

Documentation of Late Antique and Medieval Architectural Buildings in the Lystra

Lystra Hinterlandında Yer Alan Geç Antik ve Orta Çağ Mimari Yapılarının Belgelenmesi

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Abstract

Lystra is a settlement that has been inhabited since the Neolithic period. It was located along important transportation routes in Anatolia during the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods, and which became a significant center in Early Christianity following the visits of Saint Paul. This study aims to document the Late Antique and Medieval architectural remains in the hinterland of Lystra, located within the boundaries of the Meram District of Konya, and to offer a new interpretation of the region's spatial organization and settlement continuity. The fact that studies on Lystra in the literature have remained largely limited to historical and epigraphic data reveals the lack of comprehensive analyses based on architectural and spatial evidence. In this context, the study systematically documents different building types such as churches, holy springs, rock-cut structures, necropolis areas and bridges by combining methods of surface survey, on-site measurement, and architectural drawing. The findings indicate that Lystra should be considered not only as a single ancient settlement but as the center of a multi-layered and functionally diverse settlement network encompassing its hinterland. The coexistence of religious, productive, and transportation -related structures demonstrates that the region possessed a dynamic spatial organization that continued throughout the Late Antique and Medieval periods.

Keywords: Documentation, Late Antiquity, Konya, Lystra, Middle Ages

Öz

Lystra, Neolitik dönemlerden itibaren iskan görmüş, Helenistik, Roma ve Bizans dönemlerinde Anadolu'nun önemli yol güzergahları üzerinde yer alan ve Aziz Paulus'un ziyaretleri sonrasında erken Hristiyanlık tarihinde önemli bir merkez haline gelen bir yerleşimdir. Bu çalışma, Konya ili Meram ilçesi sınırlarında yer alan Lystra hinterlandındaki Geç Antik ve Orta Çağ mimari kalıntılarını belgeleyerek, bölgenin mekansal organizasyonu ve yerleşim sürekliliğine ilişkin yeni bir okuma sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Literatürde Lystra'ya dair araştırmaların çoğunlukla tarihsel ve epigrafik verilerle sınırlı kalması, mimari ve mekansal veriye dayalı bütüncül analizlerin eksikliği ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, yüzey araştırması, yerinde ölçüm ve röleve üretimi yöntemlerini bir arada kullanarak kilise, ayazma, kaya oyma yapılar, nekropol alanları ve köprüler gibi farklı yapı tiplerini sistematik biçimde belgelemektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, Lystra'nın yalnızca bir antik yerleşim değil, hinterlandı ile birlikte çok katmanlı ve işlevsel olarak çeşitlenmiş bir yerleşim ağı içerisinde değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini göstermektedir. Dini, üretim ve ulaşım yapılarının birlikte varlığı, bölgenin Geç Antik ve Orta Çağ boyunca süreklilik gösteren dinamik bir mekansal organizasyona sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma yalnızca mimari kalıntıların belgelenmesini hedeflememekte; aynı zamanda Lystra hinterlandını, dinsel, üretim ve ulaşım yapılarının bir arada değerlendirildiği bütüncül bir mekansal organizasyon modeli olarak ele almayı önermektedir. Bu yaklaşım, yerleşimi tekil yapılar üzerinden değil, işlevsel ilişkiler ağı üzerinden okumaya imkan tanıyarak mevcut literatürdeki kent-merkezli yaklaşımlara alternatif bir değerlendirme çerçevesi sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Belgeleme, Geç Antik, Konya, Lystra, Orta Çağ

Giriş

Since the Neolithic period, the province of Konya has been home to significant settlements and encompasses a vast geographical area that includes parts of Lykaonia, Cappadocia, Isauria, Phrygia, Galatia, and Pisidia. The hinterland of Lystra is located within the administrative boundaries of the Hatunsaray and Botsa neighborhoods in the Meram District of Konya Province, approximately 38 km southwest of Konya city center. The region is bordered by Çumra to the east, Seydişehir to the west, Akören to the south, and Meram to the north. Hatunsaray is situated in a strategically important transitional zone between the Konya Plain and the Taurus Mountains. Located immediately north of the Taurus range, it occupies a critical crossroads connecting eastern and northern inland routes with those leading to the Mediterranean basin and Western Anatolia (Bahar, 2006, p. 48).

The hinterland referred to as Zoldra, Zoldere, or Lystra is located today between the Botsa and Hatunsaray neighborhoods in the Meram District of Konya. It lies approximately 1 km north of the center of Hatunsaray (Figure 1). The identification of Lystra with the locality known as Zoldra in Hatunsaray was first established in the nineteenth century by John Robert Sitlington Sterrett, who discovered a Latin inscription at the site (Mutlu & Bozkurt, 2023; Sterrett, 1888). This inscription is currently exhibited in the garden of the Konya Archaeological Museum.

The center of the settlement is currently marked by a mound approximately 30 m high and 300 m in diameter (Figure 2). Lystra is included in the official register of archaeological sites maintained by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Figure 3).

Figure 1.

General view of the ancient settlement of Lystra (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Figure 2.

Topographic map of the ancient city of Lystra (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

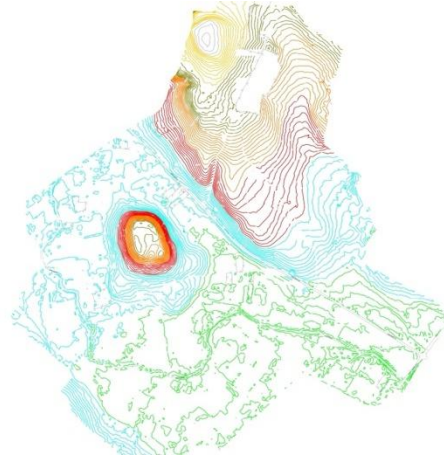
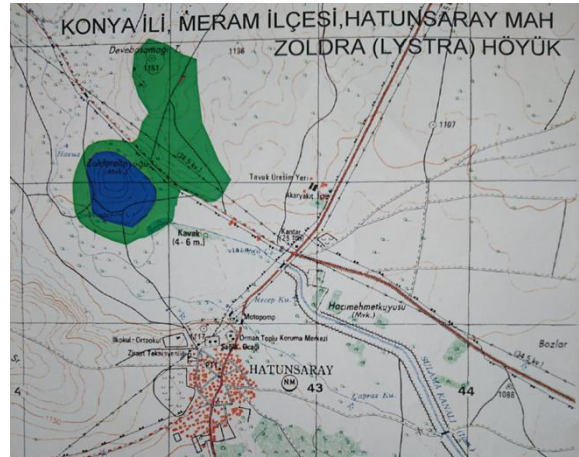


Figure 3.

Map of the archaeological sites in the ancient city of Lystra (1st and 3rd degree sites) (From Konya Regional Directorate for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage).



The location of Lystra, established under Augustus as a military base intended to secure the roads outside the city, was first proposed by W. M. Leake in 1820. However, Leake's identification was not widely accepted due to insufficient evidence. Following his suggestion that Hatunsaray was the site of Lystra, M. Waddington and later F. Imhoof-Blumer argued that Lystra was, in fact, a Roman colonial city. The conclusive evidence confirming the location of ancient Lystra in the vicinity of present-day Hatunsaray was provided by J. R. S. Sterrett (Ramsay, 1906, p. 367). The significance of Lystra in Early Christianity is primarily attributed to Saint Paul's missionary journeys in the region. Paul arrived in Anatolia during his first missionary journey, dated between AD 40 and 60 (Acts 13:1–14:27; Dürüşken, 2003, p. 26).

Lystra has attracted numerous travelers and scholars visiting Anatolia. Various studies suggest that the toponym Hatunsaray, which has survived to the present day, derives from a Seljuk sultan's palace, implying the existence of a palatial complex within the settlement. Accordingly, it has been hypothesized that the Seljuk palace in the region was constructed over an earlier Byzantine structure (Ramsay, 1906, p. 181).

The study focuses on the analysis of Late Antique and Medieval architectural remains within the Lystra Hinterland, including the Lystra Church, Bediroğlu Church, a holy spring, round-shaped structures, necropolis burials, Ak Bridge, Gömse Bridge, a rock-cut chapel, Rock-cut Structure 1, Rock-cut Structure 2, and a granary. The survey was

conducted to document these structures and produce accurate plan drawings. The primary objective of the research is to examine these architectural remains and determine their original functions within their historical and spatial context.

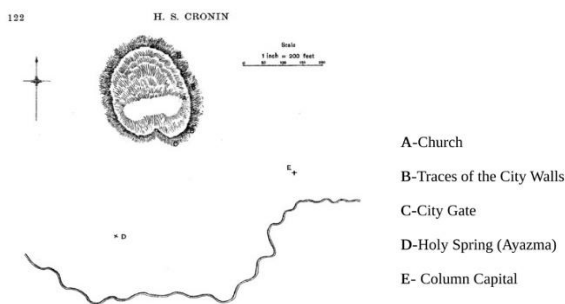
This study aims to move beyond treating individual structures as isolated architectural specimens, instead of interpreting them in terms of their reciprocal spatial and functional interrelationships. In this context, the research proposes to evaluate the Lystra hinterland not as a fragmented collection of remains but as a continuous and multi-layered settlement network.

Late Antique and Medieval Architectural Works in the Lystra Hinterland

In the 19th century, many researchers visited the region. Cronin, who became interested in Lystra in the early 1900s, provided the most comprehensive documentation of the city's urban fabric. He produced a topographic map of Lystra, identifying a church situated at the top of the mound, encircling fortification walls, a city gate to the northeast, and a holy water spring to the east (Cronin, 1902). The walls, thought to be part of the inner citadel, were visible at three locations on the northern slope of the hill (Figure 4). He also suggested that the castle gate should have been in the northeast, given Iconium's position to the north and the current location of the Konya-Hatunsaray Road (Ramsay, 1941). Additionally, a later publication mentions the foundation stones of a church on the hill (Restle & Belke, 1984).

Figure 4.

Map showing the ancient city of Lystra and some structures (Cronin, 1902).



Today, Lystra, which is presently represented by a mound, preserves no substantial structural remains except for wall traces observed on its southern slope (Figure 5). In recent years, the necropolis of the ancient city was identified on the northern side of Zoldura Mound, following a rescue excavation conducted by the Konya Museum. These rescue excavations, carried out by the Konya Museum Directorate, revealed several burial chambers attributed to the Late Antique period. The burial chambers, constructed of finely cut stone blocks, feature arched entrances and are located below ground level. In addition, limestone sarcophagi have also been documented in the region (Figure 6).

Figure 5.

General view of the ancient city of Lystra (Zoldura Mound) (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

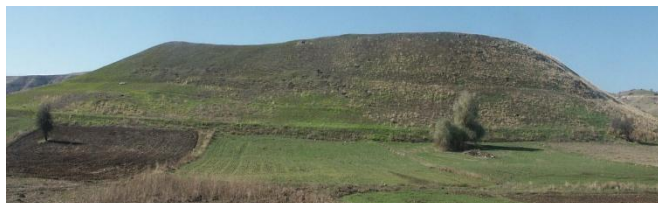


Figure 6.

Late Antique and Medieval Architectural Works and Their Locations in the Lystra Hinterland (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



As part of the study, architectural remains dating to Late Antiquity and the Medieval period within the Lystra Hinterland were systematically examined. In addition to the Lystra mound and the adjacent necropolis area, architectural remains identified in the surrounding landscape include Bediroğlu Church, Ak Bridge, Gümse Bridge, a rock-cut chapel, Rock-cut Structure 1, Rock-cut Structure 2, and a grain storage facility.

Lystra Church

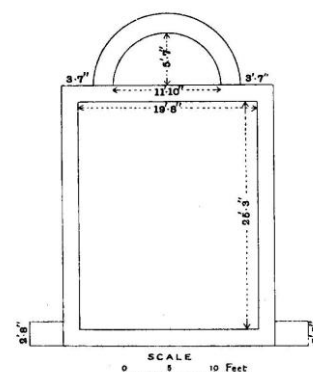
The structure is located within the administrative boundaries of the Meram District, in the Hatunsaray neighborhood, approximately 38 km south of Konya. It is situated on the northern slope of Zoldura Mound, in the vicinity of the Kilistra junction.

In the beginning of 20th century, Cronin produced a plan of the church (Figure 7), depicting a rectangular, single-naved with a semicircular apse attached to its eastern end. During the surface survey, it was determined that the southeastern end of the apse wall is partially preserved. No archaeological evidence was identified to indicate that naos was divided into aisles by colonnades. However, architectural remains documented in the western section of the church provide critical evidence regarding the structure's lateral dimensions. While previous reports estimated the building's plan at approximately 6×8 m, the extant remains suggest that the church was considerably larger. In the surviving sections of the masonry, finely dressed gray limestone was used as the primary construction material.

Based on publications from the early twentieth century and an evaluation of its materials, construction technique, and plan characteristics, the structure is dated to the Early Christian period (5th–6th centuries AD).

Figure 7.

Plan of the Church at Lystra (Cronin, 1904).



Bediroğlu Church

The church, located at the locality of Bediroğlu, was constructed of cut stone in a three-aisled basilica plan, is oriented along an east-west direction. Today, only the main apse, semicircular plan on both the interior and exterior, and the lintel of the western entrance are visible from the largely ruined structure. The principal surviving elements of the church are the east-facing apse and the door lintel on the west side, which bears a cross relief (Figure 8). No trace of a window has been identified in the largely collapsed and ruinous apse wall (Figure 9).

The apse has a diameter of 368 cm, and an apse cavity measuring 153 cm is currently visible below ground level (Figure 10). However, the western part of the apse is partially buried underground. In the southwestern part of the apse, there is a single lintel, which is thought to have belonged to the church's entrance. The lintel is 57 cm wide and 236 cm long. The only decoration preserved on the structure is a Latin cross, the upper arm of which has not survived, placed within a profiled medallion at the center of the lintel. The cross is framed by two borders, each 2 cm wide. The arms of the cross are 9 cm long and 6 cm wide (Figure 11).

Considering the three-aisled basilica plan, the cross motif on the lintel, and the construction techniques, the structure can be dated to the Late Antique periods (5th–6th centuries AD).

Figure 8.

General view of the apse of Bediroğlu Church (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Figure 9.

Church plan survey (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Figure 10.

Sectional survey of the church apse (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

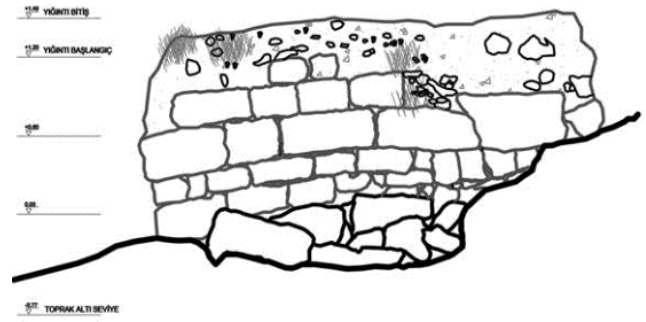


Figure 11.

Lintel on the western side of the apse (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Holy Spring

The presence of a holy spring (ayazma) on the eastern side of Zoldura Mound, at the foot of the hill, is mentioned in the relevant sources (Cronin, 1902). W. M. Ramsay, who visited the region in 1882, noted that although the local inhabitants of Hatunsaray were unaware of the holy spring (ayazma), it was known to and frequented by non-Muslim population of Konya; however, he provided no information concerning its architectural characteristics (Ramsay, 1941).

In the mid-20th century, a water reservoir and fountain were constructed over the spring where the ayazma was located. Today, this water source continues to be actively used and is visited by foreign tourists; however, the original architectural features of the structure have been largely altered (Figure 12a). The plan of the ayazma was documented through on-site survey, including measurements, photographic documentation, and the preparation of measured drawings (Figure 12b). At present, a fountain has been constructed adjacent to a remaining L-shaped wall.

Figure 12a-b.

The area where the holy spring is located and the survey of the fountain (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Circular Planned Buildings

To the east of Zoldura Mound, traces of circular -plan structures of uncertain function have been identified in a dispersed state. These remains, constructed of a combination of roughly cut stones and regularly cut stone blocks, are now largely buried underground (Figure 13). Although several examples within the same area are considered to represent elements of 20th century rural architecture, one structure built with neatly cut stone masonry may tentatively be attributed to the Late Antiquity period.

The precise function and chronology of these structures remain unclear and require further investigation. For the documented remains, on-site measurements were conducted, photographic documentation was carried, and their plans and site layouts were prepared (Figure 14).

Figure 13.

Rounded-planned structure-1 and Rounded-planned structure-2 aerial view (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

**Figure 14.**

Circular-planned structure-1 and 2 survey and mound foot site plan survey (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



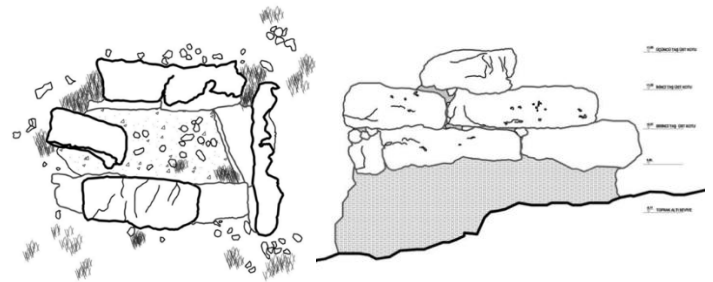
Necropolis Area

During surveys conducted in the necropolis area, which extends over a large area to the northeast of Zoldura Mound, various types of funerary structures were identified. These include monumental tombs, rock-cut chamber tombs, sarcophagi, and simple graves covered with tiles and framed by stones. Their dimensions were recorded, and architectural documentation (measured drawings) was prepared (Figure 15).

The so-called “mausoleum,” located on the northeastern slope of the hill, was constructed of cut stone. The structure is severely damaged and currently lacks its cover slab (Figure 16). The “Pasha Cemetery,” by contrast, is situated within the present-day village cemetery (Figure 17).

Figure 15.

Maouseleum Plan and Section Survey (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

**Figure 16.**

Aerial and general view of the mausoleum (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

**Figure 17.**

Pasha cemetery interior building plan survey and general view (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Ak Bridge

There is no inscription indicating the construction date of the Ak Bridge, which spans Kuru Dere at the entrance to Hatunsaray. However, based on its construction technique and material characteristics, it is generally attributed to the Seljuk period (Duran 2010, p. 157). The bridge is oriented along a north-south axis and features two-pointed arch spans. On the upstream (western) side of the central pier, a triangular cutwater rises to the level of the arches (Duran et al., 2016, pp. 139–140).

The arches and vaults are constructed of finely cut stone, while the remaining sections consist of rubble masonry. Spolia, including marble elements, are occasionally incorporated into the piers and vault surfaces (Figure 18). The Regional Directorate of Highways carried out the restoration of the Ak Bridge between 2017 and 2018, and the structure remains in use today. Survey drawings prepared by the institution were obtained, and the bridge was documented through on-site examination and photographic documentation (Figure 19, 20).

Figure 18.

General view of Ak Bridge and reused stones on the foot of the vault (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Figure 19.

Ak Bridge Land Measurement Plan update and Section (taken from the Konya Regional Directorate of Highways archive).

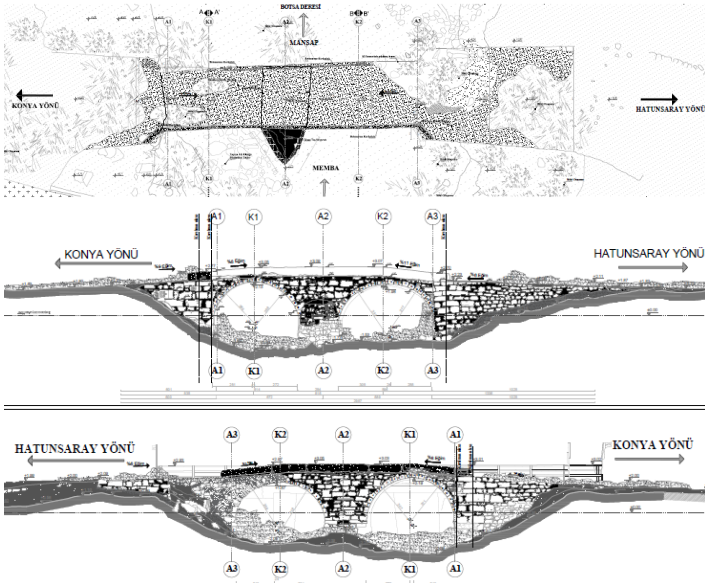
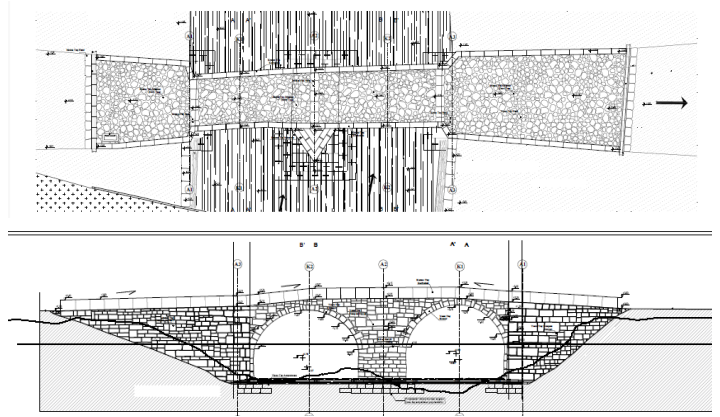


Figure 20.

Ak Bridge Restoration plan and section (taken from the Konya Regional Directorate of Highways archive).



Gömse Bridge

The bridge, located between Hatunsaray and Gömse and described in the sources as having “nine-pointed arch openings,” is locally known as the “nine-holed bridge.” The surviving remains consist of two solid pointed arches supported by three piers, one of which is largely destroyed, while another is buried underground (Figure 21). The arches have suffered significant damage; parts of the deck and parapet have collapsed, the cutwater (selyaran) that originally projected from upstream side are missing, and most of the remaining structural components are now buried underground. The pointed arches are constructed of finely cut stone, while rubble stone masonry is used in the remaining sections (Figure 22). Near the bridge, a roughly carved lion statue measuring 39 cm in height and 34 cm in width, together with various architectural stone fragments, has been identified (Figure 23).

The structure, situated on the main route providing access to the southern and eastern parts of the ancient city of Lystra, is also important for understanding the regional transportation network. To document the current condition of the bridge, measurements were taken, and detailed architectural survey drawings were prepared. The site plan shows the two surviving arches of the bridge and a third arch in a collapsed state. As shown in the elevation drawing, the structure is largely ruined (Figure 24).

The structure, which bears no inscription, is generally attributed to the Anatolian Seljuk period based on its architectural features and construction techniques. In this regard, İbrahim Hakkı Konyalı proposed a date of 612 AH / 1215–16 CE, based on an inscription that he associated with the Gömse Seyfeddin Ferruh Caravanserai, now presented in the İnce Minareli Stone and Wooden Works Museum (Konyalı, 1997; Mutlu & Bozkurt, 2023).

Figure 21.

General view of the Gömse Bridge and taking measurements of the bridge (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Figure 22.

Gömse Bridge section-1, section-2, section-3 (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).

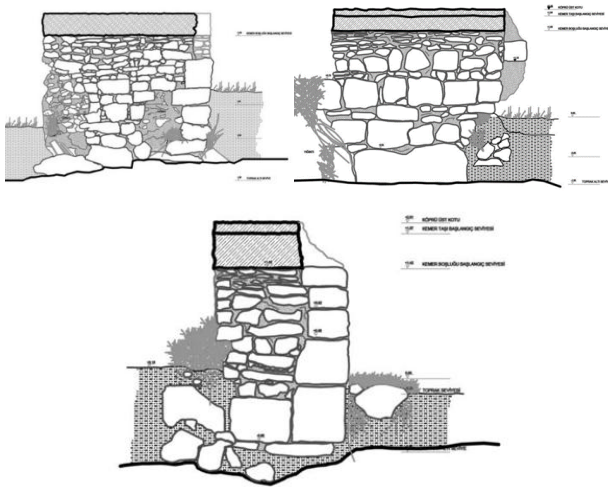


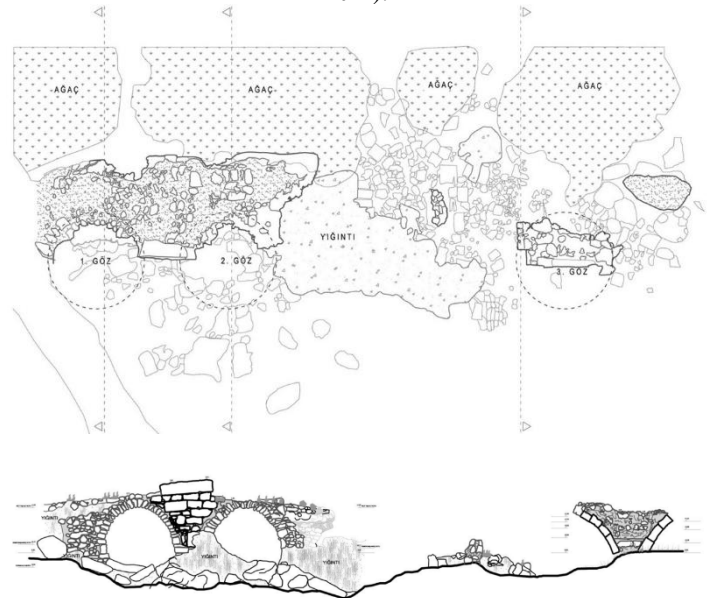
Figure 23.

Architectural block fragment and cornice block with plant motifs on it at Gömse Bridge (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Figure 24.

Gömse Bridge site plan and front view survey (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Rock Carved Chapel

In the Koruluk area of Hatunsaray Neighborhood, on the northern slope of the valley, a rock-cut chapel is located on a natural rock formation extending in an east–west axis. The northern wall of the chapel, cut into the same rock mass, has collapsed and was subsequently closed by the local inhabitants using dry-stone masonry.

The naos measures 210×175 cm and has a preserved height of 228 cm. The apse, located on the eastern side, has a semicircular plan. To emphasize the sacred space between the apse and the naos, the bema area was raised by means of a step. No remains of an altar were identified within the apse. On-site measurements were taken for the prepare the plan, and an architectural survey drawing was produced (Figure 25).

Figure 25.

General View of the Rock-Carved Chapel, chapel entrance and plan survey (Lystra Project Archive, 2021).



Rock Carved Building No. 1

The structure is located to the west of the rock-cut chapel and has entrances on both its eastern and western sides. The eastern entrance measures 95 cm in width and 95 cm in height, while the western entrance measures 75 cm in height and 150 cm in width. The western entrance is smaller and narrower than the eastern one.

The interior space, accedes through these entrances, measures 342×520 cm, has a preserved ceiling height of 144 cm. On the southwest wall, there is a niche measuring 125 cm in width and 90 cm in depth, while two additional niches are located on the northwest wall (Figure 26). On the western wall of the chamber, there is an opening that, according to local accounts, is associated with an underground passage. However, no archaeological evidence confirming this interpretation has been identified. The passage measures 70 cm in depth and 135 cm in height; it extends 350 cm westward before turning to the north. The northern extension could be documented only for a distance of 192 cm, and as the remaining section was inaccessible.

Considering the plan layout, the presence of niches, and its proximity to the rock-cut chapel, the structure is most plausibly interpreted as an auxiliary liturgical space or a small hermit cell associated with the chapel. The low ceiling height and limited spatial volume suggest specialized, restricted use rather than intensive occupation.

Figure 26.

Views from inside the Rock Carved Structure No. 1 (Lystra Project Archive, 2024).



Rock Carved Building No. 2

The structure is in the Koruluk area of Meram District and represents a more complex rock-cut formation situated approximately 700 m east of the other rock-cut structures. Positioned on a steep slope, the complex has two entrances. The eastern entrance measures 90 cm in height, 90 cm in width, and 240 cm in depth, while the southern entrance is located at the edge of the slope, making access more hazardous. The first chamber, accessed through these entrances, has a semicircular plan and measures 90 cm in height, 290 cm in width, and 215 cm in length (Figure 27).

Due to its small dimensions, semicircular plan, and difficult access, the structure is likely to have served a specialized function rather than everyday use. It is most plausibly interpreted as a small hermit cell or an auxiliary unit of associated with a larger rock-cut complex.

Figure 27

Views from inside the Rock Carved Structure No. 2 (Lystra Project Archive, 2024).



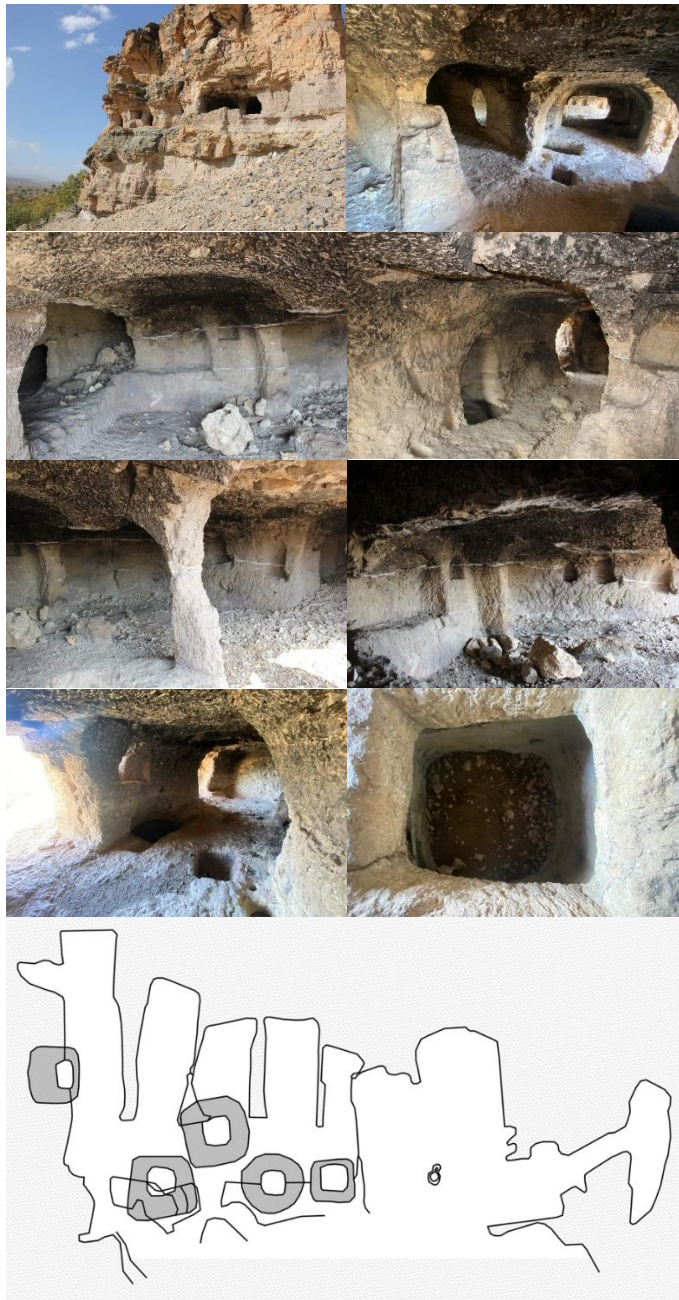
Grain Storage (Warehouse)

The grain storage facility, located north of the rock-cut chapel in the Koruluk area, was carved into the bedrock approximately 20 meters above ground level. Oriented along a north–south axis, the structure consists of seven interconnected chambers of varying sizes. These chambers are accessed via a corridor on the western side. The spaces display relatively rough workmanship and contain five irregularly shaped grain storage pits. Although the structure has a flat ceiling, its entrance is currently damaged;

however, surviving traces suggest that it was originally located on the southern side (Figure 28).

Figure 28.

Views and plan survey from inside the Grain Storage (Warehouse)
(Lystra Project Archive, 2024).



When evaluated as a whole, the rock-cut structures in the Koruluk area represent a multifunctional complex developed within the same settlement tradition but serving different purposes and functions. The small chapel and its associated auxiliary spaces, together with the possible hermit cells, indicate a rural religious function, while the larger multi-chambered rock-cut facility interpreted as a granary, reflects the economic and subsistence activities of the settlement. This combination suggests that the area functioned as a multifunctional rock-cut complex integrating both religious and productive activities.

In terms of chronology, neither the chapel nor the storage complex provides definitive archaeological evidence for precise dating based on plan typology, workmanship, or construction techniques. The absence of inscriptions, decorative programs, and distinctive architectural features

that could provide a secure chronological framework further complicates precise dating. Nevertheless, comparisons with similar rock-cut storage facilities and single-naved chapels identified in the settlements of Detse, Botsa, and Gökyurt suggest that the Koruluk structures may plausibly be dated to the Middle Byzantine period. More specifically, the complex can be associated with the period following the Islamic raids and frontier instability of the eighth–ninth centuries and preceding the Turkish domination of the region in the twelfth century.

Conclusion

This study not only documents the Late Antique and Medieval architectural remains in the hinterland of Lystra but also provides an analytical assessment of the region's spatial organization based on the collected data. In this context, it aims to move beyond the predominantly text-based and urban-focused approaches in the existing literature on the Lystra hinterland by offering an alternative interpreting that places architectural evidence at its core.

The structures documented within the scope of this research demonstrate that the hinterland is not merely a scattered area of isolated remains but rather presents a coherent network in which buildings with different functions are organized within a defined spatial framework. The distribution of churches, a holy spring, and rock-cut religious structures indicates the existence of a network of religious focal points across the region, while the necropolis area reveals the spatial organization of burial practices within the settlement landscape. In contrast, the presence of transportation structures such as the Ak Bridge and the Gömse Bridge, indicates that the Lystra hinterland functioned not only as a local settlement zone but also as a transit node integrated into broader regional transportation and trade networks. Rock-cut structures and grain storage facilities further demonstrate the importance of production and storage activities within this spatial organization.

Although multilayered occupation and the coexistence of different building types are expected phenomena in historical settlement areas, the findings of this study point to a more distinct spatial organization specific to the Lystra hinterland. The distribution and co-presence of religious, funerary, production, and transportation structures in the region indicate not merely a heterogeneous accumulation of remains, but the existence of a spatially organized and functionally interrelated system. In this sense, the Lystra hinterland should be interpreted not only as a multilayered settlement zone but as an integrated landscape organization in which different building types operate within interconnected functional relationships.

Accordingly, this study proposes redefining the Lystra hinterland as:

- a spatially organized settlement system shaped by functional relationships,
- an integrated organization of religious, economic, and infrastructural components,
- and a locally distinctive spatial configuration situated within broader regional networks.

This approach contributes to discussions on Late Antique and Medieval settlement systems in Anatolia by moving beyond the mere identification of multilayered occupation and instead offering a holistic and relational reading that demonstrates how different occupational phases and building types interacted within a defined spatial context.

This study has certain limitations. The absence of stratigraphic context in the data obtained through surface surveys imposes constraints on the precise dating and functional interpretation of the structures. For this reason, the typological and functional assessments proposed here should be supported by future archaeological excavations and material analyses. However, this limitation does not diminish the significance of the

presented dataset or the interpretive framework proposed; rather, it highlights the need for more in-depth and context-based investigations of the area.

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