

Archaeological Reconnaissance in Late Roman Galatia

The Princeton University Tahirler Project

Preliminary Report, 1998 field season.

Introduction: The Tahirler Project (1996-97)

The Tahirler Project is a multi-year collaborative research project examining the history and archaeology of western Galatia. The survey focuses on the identification, recording, and study of sites related to the Roman and Byzantine road system between the ancient cities of Juliopolis (near Cayirhan, now under the Sariyar Lake) and Anastasiopolis (Dikmen Höyük). The survey takes its names from the modern village of Tahirler, which lies ca. 15 kms. south of the provincial capital, Beypazari [Please see attached map], seventy-five kilometers northwest of Ankara. During the first two field seasons of the Tahirler Project (1996-97), our survey work focused on the site of "Kilisiler," an unwalled nucleated settlement of the Roman-early Byzantine period, located ca. 3 kms. north of Tahirler. At this site, we have identified and recorded the remains of a small settlement of the Roman period, located near a section of Roman road leading southeast towards the Roman city of Anastasiopolis (Dikmen Höyük). At this site, Kiliseler, we have also recorded the remains of two and possibly three late Roman churches exposed, and partially destroyed, by recent agricultural expansion.

The second preliminary report, submitted in the fall of 1997, describes in detail the various architectural and ceramic finds associated with Kiliseler. The 1997 report also provides both a map of Kilisiler, prepared by Mr. Phil Stinson, and a drawing of the architectural remains of the two early Byzantine basilicas, prepared by Anne McClannan, Assistant Professor of Art History at Portland State University. I include copies of these drawings from the 1997 report. The attached color map (based upon GPS data collected in 1998) shows the precise location of these churches. The discovery in 1998 of a section of Roman road immediately to the south of Kiliseler strongly supports our hypothesis that Kiliseler can be identified as the ancient Roman road-station of Sykeon.

This discovery brings with it important ramifications for the history and archaeology of central Anatolia in the period of Late Antiquity. The Roman village of Sykeon, a posting-station on the main Roman highway running from Constantinople to Ancyra, holds a special place in late Roman history, because of the extensive literary documentation that surrounds the village's most famous native: a holy man who lived in Sykeon during the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries C.E. The biography of this holy man, written by a disciple from a near-by village, offers what is probably the most complete picture of rural life in central Anatolia, at any stage of the region's ancient or medieval history. The primary goal of the Tahirler Project is to compare these literary sources with the material culture of the same region to elucidate the social and cultural life of central Anatolia during the late Roman and Byzantine periods.

Results of the 1998 Field Season

During the 1998 field season, we concentrated our investigation along the northern side of the Kirmir River in an effort to trace the route of the Roman road leading south-southeast from Juliopolis, and to document additional archaeological sites on or near the Roman road. We have now identified and recorded over twenty previously unknown sites in this region, on both the northern and southern sides of the Kirmir River (the ancient Syberis).

The most important results of our research to date are as follows:

1)

The identification of two stone fortresses (Poyrazoglu and Kizlarin Sekisi) near the modern village of Tahirler, apparently Hittite or Phrygian in date but with ceramic evidence of Roman/late Roman phases of occupation.

2) The identification of two major late classical sites (Uyku and Maltepe) within sight of the old Roman highway.

Uyku preserves the remains of a monumental pedestalled building, possibly a Roman temple.

3)

The identification and recording of the site of "Kiliseler," a late Roman nucleated settlement with 2-3 associated

early Byzantine churches (badly damaged); the site appears to be identical with the ancient village of Sykeon, a posting-station on the main Roman highway between Iuliopolis and Anastasiopolis.

4) Re-examination of the ruins of the Roman city of Anastasiopolis (Dikmen Höyük) which had been discussed only briefly in previous archaeological literature. Roman and Byzantine coins on display at the Civic Museum of Beypazari testify to the economic life of this Roman city between the fourth and the twelfth centuries C.E.

5)

The identification of two Middle-Byzantine cave complexes, both overlooking the route of the Roman-Byzantine highway. One of the churches contains the much faded, but still beautiful remains of a Byzantine fresco cycle.

During the 1998 season, we made preliminary or return visits to all of these sites to mark their location with a hand-held GPS unit for the purpose of mapping. The attached color map thus represents the most important result of the 1998 field season. All of the sites named above, with the exception of Uyku and Kizlarin Sekisi, appear on this color map. During the 1998 field season, we also conducted preliminary ceramic survey and photo-documentation of these sites in an effort to: a) provide a preliminary record of their surface remains; b) assess the danger posed to the region's archaeological sites by illegal excavation or current agricultural expansion; c) study the relationship of ancient settlements and shrines to the Roman road system; and d) to develop a comparative ceramic catalogue of this little-studied region of central Anatolia. The attached five-year plan for the Tahirler Project reflects the results of this broad investigation during the 1998 field season. Our first attention, when we return to the field in September, 2001, will go to the two large late classical sites, Maltepe and Uyku, which lie northeast of the main Roman highway. Further results and images from the 1998 field season can be seen at the project Web-site (begun in autumn, 2000 and still under construction) at <http://courses.washington.edu/tahirler/>

As always, it is a pleasure to recognize the warm and knowledgeable support we have received during our field work from the representatives of the Department of Antiquities, the American Research Institute in Turkey, the government and military officials in Beypazari, and the local people of the villages of Tahirler, Tacettin, and Dikmen.