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A new Late-Roman urban centre in Isauria

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In 2002, the Göksu Archaeological Project (GAP) began intensive and extensive survey work in the Upper Göksu valley of the Taurus mountains in S Turkey. The valley lies north of Mut and south of Karaman. At the center of the survey area is Alahan, which lies c.22 km from Mut and c.75 km due north of Celenderis on the coast of Rough Cilicia (fig. 1a). Although the survey is focussing on changes in settlement patterns, communications, and economic strategies, extra urgency is lent to investigating this area by the planned construction of a dam north of Mut. When built, this dam will flood large areas of the Upper Göksu valley to a height of 305 m asl.

At Alahan itself a complex of Christian buildings of the 5th-6th c. stands in apparent isolation on a hillside. M. Gough carried out a series of excavations between 1955 and 1972. He died in 1973 after finishing his excavation program but before being able to complete the final report.¹ The work around the Christian complex at Alahan has shown that the churches do not stand in isolation but in close proximity to a small and hitherto-unknown Roman urban centre which must have provided housing and other services.

Isaurian topography

From late-antique bishop lists and other sources, we know the names of over 20 Isaurian towns (fig. 1a). Many, however, cannot be identified on the ground: those include Hierapolis, Dalisandus, Coropissus, Philadelphia, Meloe, Neapolis, Sibyla, Musbada, Domitiopolis, Titiopolis and Iuliosebaste, currently the subject of much debate. Identifications have been made for many of them, but they all lack conclusive evidence. A number of large sites have no secure identification: they include Gökçeseki, Dağpazarı, Sinapiç, Asar Tepe, and Kalın Ören. All are certainly towns, but no definitive evidence has yet been produced. The case of Dalisandus provides a good illustration of the problems: locations have been suggested at Belören (now Sarıoğlan), Sinapiç and Alahan, and there are disputes about whether there were one or two towns with this name.² Inland Isauria was poor, and many of the standard features of classical cities further west are absent: there are very few theatres, stoas, temples, or agorai. Although there is no doubt that sites near Alahan at Ermenek, Mut, Sinapiç, Dağpazarı, and Adrassus were urban centres, almost all the public buildings recorded are town walls and churches.³ This is perhaps related to the late development of urbanisation in the region (there are no literary mentions of the interior before the late Hellenistic era⁴).

Mut was visited by several 19th-c. travellers, including Leake (in 1800), Laborde (1826), Davis (1875), Sterrett (1885), Duchesne (1880), and Collignon (1880). Duchesne provided the most detailed account, noting that the colonnaded street at Mut was 12 m wide. Other travellers mention a gate, while Sterrett recorded 7 inscriptions at or close to Mut, but said nothing

1 M. Gough (ed.), *Alahan: an Early Christian monastery in southern Turkey* (Toronto 1985).

2 Belören: D. H. French, "The site of Dalisandus," *EpigAnat* 4 (1984) 85-98; Sinobuç: A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the eastern Roman provinces* (2nd edn., Oxford 1971) 413 with n.24; G. Bean and T. Mitford, *Journeys in Rough Cilicia, 1964-1968* (Vienna 1970) 224-25; F. Hild and H. Hellenkemper, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini 5: Kilikien und Isaurien* (Vienna 1990) 233-34; Alahan: C. Nauerth, "Kaiser Zenon und Dalisandos — ein Theklakloster in Alahan Monastir?" *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rezeption in der Alten Kirche* 23-24 (1987) 46-65; two cities: G. Laminger-Pascher, "Die Lykaonischen Koinon und die Lage der Städte Barata, Dalisandos und Hyde," *AnzWien* 123 (1986) 238-60.

3 A hippodrome is drawn on Gough's map in S. Hill, "Dağ Pazarı and its monuments," *Yayla* 2 (1979) 8-12. Given the mountainous terrain and a lack of regional theatres, this is unlikely.

4 H. Elton, "The economic fringe: the reach of the Roman empire in Rough Cilicia," in L. de Blois and J. Rich (edd.), *The transformation of economic life under the Roman empire* (Amsterdam 2002) 172-83.