irène Beldiceanu-Steinherr, "La géographie historique de l'Anatolie centrale d'après les registres ottomans, communication du 30 avril 1982," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 126e année, 3 (1982), 493.

21 Halil Sahillioğlu, "İkinci Keykâvus'un bir Mülknâmesi," *Vakıflar Dergisi* 8 (1969), 60; Aksarâyî, *Müsameretü'l Ahbar*, 98, 205, 247-48.

22 Sahillioğlu, "Keykâvus'un bir Mülknâmesi," 60.

23 The buyout document (AD 1284-85, AD 1290) is called Şiraname this time because, being a second sale, it was no longer a miri (state treasury) property (Karaman Evkafi (foundation registration), TK 564). For the translation and notes, see Sahillioğlu, "Keykâvus'un bir Mülknâmesi,".

24 Sahillioğlu, "Keykâvus'un bir Mülknâmesi," 60.

25 TK 564, vrk. 77; Feridun Nafiz Uzluç, *Fatih Devrinde Karaman Eyâleti Vakıfları Fihristi* (Ankara: Doğuş Limited Şirketi Matbaası, 1958): 66, n. 3, 5; Nicoara Beldiceanu and Irène Beldiceanu-Steinherr, "Recherches sur la province de Qaraman au XVIe Siècle. Étude et actes," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 11, 1 (1968), 16; Sahillioğlu, "Keykâvus'un bir Mülknâmesi," 58-60.

Tatar troops of Ali Melik found refuge there since they had good relations with him²⁶. Selime is mentioned five times in his book²⁷. It is recorded in the same text that Bedreddin, son of Bugdin, found refuge in the caves of Ihlara (هرواح) (Helvabre, Haliyre, Hilize, Hilie) in AD 1298 and AD 1299²⁸. Ibrahim Hakkı Konyalı, however, reads the name هرواح as Helvabdere (Samsa/Helvadere)²⁹.

After the Seljuks and Karamanis, the region is well-recorded under the Ottomans. Kerfeli of the Seljuks is recorded as Gerveli, Gölveri, and Gelveri, and Salma as Silme, Selme, and Selime. While Selime was a nahiye (district) under the Seljuks it later became a village of Gelveri and both are listed under the Bekir Nahiyesi. In the fifteenth century, Selime was registered in Karaman Evkafı TK 564 (AD 1476) as Silme, a property of Sinan Beg in 1284, and Gerveli as the property of Paşa Çelebi bin Muhsin in AD 1285³⁰. In the sixteenth century, in the Aksaray Mufassalı TT 455 (AD 1582), Selime was recorded as the *Eşküncül* of Hamza the son of Sinan, Belisırma as Belirema a *waqf* of the madrasa of Dârü'z-zâkirîn in Niğde, and Gervele as the property of Mevlana Şeyh Muh'id-din and of the heirs of Mevlana Muhsin Çelebi. Selime along with Gelveri, Belisırma, Yaprahisar and Ihladere were recorded as villages of Bekir Nahiyesi³¹. Ottoman sources provide more information about the population and their economic activities, thanks to the Ottoman tax registry. According to the TT 455, Selime, Yaprahisar, Genatala, Ihlara, and Belisırma had a mixed population of non-Muslims and Muslims³². On the other hand, Gelveri's inhabitants were all non-Muslims. The village was recorded in the same dossier as the property of Şeyh Mevlana Muhyiddin Çelebi³³. In the same register, the neighboring villages of Selime, all of which were non-Muslim settlements, are listed as Akhisar, Marmasun, Dadasun, Saruatlu, Kafirdinek, Köstesün, Sivasa³⁴. These settlements must have provided devshirmes, since Aksaray was one of the main centers where the Ottomans levied them³⁵. The Ottoman registration reports do show that some deshirmes

26 Aksarâyî, *Müsameretü'l Ahbar*, 207.

27 Aksarâyî, *Müsameretü'l Ahbar*, 98, 205, 247-48.

28 Aksarâyî, *Müsameretü'l Ahbar*, 204-05.

29 Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*, 120, 1838.

30 TK 564, Ankara Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü, Kuyud-i Kadime, Karaman Evkafı 564, 90b; Doğan Yörük, "Tımara Çevrilen Vakıf ve Mülkler (1476-1483)," *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları (HÜTAD)* 6 (2007), 69.

31 TT 455, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Tapu Tahrir, Aksaray Mufassalı 455, (599); TK 564, 90b, vrk. 77; TK 131, Ankara Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü, Kuyud-i Kadime, Aksaray Mufassalı 131, Vrk. 115; Uzluk, *Karaman Eyâleti Vakıfları*, 66, n. 3; Sahillioğlu, "Keykâvus'un bir Mülknâmesi," 60-62; Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*, 607-08, 627-28; Doğan Yörük, "XVI.Yüzyılda Aksaray Sancağı" (PhD diss., Selçuk University, 2022).

32 TT 455, 609 (Selime), 604 (Yaprahisar), 606 (Ihlara), 605 (Belisırma); 611 (Genatala) Yörük, "Aksaray Sancağı," 66, n. 324-25.

33 Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*, 607-08; TT 455, 607 (Gerveli) Yörük, "Aksaray Sancağı," 66.

34 TT 455, 634 (Akhisar) (s. 634), 625 (Marmasun), 618 (Dadasun), 619 (Saruatlu), 617 (Kafirdinek), 623 (Köstesün), 617 (Sivasa) Yörük, "Aksaray Sancağı," 66, n. 322.

35 Speros Vryonis, "Seljuk Ghulams and Ottoman Devshirmes, *Der Islam*," 41 (1965), 242; Yörük, "Aksaray Sancağı," 66.

escaped and returned home³⁶. So it would seem that regulations were being enforced to maintain control³⁷. Such regulation started well before the Ottomans but sometimes the enforcement was discretionary, as in the example of the Islamized Christian, Zainuddin Bişara, once he overshadowed the sultan³⁸.

Nevertheless, Christian communities continued to thrive, and Kyrillos IV, Metropolitan of Konya (AD 1750-81), pinpointed Ihlara as Chlara, on his map dated 1812. He stated that the valley maintained thousands of churches. Kiepert, reproducing from the map of Kyrillos, noted Selme, Irchala and Carbala. William Francis Ainsworth refers to Salmadder (Selime?) as being remarkable for its numerous grottoes, to Belistermeh (Belisırma) as being a very populous site with ruins of dwelling houses and arches of stonework, and to Gelvedery (Gelveri) as being a large colony of Christians living in caves³⁹. On the other hand, Anastasiou M. Levides named Belisırma as Peristremma,⁴⁰ and Ibrahim Hakkı Konyalı, in his book of Aksaray, describes *Belisarama*, *Selme*, and *Silme* and mentions two undecorated churches between Yapraphisar and Belisırma⁴¹. However, he does not provide any description of these churches. In the twentieth century, Hans Rott, and William M. Ramsay and Gertrude Lowthian Bell provided the first details of the medieval architecture of the region⁴². However, the Peristremma complex remained unexplored.

Architecture

The Settlement

The Ihlara valley rock-cut complex is located about 3km northwest of Belisırma village in Aksaray. The complex consists of a mosque, two churches, and housing units with large salons, storage areas and tunnels. While the mosque is in the center of the settlement, the churches lie about 50-250m to the west. The settlement is a four-floor rock-cut complex consisting of a mosque, two churches, dwellings, storage rooms and tunnels (**F.3**). The mosque is at the center of the settlement. About 50m west of the mosque is Church No. 2, and 250m west is the Church of Niches.

36 Yörük, "Aksaray Sancağı," 67.

37 Ibn Bîbî, *El evemirü 'l-ala 'iye fi 'l-umuri 'l-ala 'iye: (Selçukname)*, trans. M. Öztürk (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1996), I: 283-85; Yörük, "Aksaray Sancağı," 66-67.

38 Vryonis, "Gulams and Devshirmes," 236; Ibn Bîbî, *Ala 'iye*, I, 283.

39 William Francis Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia* (London: John W. Parker, 1842), I: 201.

40 Levides, *μova*, 117.

41 Konyalı, *Niğde, Aksaray*, 1842-43.

42 Hans Rott, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler aus Pisidien, Pamphylien, Kapodokien und Lykien* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1908); William M Ramsay and Gertrude Lowthian Bell, *The Thousand and One Churches* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909).

The Peristremma Complex

The first floor is at the southern corner of the settlement. The ground floor is reached through the front of a tunnel on the north/south axis of the first floor. The stone rake of the entrance is conserved in-situ, but the entrance is filled with earth and debris. The second floor is reached through the north corner of the tunnel. This floor has a tunnel on the north/south axis about 20m long, 1.5m high and 0.5m wide. At the west end of this tunnel, an opening leads to the outdoors. After a few steps to the north, there is the guard room. To the north of this room, a cross room is hewn. There are openings on the north and east arms of this room. Through the north arm door, a short corridor leads into the dovecote. A domed room is reached through the east arm door. To the northeast of this room there is a square depot room, and along the southern wall of the mid-room a 3m wide cellar can be found. An entrance to the east of the cellar leads to the upper floor. The upper floor is reached through a steep passage. A room and a passage on its northern corner lead to the guard room. A large basilica hall with a group of rooms and storage juxtaposed to the Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque forms the core of the settlement (F.4). To the west and east are other halls with groups of rooms (F.5) and to the westernmost point there is the Church of Niches. About 20m to the east of the church there is a flat apse room with benches on the north and south of the wall.



Figure 3: The Ihlara Valley complex (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 4: The Peristremma complex (Photo: Author, 2022)

Figure 5: The vestibule of the large salon of the Peristremma complex (Photo: Author, 2022)

The Church of Niches (Nişler Kilisesi)

The church was registered as *Nişler Kilisesi* (Church of Niches) by the Konya Conservation Board of Cultural Assets as entry no. 344, dated February 24, 2012.

On the eastern side of the complex, the church is carved out of a rock block at an altitude of 15m on the slope of the valley (Coordinates: 38.2856,34.2787) (F.6). Its distance to the rock-cut mosque is about 200m to the west. It is a typical single-nave basilica, 11.90x5.05m, with a narthex to the west of it (F.7-16). To the east of the naos is a single semi-circular apse, and to the west of the naos a single door opens to a barrel-vaulted corridor leading to the narthex. The naos and narthex are semi-circular barrel-vaulted, and the apse is roofed by a semi-dome.

The naos is reached through an arched opening in the east wall of the narthex. It is a rectangle on its east/west axis; its dimensions are approximately 9.10x5.05m. Eight deep lunettes, four on the north and four on the south walls, form an arcade of carved pilasters and simple capitals⁴³. Each lunette has a bench: the northeastern bench circuits the lunette and faces a niche carved on the east wall; the others face the south and north walls, but some are damaged. The northeastern and southeastern lunettes close to the apse are larger than the rest. The northeastern lunette has a niche on its eastern wall. The west wall consists of a wide arched opening, leading to the narthex. Above this entrance, a wide window is carved. The door on the east wall of the naos has a similar wide arch opening to the apse.

Two steps above the naos level, the apse has three narrow semi-circular arched niches, about 1x 0.5m starting about 1m above floor level. There is no sign of an altar, but the low chancel is intact and supports the apsis arch on pilasters and capitals. The chancel is framed by a slender rectangle and has an opening to the naos. There are signs of carved hallows on each side of the pilasters, apparently a curtain or a wooden raised slab.

43 The lunettes have different dimensions.

To the west of the naos a wide arch leads to the narthex. The elongated rectangle narthex on the north/south axis precedes the naos. The narthex has dimensions of 2.10x10.70m, including the tomb chamber. To the south of the narthex an arch leads to the tomb chamber, the dimensions of which are 2.07x2.58m, and it maintains five hewn tombs on an east/west axis. To the north of the narthex, another wide arch leads to a rectangular room. The northern wall of this room is extensively damaged and mostly destroyed. There is no clear evidence of its function.

The entrance to the church is through a highly articulated façade to the west of the narthex. The façade is composed of three registers of horseshoe-arched niches. The lower register contains the entrance and two large windows to its west and south. The entrance has a semi-circular arch supported by two square columns, forming a rectangular frame by integrating into the second register. The lower sections of both windows are damaged. In the second register, there is an arcade composed of two blind niches on each side of the two windows above the entrance. They all have semi-circular arches supported by plain square columns with triangular bases. The third register has an arcade of ten blind niches. All niches have a semi-circle arch supported by simple slender columns with slab capitals. The upper section of this register is mostly damaged. The westernmost part of the facade is mostly destroyed.

The decoration in the church is based mainly on simple red paint and articulated walls and façades by different sizes of niches. Vestiges of red paint on white plaster can be observed. Fragments of ornaments and red crosses on the apse, naos and narthex wall are still preserved. Some ornaments and crosses in red are painted directly onto the rock. The overall decoration, however, is simple and mostly articulated with an arcade of lunettes, simple columns, and slab capitals/bases. On the other hand, rows of niches with horseshoe-arches are extensively used on the facade. The entrance to the church is framed in a rectangle formed by jambs and column bases. No molding or recess is observed.



Figure 6: The Church of Niches and side rooms (Photo: Author, 2022)

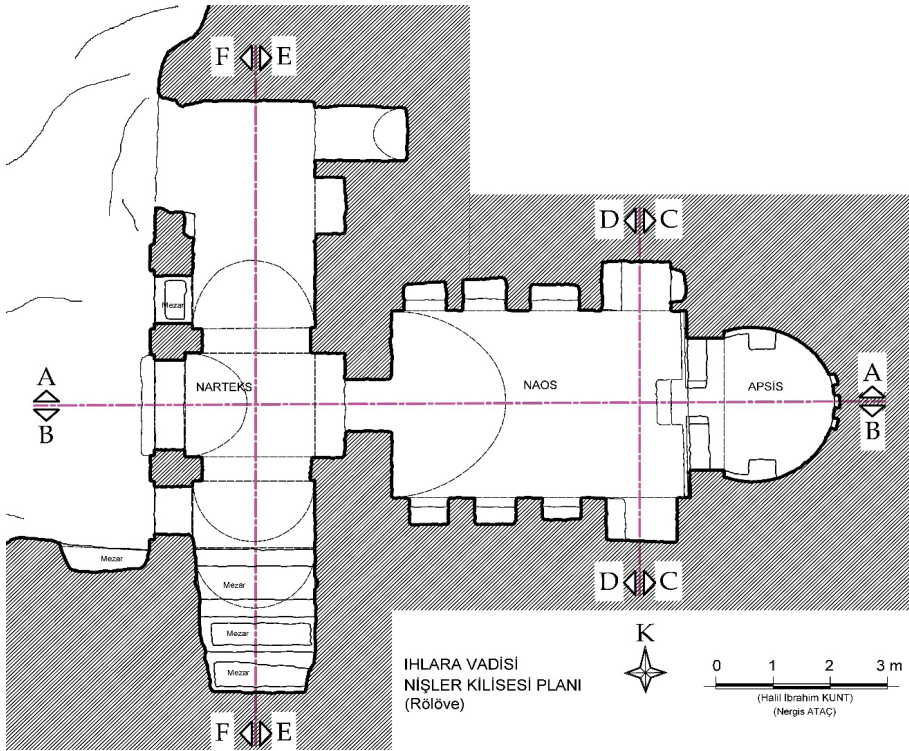


Figure 7: The Church of Niches, plan (Drawing: Author, 2022)

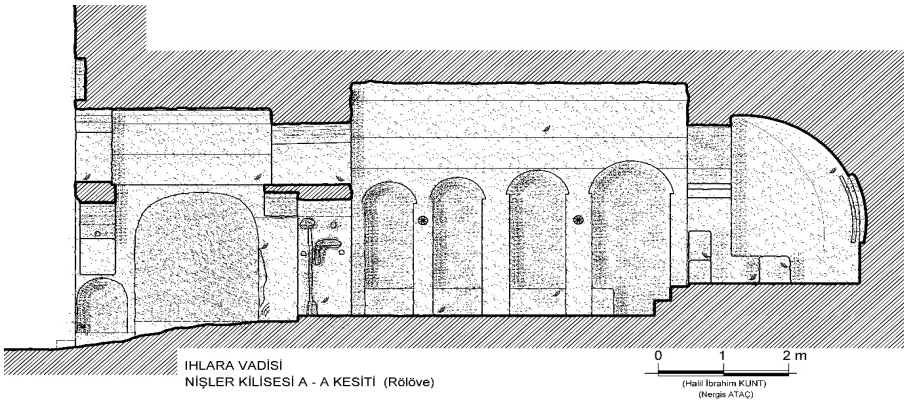


Figure 8: The Church of Niches, A – A section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

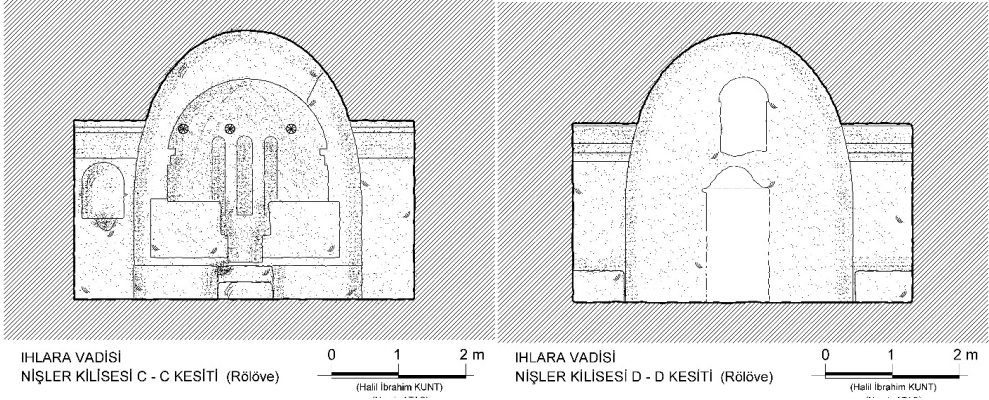


Figure 9: The Church of Niches, C - C section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

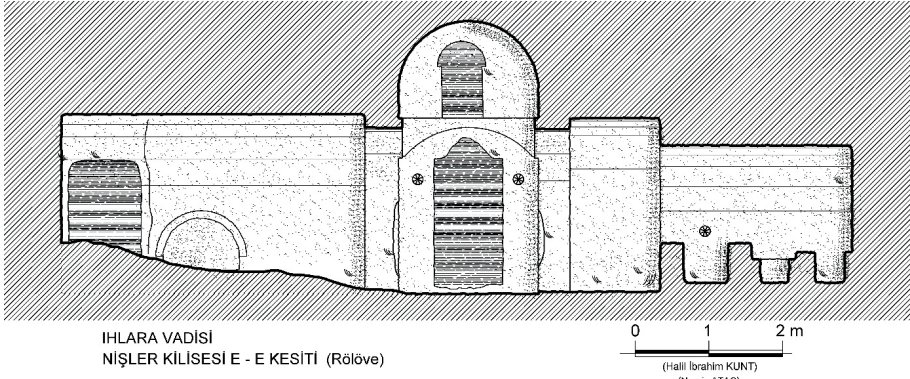


Figure 10: The Church of Niches, E - E section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

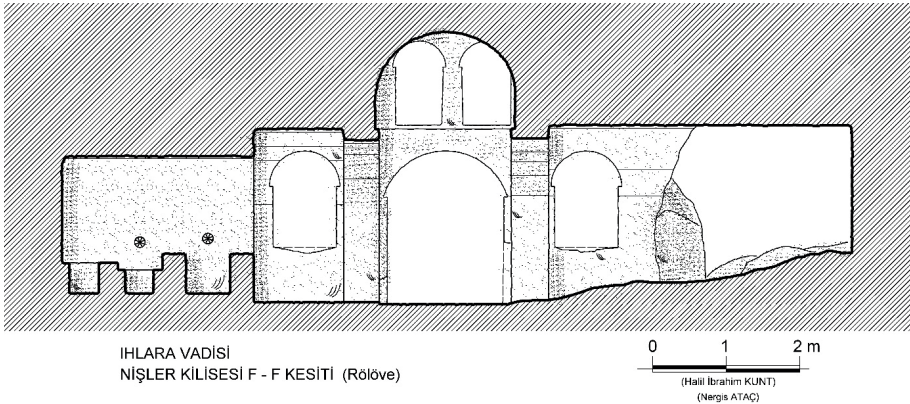
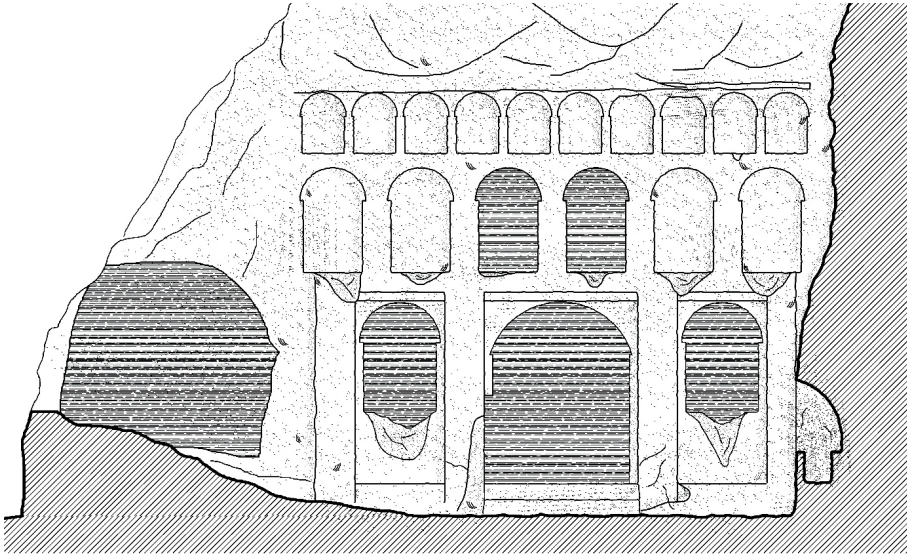


Figure 11: The Church of Niches, F - F section (Drawing: Author, 2022)



IHLARA VADİSİ
NİŞLER KİLİSESİ CEPHE GÖRÜNÜŞÜ
(Rölöve)

0 1 2 m
(Halil İbrahim KUNT)
(Nergis ATAÇ)

Figure 12: The Church of Niches, facade (Drawing: Author, 2022)



Figure 13: The Church of Niches, facade (Photo: Author, 2022)

Figure 14: The Church of Niches, east wall and apsis (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 15: The Church of Niches, narthex door (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 16: The Church of Niches, north wall (Photo: Author, 2022)

Church No. 2 (Kilise 2)

The church was registered as *Kilise 2 (Church No. 2)* by the Konya Conservation Board of Cultural Assets as entry no. 344, dated February 24, 2012.

The structure is carved out of a rock block at an altitude of 70m on the slope of the valley (Coordinates: 38.2842,34.2790) (F.17). Its distance to the Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque is about 80m to the west. Its irregular plan, form and orientation of the apse casts doubt about the function of the rooms. Although open to debate, the ecclesial function is supported by the presence of a funerary room, vestiges of a possible templon and a Malta Cross painted on the tympanum of the entrance door. The side room appears to have been a private chapel. The structure is at the core of a small two-three floor complex. Today, the entrance is reached through rock rubble and an opening on the southwest, rather than the almost destroyed stairs of the original entrance on the south. The original entrance is on the south wall of the church. It is a rectangle door with a semi-arc tympanum. The ground floor entrance is closed with rocks.

The church is a single nave rectangle on its northeast/southwest axis; its dimensions are 8.20x2.40m (F.18-27). To the northeast of the naos is a single flat apse. An arch on the north wall of the naos leads to a large room, and a door on the southeast opens to another large room. A rough masonry wall was built at a later stage at the east northern part of the naos, between the naos and the bema. To the southwestern part of the naos wall there is a door leading to a large room. The rectangle door is framed by a triple molding of different width and height.

The bema is at the northeast of the naos. Its northwestern part was built with mortar at a later stage. There is evidence of a templon, but the remains are insufficient to draw its form. There is no sign of an altar, except for evidence of illegal digging at the middle of the floor of the apse. The east wall of the apse is flat, and its ceiling is barrel-vaulted. There are no signs of niches nor benches or windows. Many holes were carved for beams and door slabs at later stages, which show alteration most likely in use of function.

The room to the north of the nave has a flat ceiling, and its north wall facing the cliff is destroyed. This room was originally attached to the nave by a large arch. At a later stage, however, half of this arch, which forms the southern part of the wall between the nave and this room, was closed with a wall built with rough stones and soft mortar. The built wall extends at a right angle to the middle of the naos, but it is also partially destroyed. A small niche beneath the western part of the arch is carved out on the southwest wall of the room.

The western room is connected to the church by a finely carved frame of triple molding. It is a large square room roofed by a flat ceiling. A small door leads to a short tunnel that was left incomplete. The pointed arch of the door evinces a later stage for the tunnel.

A funerary room, 1.65x1.90m, on the first floor maintains two carved tombs. Its façade is destroyed, and the room is inaccessible, for security reasons.

Decoration in the church or side rooms is composed of wall paintings and molding. Although residues of wall plaster and paintings are detected, forms or colors cannot be drawn out. While the church and the northern room are plastered and painted, the southern room shows no residue of paint. The red paint Malta Cross on the tympanum of the church entrance is the only preserved painting.



Figure 17: The Peristremma complex and Church No. 2 (Photo: Author, 2022)

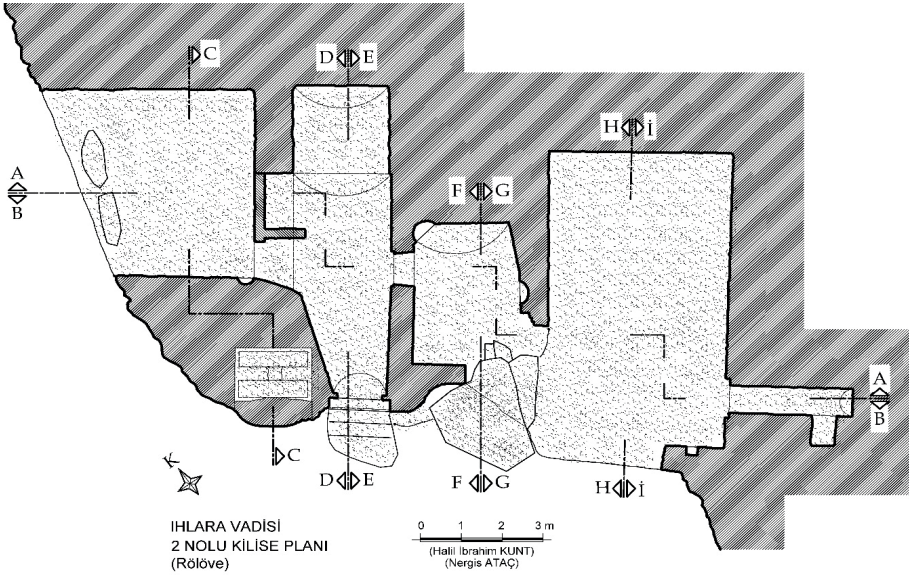


Figure 18: Church No. 2, plan (Drawing: Author, 2022)

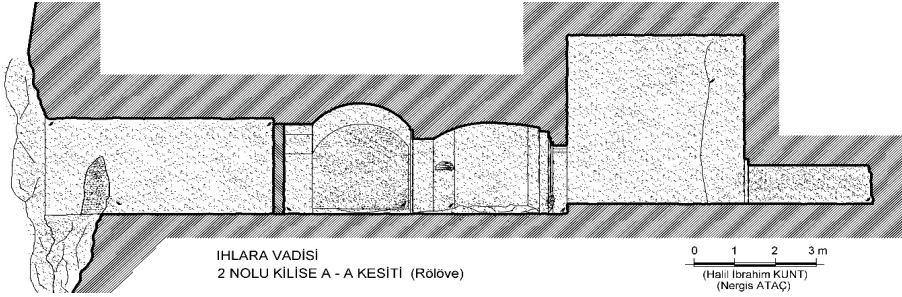


Figure 19: Church No. 2, A – A section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

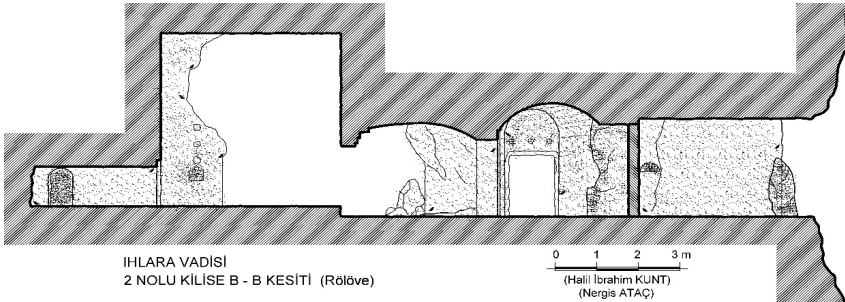


Figure 20: Church No. 2, B – B section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

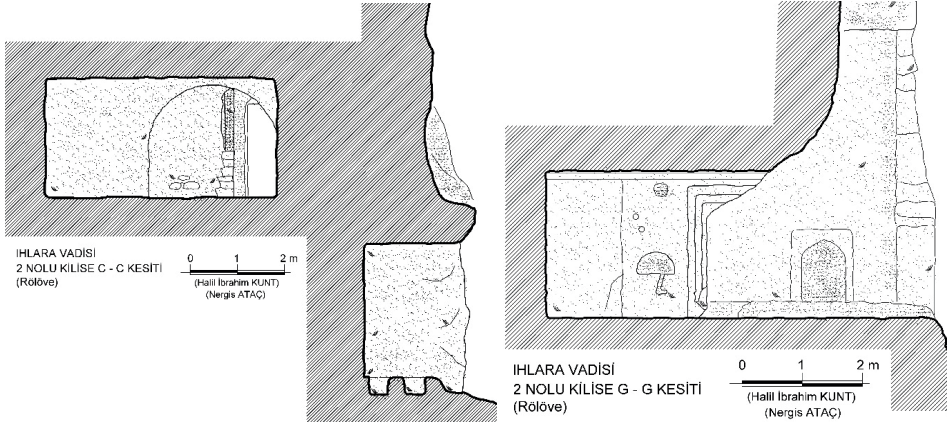


Figure 21: Church No. 2, C – C section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

Figure 22: Church No. 2, G – G section (Drawing: Author, 2022)



Figure 23: Church No 2, the tomb chamber and the church entrance (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 24: Church No 2, tympanum, Malta cross (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 25: Church No 2, southeast wall opening (Photo: Author, 2022)

Figure 26: Church No 2, east wall (Photo: Author, 2022)

Figure 27: Church No 2, paint and plaster (Photo: Author, 2022)

The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque

The mosque was registered as *Ihlara Vadisi Kaya Camii* by the Konya Conservation Board of Cultural Assets as entry no. 344, dated February 24, 2012.

Forming the core of the complex, the mosque is carved on a rock-block at an altitude of about 50-60m on the east slope of the valley (Coordinates: 38.2836,34.2790). The building is a rectangle with a harim to the east and an entrance hall to the west, with dimensions of 6.95x6m on the east/west axis (**F.28-38**). The single harim is a square room about 4.84x4.25m, and the rectangular entrance hall is about 2x4m carved to the west.

The harim has a large semi-circular arch carved on each of its four walls. A hemispherical dome is carved on a slender framed ceiling supported on the four walls without transition elements. There is no window in the dome nor in the harim. The only opening is the entrance hall to the west. Most of the south wall is carved for a mihrab niche, semi-circle in plan and framed by a recessed molded arch, slightly pointed. The mihrab semi-dome is finely executed with six rows of muqarnas. The muqarnas prisms are small semi-circles.

The rectangular last congregation hall, 2.10x4.20m, is carved on the west of the harim at one step level about 0,60m lower. The hall is barrel vaulted on the north/south axis. There is a low bench alongside the north and south walls. The entrance into the hall is carved to the western wall and is reached via seven steps carved on the façade leading to the building.

The façade is kept simple and has a single entrance and a window high above. The keyhole-shaped window is the only one in the building. Below the window is the entrance. It is composed of a semi-circular arched opening framed by a larger semi-circular arch. They are both carved in a rectangle frame. The dimensions of the entrance are 1.35x0.66m and it faces the Melendiz River and Ihlara Valley. The rest of the façade is rough and partially damaged.

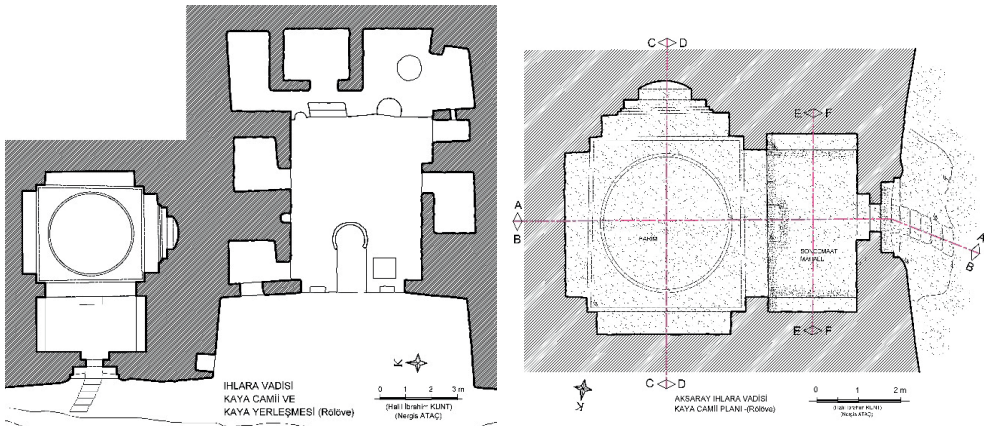


Figure 28: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque and the Basilica, plan (Drawing: Author, 2022)

Figure 29: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, plan (Drawing: Author, 2022)

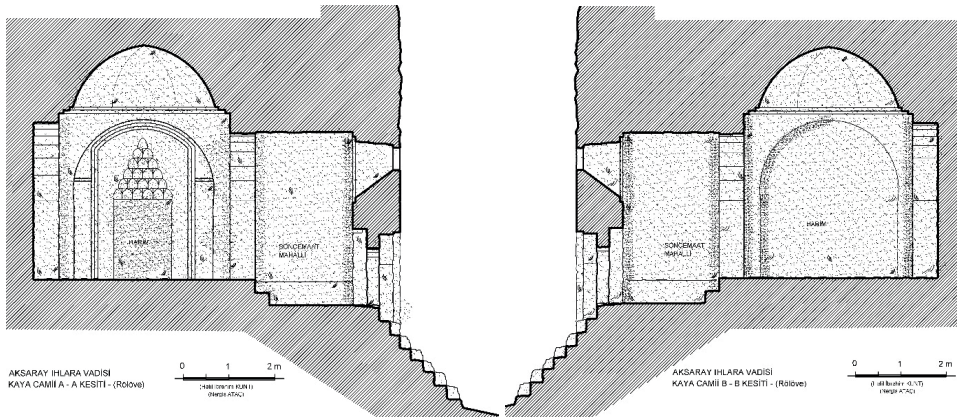


Figure 30: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, A – A section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

Figure 31: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, B – B section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

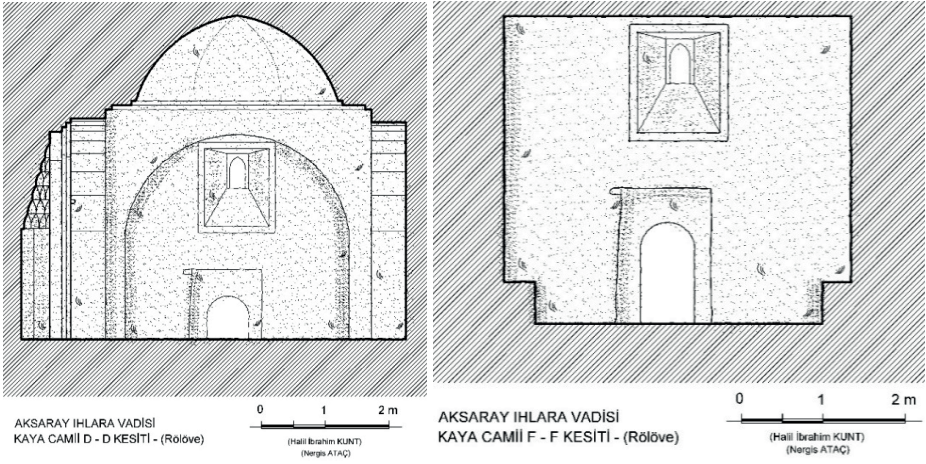


Figure 32: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, D – D section (Drawing: Author, 2022)

Figure 33: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, F - F section (Drawing: Author, 2022)



Figure 34: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, south wall and mihrab (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 35: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, the dome (Photo: Author, 2022)

Figure 36: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, facade (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 37: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, south and west wall (Photo: Author, 2022)



Figure 38: The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque, west and north wall (Photo: Author, 2022)

Preservation

Although the Church of Niches lies intact, the westernmost part of the narthex is destroyed, and the only preserved wall paintings of Malta Crosses are highly damaged. In the naos, parts of benches are damaged, and the floor is illegally excavated, the altar is destroyed. The façade is mostly preserved, apart from the western part and the lower section of the windows on each side of the entrance. Church No. 2 is greatly damaged. The steps to the entrance are destroyed, but the church can be reached through collapsed rocks. The partially ruined masonry wall to the north of the church and damaged plaster point to restoration efforts at different stages. The paintings could not be identified due to significant soot and smoke damage. The opening leading to the south room is destroyed. The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque is better preserved compared to the other structures. Today, it is in a good condition and open for prayer.

Nevertheless, some parts of the complex, especially corridors, steps and tunnels are ruined, damaged, or filled with earth and debris.

Conclusion

Rock-cut settlements in Cappadocia are prevalent in medieval architecture. However, only a few rock-cut settlements with a mosque and a church in the same complex have survived. The Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque and its complex is one of these sites. Located about 3km southwest of Belisırma, and 4km of the Yaprakhisar village, the settlement sheds light on Byzantine and Seljuk-Ottoman architectural heritage. Archeological and written sources reveal communities of different religions and cultures in need of building one common settlement for all. While the ecclesial rock-cut architecture of the site conforms to the Byzantine rock-cut settlements, the architectural plan and decoration of the mosque conform to the Rum Seljuk models of the thirteenth century. Ferruḡşah Mescid and Taş Madrasa in Akşehir, Aksinne Mescid, Sırçalı Mescid, and İnce Minareli Medrese Mescid in Konya are Seljuk masonry examples. No parallel to the Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque is found among the rock-cut mosques of the Ottomans. The known Ottoman rock-cut mosques are roughly carved structures with almost no architectural design or plan. Some of them were made from altered Byzantine structures (e.g., Mamasun Pir Şemmas Tekkesi, Açıkсарay Monastery Mescid); others by adding masonry to rough rock-cut rooms (e.g., Başdere, Tatların, Uçhisar), or single small rooms (e.g., Yuvaköyü, Erdemli Valley, Sulusaray), and roughly carved irregular rooms (Kayırlı Köyü, Karakaya Köyü, Sofular Köyü). These structures have a simple mihrab and almost no fine decoration. Contrary to these models, the Ihlara Valley Rock-Cut Mosque presents a unique case, compared to the Anatolian rock-cut models. It is finely carved by masters, has parallels to the Seljuk masonry domed square rooms, and is decorated by Seljuk art. Domed square room mosques, with a mihrab decorated with muqarnas, are prevalent in Rum Seljuks and Beyliks. Although the first stage of the complex was presumably built by the Byzantines, neither the churches, nor the mosque, show signs of any major alteration. Medieval sources nevertheless agree on the existence of thriving Christian communities under the Seljuks, in an Islamic legal framework. Some Christians gradually converted to Islam for different reasons. Political power, cultural pressure, avoidance of taxes, and intermarriage are the suggested main factors. Although no certain date is offered for the Peristemma complex, the many tunnels may offer some explanation. The mosque conforms to the Seljuk Mescids of the second half of the thirteenth century. For the Seljuks, this was a time of war against the Tatars and peace with the Byzantines. The Aksaray Battle in 1256 may have a key role, compelling Christians and Muslims to live in the same complex. When the Seljuks were defeated and their supporter, Manuel Komnenos, returned home, Keykavus II sold Selima and Gelveri and fled the region. However, his *Mülkname* does not provide any specific location of his estates. After the thirteenth century, Aksaray was ruled by the Karamanis and later by the Ottomans. Since there is no evidence of a major alteration in either the mosque or the main church,

one can assume continuity of function. It is perhaps possible that this was indeed a consequence of either intermarriage or merely efforts to avoid taxes. The sale of the Selime and Gerveri estates mentions them as *waqf* estates, and the sale of such properties *was* considered, in part, as a way to avoid taxes. Another point of note is the escape of devshirmes recorded in the Ottoman sources, which leads to the question: where would these fugitives live and practice the faith of their salvation? There is no evidence of any certain explanation. However, we may assume that, while Christians most likely continued to use the church under the Turks, the Muslims prayed in their newly built mosque. The Ottoman archive shows a mixed population of Christians and Muslims in the region. The site, built in a fertile valley along the river, is suitable for agriculture and commerce, in general. The presence of such favorable conditions for economic needs and survival likely influenced the continuity of cohabitation by adherents to both religions.

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