

## **PRESERVATION OF HASANKEYF/ A SITE THREATENED BY ILISU DAM PROJECT**

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Hasankeyf, which is one of the medieval sites in Turkey, is faced with the danger of being inundated by Ilisu Dam. The Turkish Prime Minister T. Erdogan earlier promised to stop the project, but now informs the public that the dam construction will start in March 2006. The unfortunate project was designed many years ago, without giving due attention to the presence of the unique architectural heritage at Hasankeyf. In spite of objections from archaeologists, art historians, architects, environmentalists and writers, the project has not been changed or cancelled. The authorities provide only eight-ten more years for further research in the region which will be flooded by the dam reservoir. This very short time is not enough to complete archaeological research; several cultural layers and artifacts will not be able to receive proper attention during the haste or will be flooded before they are systematically studied. The same was also tragically true for several other prehistoric, ancient and urban sites in the GAP region; Zeugma, a Roman garrison city and Halfeti, a beautiful town in the stone tradition are among significant ones which were recently sentenced to death by dam constructions.

In Hasankeyf, the possibility of salvaging some of the monuments by transferring them to another site needs to be considered seriously. Modern technology offers several methods for transferring masonry buildings. The most favorable from the point of conservation is the technique in which the monument is cut off from its foundations and mounted on a wheeled trolley. This sophisticated technique has been used in Europe to move cathedrals and palaces. It would be the right one for Zeynel Bey Tomb, which is a significant monument from late 15 th century. The structure has a cylindrical shaft, the exterior of which is decorated with glazed bricks, laid in geometric patterns, featuring Timurid tradition and marking the strong artistic link between Anatolia and Central Asia in the fifteenth century.

Another technique which is widely adopted for moving is by the dismantling of the historic building and its reassembly at the new site. After careful photographic documentation and survey, each stone block in the structure is numbered. This technique is generally applied to monuments with ashlar construction. In Hasankeyf, it can be used to transfer architectural elements like minarets and the gates of the citadel. The criticism to this technique is that during the dismantling and the re-erection process, monuments lose some of their original details; some blocks break down or crumble. Binding elements like mortar and clamps need to be changed or replaced. The workmanship is not the same. The mounting has to be done very carefully to assure proper alignment of the members.

Moving monuments is a hard task. It requires a good budget, technical means and planning. One of the most important objections to the Ilisu Dam is that there is no proper planning for the re-location of Hasankeyf's architectural heritage. Siting and

topography are very important in moving monuments or parts thereof. A relocated building seldom has the same topographic relationship to its new site. When monuments are cut off from their foundations and erected on a completely different site, they look very different. They are alienated/ isolated and lose much of their dignity and integrity. Their aesthetic value is diminished. A similar landscape and context has to be created in order to make them impressive and meaningful again. There are no studies or preparations to provide a similar landscape for the monuments; if the projected plan is put into execution, the new open air museum of "Hasankeyf" will be just a small park in which small fragments of great monuments will be exhibited like museum pieces.

One has to consider the fact that, it is impossible to create the landscape of Hasankeyf with the Tigris river in the middle and cliffs shaped by action of the water in the past millions of years. The context for the transferred monuments will be totally foreign; since the new site is a land with a small inclination. The landscape at Hasankeyf comprises gigantic natural elements and complex relations among its architectural members. It is impossible to re-create the picturesqueness of the background for monuments like the Koç and Sultan Süleyman Mosques. Furthermore, who will compensate for the loss of the prestigious position of the medieval Castle and the Palace which are perched on a high cliff?

There are also technical problems: the rubble construction does not lend itself easily to being dismantled. Therefore monuments having rubble masonry ( like the Koç and Sultan Süleyman mosques) and most of the other smaller structures, can not be transferred successfully. The relieving system in the vaulting of Sultan Süleyman mosque is very interesting. Yet, if this structure is forced to be transferred, most of the historic substance will be lost during the dismantling . Almost ninety-five percent of the masonry will have to be renewed after the operation. This means that authenticity of the cultural heritage will be lost. Authenticity is an important element of preservation. The site, form, substance /material of a monument are essential components of its significance as a cultural object. In the attempt to transfer the historic buildings in Hasankeyf , the original site will be changed, the original material will be lost in great scale.

International charters and conventions concerning protection of the cultural heritage recommend that at the preliminary survey stage of engineering projects, sites of historic and archaeological importance be marked and measures taken to preserve them in-situ. UNESCO's **Recommendation concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works** (1968) points out the fact that "*It is duty of governments to ensure the protection and the preservation of cultural heritage of mankind as much as to promote social and economic development*

*Preventive and corrective measures should be aimed at protecting or saving cultural property from public or private works likely to damage and destroy it .. "*

UNESCO's recommendations have been ratified by Turkey and several of the European countries who are planning to support the consortium. We believe that it is essential to insist on the revision of the dam project in the light of this fact. Hasankeyf is a Grade I archaeological site with significant monuments. No

permission is yet granted from the Monuments Council of the region for the construction of the Iisu Dam. Ministry of Culture should try to solve this problem for the benefit of Hasankeyf.

Another critical point about Iisu Dam is its life span. Experts foresee 30-50 years of functional life for this dam. It is predicted that in a very short period of time it will be filled with rubble and not be as useful. Experts claim that, in the long run, the dam will be a social, cultural and environmental disaster. When the very short useful life of the dam is set against the long history of Hasankeyf and its potential to live, one is compelled to ask the authorities " **Why build Iisu dam?**"

No material gain or money can bring back or reproduce a cultural treasure and impressive landscape like Hasankeyf. We have a great deal to learn from this site. People living there and others, who have visited it, have memories and very close ties with the site, all of which are worth more than the benefits the dam will provide.

The GAP region (Southeast Anatolia) hopes to have more and more tourist interested in visiting the cities and archaeological areas of the area . Hasankeyf offers immemorable vistas and moments for spectators. From its acropolis, it is wonderful to watch Zeynel Bey tomb and the river Tigris flowing peacefully under the ruins of the medieval bridge. It seems absurd to bury a site which has a great potential for tourism.

When one compares the short-term economic prosperity the dam will generate with the long-term survival of a significant site which encompasses treasures from early human settlements up to late medieval period, one without doubt makes the preference for the survival of Hasankeyf. Public opinion and scholarly concerns back up the view that short-lived dams should not be permitted to devastate culturally abundant lands. Hasankeyf should not be "Doomed by the Dam".