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Byzantine Period Rock-Cut Architecture in Thrace

Arif Mısırlı¹

Abstract

Rock-cut churches can be found throughout the Byzantine Empire. In Anatolia, examples can be found in the regions of Cappadocia, Phrygia, Lycaonia, and Thrace. The aim of this study was to determine the current status of the rock-cut religious buildings from the Byzantine period on the borders of Kırklareli and Edirne in Thrace and to examine and classify the identified buildings in terms of their periods and ground plan features and to show the historical and architectural values of these buildings. During the work process, a literature search was carried out to compare areas where rock-cut buildings are common. Written sources and drawings of these buildings were examined and field observations and photographs were taken. A total of nine buildings, seven from Kırklareli and two from Edirne, were examined as part of the study. Floor plan typologies, roof construction systems and architectural elements of the buildings were evaluated. It was found that although the floor plans are mostly single-aisled, there are also three-aisled and triconch examples and the roof construction system is generally a barrel vault. By examining the similarities and differences between the artifacts in Thrace and other regions, the original characteristics of the rock-cut religious structures were evaluated. It is possible to trace the rock-cut architecture in Thrace from the early to the late Byzantine period.

Keywords: Thrace region, Byzantine architecture, rock-cut church.

¹ Assist. Prof., Trakya University, E-mail: arifmisirli@trakya.edu.tr

1. Introduction

Residential and cult sites carved into the rock can be found throughout the Byzantine Empire. Most of these settlements were simply modified natural caves, but new rock-cut buildings can also be observed, especially where the geology was favorable². Byzantine rock-cut religious architecture can be found in many places in Anatolia, especially in Cappadocia (the region around the cities of Aksaray, Nevşehir, Kayseri and Niğde) and Phrygia (Kütahya, Eskişehir and Afyonkarahisar). There are also examples of Byzantine rock-cut architecture in Kilistra in Lycaonia, which lies southwest of Konya, outside these two main regions³.

As the material needed for rock-cut architecture is already available in nature, there is no need to fetch stones from the quarry and bring materials from elsewhere. Therefore, they are preferred and built faster than masonry structures as they are less costly and soft rock can be easily shaped⁴. Rock-cut buildings are also more likely to stand the test of time than masonry buildings. The prevalence of secret underground settlements and hermitages also suggests that they were used for protection from physical or spiritual enemies⁵.

It is noted that the existing masonry churches, especially in Cappadocia and Byzantine architecture, were an example of religious architecture carved into rock and influenced the development and design of carved architecture⁶.

There are many studies on the rock-cut architecture in the Cappadocia region. In her research, which began in 1977, Ötügen compiled a catalog of 703 buildings in 230 settlements in the Cappadocia region. She classified the buildings according to their floor plans, determined 7 types in this context and showed which of these types were used in masonry churches and rock-cut churches⁷. In addition, the author's books, Göreme and Ihlara Valley, provide information

² Annabel Jane, Wharton, (1991). "Rock-cut Churches and Dwellings", *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1081.

³ Spiro Kostof, *Caves of God, Cappadokia and its Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 18; Lyn, Rodley & Nicole, Thierry, "Cappadocia", *Grove Art Online* (2003): erişim 17 Nisan 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T013854>; Robert Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community: Art, Material Culture, and Settlement in Byzantine Cappadocia* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017); Fatma Gül Öztürk, "Rock-cut Architecture", *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia : From the End of Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 148.

⁴ Rodley & Thierry, "Cappadocia".

⁵ Öztürk, Rock-cut Architecture, 149.

⁶ Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community...*, 10, 23.

⁷ Yıldız Ötügen, (1983). "Kapadokya Bölgesi Çalışmaları", *I. Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı* (İstanbul: Eski Eserler ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü. 1983).

about the geographical and physical settlement history of the region, its architectural heritage and its churches and monasteries⁸.

In his studies, Ousterhout argues that the rock-cut settlements in Cappadocia were not monasteries, but a small town or village. He also maps and documents the rock-cut and masonry architecture in the settlement known as Çanlı Kilise in western Cappadocia. However, he mentions the dating, floor plans and decoration of the churches and chapels in the region⁹. In another of his works, he also classifies the rock-cut buildings according to their periods and floor plans¹⁰.

Öztürk (2017), in her study in which she mentioned the Cappadocia region, which has a high density and variability in the form and type of settlements carved into the rock, conveyed the impulses of the rock-cut architecture, talked about the form of the settlements and made external and internal evaluations of the structures¹¹.

Şahna¹² and Pekak & Coşgunaras¹³, in the Cappadocia region, the rock-cut churches and places of worship in the settlements of Ihlara and Belisırma in the Ihlara Valley and the civilian building communities were evaluated within the framework of history, culture, social structure, architecture, iconography and understanding of the settlements.

Another region where rock-cut architecture is intensively researched is Phrygia. In the book, which is one of the pioneering studies on the Phrygian region and was edited by Olcay Uçkan¹⁴, the rock-cut buildings in the provinces of Eskişehir, Afyonkarahisar and Kütahya are described in detail, the position of the Phrygian rock-cut churches in Anatolia is evaluated and suggestions for the protection of the region are developed.

⁸ Yıldız Ötügen, *Göreme* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1987); Yıldız Ötügen, *Ihlara Vadisi* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990).

⁹ Robert Ousterhout, (1997). "Survey of the Byzantine Settlement at Çanlı Kilise in Cappadocia: Results of the 1995 and 1996 Seasons", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), 301-306; Robert Ousterhout, *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2005).

¹⁰ Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community...*, 38-175.

¹¹ Öztürk, *Rock-cut Architecture*, 148-159.

¹² Hülya Şahna, "Kapadokya Bölgesi, Ihlara Vadisi'ndeki Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisi" (Doktora tezi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 2018).

¹³ Mustafa Sacit Pekak & Hülya Coşgunaras, "Ihlara Vadisi, Ihlara ve Belisırma'nın Bizans Dönemi Yerleşim ve Sosyal Yapısı Üzerine Görüşler", *Turkish Studies* 16(7) (2021), 285-326.

¹⁴ Yelda Olcay Uçkan, *Frıgya (Phrygia) Bölgesi'nde Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisi* (Eskişehir: Tepebaşı Belediyesi Kültür Yayını, 2010).

Evcim¹⁵ (2015) (2016), another researcher who examined the Phrygian region in detail, defined the ground plan types, functions and decorative features of the rock-cut churches and evaluated them from an art-historical perspective. In addition, he presented a typological classification of the rock-cut churches in the region based on documentary studies and compared them with their counterparts in Anatolia.

It has been mentioned above that the third region related to rock-cut architecture is Lycaonia. In his work on the religious architecture of the Byzantine period in Konya, Mimirođlu¹⁶, presented the medieval rock-cut buildings in Kilistra as a catalog. He defined the general characteristics of the rock-cut buildings in the region and compared them with similar buildings in Cappadocia, Phrygia and Lycaonia.

When all these studies are examined, it can be seen that most of the basic plan types (single-nave, three-nave basilica, cross, cross-in-square, etc.) found in masonry churches are also used in rock-cut churches, with some differences. In detail, the rock-cut churches have similar features to the masonry churches with their vaults, columns or pillars, blind arches, cornices and imitation ochre stones¹⁷.

This study examined Thrace, another region where rock-cut architecture from the Byzantine period can be found. The aim of this study was to determine the current status of the religious rock-cut churches from the Byzantine period on the borders of Kırklareli and Edirne in Thrace and to examine and classify the identified buildings in terms of their periods and floor plan features and to show the historical and architectural values of these buildings.

During the work process, a literature review was carried out to compare regions where rock-cut buildings are common, and written sources and drawings of these buildings were examined. Vize Cave Monastery and Midye Agios Nikolaos Monastery, which have monumental features, were compared with buildings that have a similar design and their original condition was revealed. On-site surveys were carried out to determine the current condition of the buildings and many of them were documented with photographs of their current state.

¹⁵ Seçkin Evcim, “Dađlık Frigya Bölgesi Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisi” (Doktora tezi, Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2015); Seçkin Evcim, “Frigya Bölgesi’nde Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisi”, *Ordu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6(3) (2016), 861-876.

¹⁶ İlker Mete Mimirođlu, “Ortaçađ’da Konya Kilistra Kenti Yapıları”, *Meram Kitabı: Mevlâna, Konevi, Meram* (Konya: Meram Belediyesi Konevi Araştırma Merkezi, 2007), 113-120; İlker Mete Mimirođlu, “Konya’nın Bizans Dönemi Dini Mimarisi” (Doktora tezi, Selçuk Üniversitesi, 2015), 78-121.

¹⁷ Ötügen, “Kapadokya Bölgesi Çalışmaları”, 89-104; Rodley & Thierry, “Cappadocia”.

2. Rock-cut Buildings in Thrace

A total of nine buildings were examined as part of the study, six in the Vize district of Kırklareli, one in the Centre district and two in the Enez district of Edirne.

2.1. Vize, Cave Monastery

It is located on the northern slope of the Karaköçek (Damata) hill, which drops steeply to the stream in the northeast of Vize, and in a position overlooking the Ayazma stream. It was carved into the rocks on the slope of a deep valley. Due to the crosses that were made for decorative purposes, it is thought to have been built during the Iconoclasm period (726-842) or shortly before. It is dated to the 7th to 9th century¹⁸.

The monastery complex consists of three parts carved into the rock. The first of these is a triconch chapel (A), the second is a large single-aisled church with an irregular floor plan, which adjoins this church (B) (**F. 1**), and the third, further north, consists of the settlements lined up next to each other and a chapel carved into the rock in the middle of them (C).

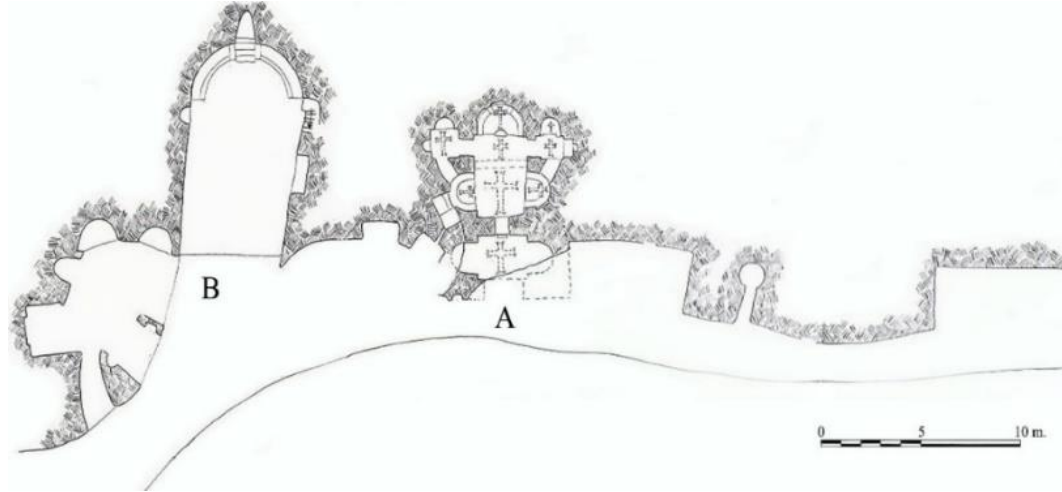
Eyice states that the rocks, before they came to the trikonch chapel, were properly cut from the south, and that there were some additional parts in that direction adjoining these parts. He also states that there may have been regularly spaced square holes in the rock face (**F. 2**) and wooden porches on the rock in front of this cave monastery¹⁹.

A. The chapel, which is the most interesting part of this rock-cut monastery, is very small. Although the entrance (western part) is in ruins, it is possible to complete its ground plan. The side walls of the square room that forms the narthex are extended from the inside with semi-circular apses (**F. 3**). A large cross is carved in relief on the ceiling of the square section. A narrow door leads from the narthex into the naos. The naos is a rectangular nave that extends towards the apse and is divided into two sections that open into semi-circular apses (conches) on both sides, which together with the apse form a triconchial floor plan. Both the ceiling of the first section and the ceiling of the second section, which is considered the bema, feature a Latin cross, as in the narthex²⁰.

¹⁸ Nazan Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi", *Arkitekt* 355 (1974), 123.

¹⁹ Semavi Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", *Belleten* 33(131) (1969), 333.

²⁰ There are crosses on the ceiling of a rock-cut church in Sille, near Konya. see: Semavi Eyice, "Konya ile Sille Arasında Akmanastır: Manakib al Arifin'deki Deyr-i Eflâatun", *Şarkiyat Mecmuası* VI (1966), pl. XI. Crosses were also carved on the ceiling of the rock-cut churches in İnceğiz. see: Feridun Dirimtekin, "Arkeolojik ve Turistik Bakımdan Trakya'nın Doğusu", *I. Türkiye Turing ve Otomobil Kurumu Belleteni* 2-281 (1965), 3. This type of cross carved into the rock can also be found in Cappadocia. see: Guillaume de Jerphanion, *Une Nouvelle Province*



F. 1: Plan of sections A and B in The Vize Cave Monastery²¹

The second section is separated from the apse by a bench. On the semi-circular apse surface, which has a synthronon level, there are three niches (**F. 3**) in which a cross is engraved²². The prothesis and diaconicon cells, which are connected to both the bema and the side conches, have the appearance of chapels with their small apses. There are niches and crosses on the ceilings in these cells. The rectangular room, which is connected to the one on the left side of the conch opens through a narrow passageway.



F. 2: General view of the monastery **F. 3:** The apse of the chapel and the three niches in the apse (Mısırlı, 2018)

B. The large single-aisled church to the north of the triconch chapel has no remarkable architectural features. The nave continues across its entire width and ends with an apse. In the

de L'art Byzantin Les Eglises Rupestres de Cappadoce (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1925), Planches 10 Karanlık kilise. Pl. 20, No. 4, Pl. 26, No. 2-4; Planhes II: Tokalı Kilise, Pl. 72; Zelve'de Güllü Dere, Pl. 144.

²¹ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", f. 17.

²² This type of apse niche can be found in Sille and Kızılören.. see: Eyice, "Konya ile Sille arasında Akmanastır", f. I.

middle of the apse there is a deep niche and on the sides there are three-tiered cathedra and synthronon steps (**F. 4**). Looking at these elements, Eyice realises that this is a church in which great ceremonies were held²³.

The place to the left of the large church consists of a simple hall with rectangular or semi-circular niches on the walls and has no ground plan features (**F. 5**). There are niches for icons and oil lamps on the walls of the corridor-shaped opening that connects this space to the exterior.



F. 4: Synthronon **F. 5:** The place to the left of the large church (Mısırlı, 2018)

C. A well-carved chapel and two adjoining rooms, about 35-40 meters from the single-nave large church, form the third section (**F. 6**). There are 2 tombs in the room adjacent to the main room and 5 tombs on the floor of the narthex of the chapel. On Eyice's plan, two square pillars carved out of the rock can be seen separating the narthex from the naos²⁴, while Yavuzoğlu states that these pillars disappeared afterwards and only the beginning of the pillar can be seen²⁵. The naos has the shape of a transverse trapezoidal square. While the ceilings of the narthex and the naos are flat, the bema section has a barrel-vaulted ceiling and its two side walls are enlarged with semi-circular apses. The chapel is closed off by a semicircular apse.

It is pointed out that the three interconnected rooms on the left were the living cells of the monks who lived in this rock monastery²⁶. On the walls of the rooms are cabinet niches and in the door openings are the slits of the door leaves. These living cells and the exterior of the chapel are enlivened by well-carved niches. In addition, the beam holes on the façade indicate the presence of a vestibule. In this rock monastery, which covers a very large area, there are no sculpted or

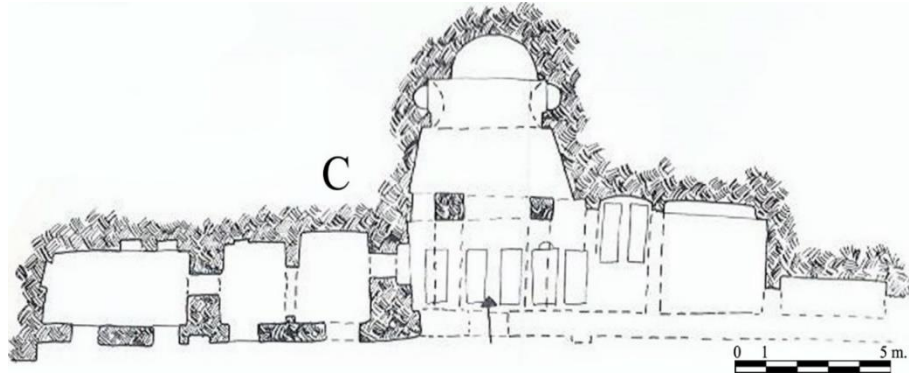
²³ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 334.

²⁴ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 335, f. 17.

²⁵ Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi", 123.

²⁶ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 335; Yavuzoğlu, "Vize'de Mağara Manastır Kompleksi", 123.

coloured decorations, with the exception of the crosses placed as a decorative element in the triconch chapel.



F. 6: Plan of section C at the Vize Cave Monastery²⁷

2.2. Balkaya Cult Area

The church is located 450 meters southeast of the village center of Balkaya in the district of Vize. It is carved and shaped into a natural rock formation. It is located on the right side of the Balkaya-Aksicim road, 200 meters southwest of the road. Around it there are many rectangular tombs carved into the rocks.

There is an entrance gate to the north of the church carved into the rock. The rectangular naos is covered with a barrel vault. Although part of the rock-cut iconostasis of the single-nave church is broken, it is assumed that it had 3 arched openings (**F. 7**). The apse has two side niches and there is an altar on its floor. There are 3 crosses on the south wall. To the west of the church is a pithos carved into the rock, which was probably built for storage purposes. On the east side of the church there are two water reservoirs carved into the rock²⁸.

2.3. Church 1 in Balkaya

The church, located 500 meters southwest of the village center and 100 meters southwest of the main road, was carved into the natural rock formation. The church's cover system is currently unavailable. To the north of the church is a chapel with a cross relief on the apse half-dome (**F. 8**). To the south of the church are rectangular tombs carved into the rock²⁹.

²⁷ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", f. 17.

²⁸ Özkan Ertuğrul, "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde Yapılan Roma-Bizans Devri Yüzey Araştırması", *XIV. Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı II* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Milli Kütüphane Basımevi, 1997), 6; "Balkaya Kültür Alanı", Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, erişim 17.04.2023, <https://kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr/sitler.php?id=130>

²⁹ Ertuğrul, "1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi'nde...", 5; "Balkaya Kayaya Oyma Kilise 1", Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, erişim 17.04.2023, <https://kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr/anitlar.php?id=86>



F. 7: Balkaya Cult Area **F. 8:** Church 1 in Balkaya (Mısırlı, 2019)

2.4. Church 2 in Balkaya

The church, located 500 meters southwest of the village center and 110 meters southwest of the main road, was carved into the natural rock formation. Part of the roof of the single-aisled church had collapsed and was later replaced with concrete. The narthex carved into the rock in front of it is broken and only a small part of the iconostasis remains to the north³⁰. Its floor plan is almost rectangular. In the apse of the church there are three long niches that resemble triple windows (F. 9). There are various cross motifs in the apse and on the south wall. These are crosses made using deep and superficial scraping techniques. There is a niche on the north-eastern wall and lamp niches in various places in the building³¹.



F. 9: Church 2 in Balkaya (Mısırlı, 2019)

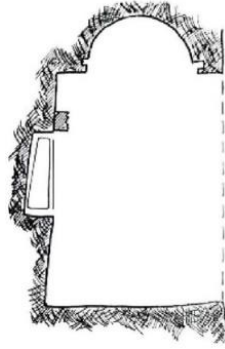
2.5. Midye (Kıyıköy) Chapel

It is located in Kıyıköy of Vize, near Acısu. It is a small chapel with a semicircular apse and a single aisle (F. 10-11). There is a trace of a partition wall between the apse and a trapezoidal

³⁰ “Balkaya Kayaya Oyma Kilise 2”, Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, erişim 17.04.2023, <https://kirkclarelienvanteri.gov.tr/anitlar.php?id=89>

³¹ Ertuğrul, “1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi’nde...”, 5.

arcosolium on the north wall (F. 12). Names and the dates 1784 and 1898 can be read on the wall surfaces inside the chapel³².



F. 10: Plan³³



F. 11: Apse F. 12. Arcosolium (Mısırlı, 2018)

2.6. Midye (Kıyıköy), Agios Nikolaos Monastery

It is located 600-700 meters to the west, at the point where the southern slopes of the valley drop steeply as the road descends through the Saray Gate to Pabuçdere. Eyice dated the complex to the 7th to 9th centuries, as there is only a single painting of a cross in the apse of the church and abundant use of early Christian symbols in the area of the holy spring³⁴. Dirimtekin dated the complex to the 6th to 8th century based on the decorations in the holy spring and the church³⁵, while Ousterhout dated it to the 6th century based on the sculptural decoration of the building³⁶.

³² Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 338-339.

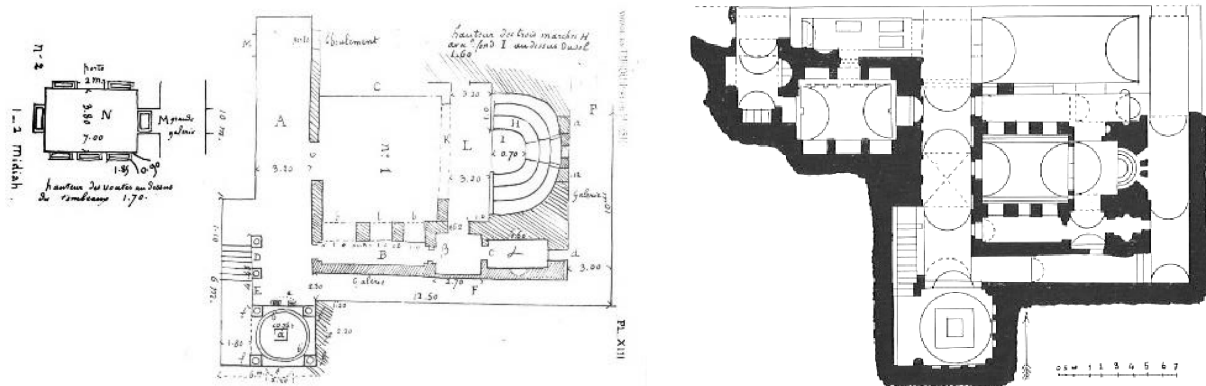
³³ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", f. 21.

³⁴ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 346.

³⁵ Ferudun Dirimtekin, "Midye", *Ayasofya Müzesi Yıllığı* 5 (1963), 55.

³⁶ Robert Ousterhout, (2011). "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace: the View from Constantinople", *4th International Symposium On Thracian Studies Byzantine Thrace* (Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 2011), 490.

A sketch of the building was drawn in 1846 by the French traveler Xavier Hommaire de Hell (F. 13), and Jules Laurens produced paintings³⁷. Later, the building was examined by the Bulgarian K. Skorpil (F. 14) and a detailed plan was published³⁸.



F. 13: Hommaire de Hell's plan³⁹ F. 14: Skorpil's⁴⁰ plan

The monastery consists of three parts that are completely carved into the rock formation (F. 15). These three parts consist of a large church carved entirely into the rock, the holy spring, also carved into the rock, at the rear, to the southwest, and two successive places adjacent to the narthex of the church (F. 16). In addition to these three parts, places made of stone and brick were added to the front of the monastery complex, which have not survived to this day.



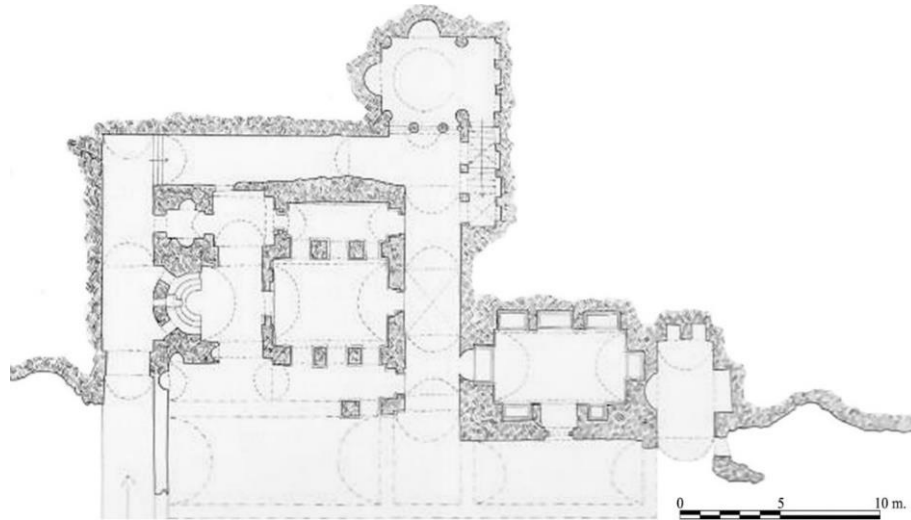
F. 15: General view of the monastery (Mısırlı, 2019)

³⁷ Xavier Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse exécuté par ordre du gouvernement français* (Paris: P. Bertrand, 1854), 145-150. Erişim 18.04.2023, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433066614920&view=1up&seq=9>

³⁸ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 340, quoted from Karel Skorpil, "Arkeoloğičeski beleški ot Strance planina", *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique Bulgare* III (1912-1913), 235-262.

³⁹ Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie...*, pl. XIII.

⁴⁰ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", f. 30.



F. 16: Monastery plan⁴¹

The narthex consists of three sections with a cross vault in the middle and a barrel vault on the sides (**F. 17**). Access to the cross vault in the middle is through a door with a lintel and a square window above the naos. The naos, covered with a barrel vault, is divided into three naves by two square pillars (**F. 18**). The barrel vault covering the naos begins with a three-tiered cornice. The side aisles are also covered with barrel vaults.

The bema is reached via a step from the naos. The iconostasis, which separates the two rooms, was also carved out of the rock. The narrow naves on both sides are covered with barrel vaults. As the northern nave was destroyed, its structure cannot be fully understood. The bema, covered with a barrel vault, is quite wide and gives the impression of a basilica with a transept.



F. 17: Narthex **F. 18:** Naos (Mısırlı, 2019)

⁴¹ Eyice, “Trakya’da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler”, f. 31.

In the semicircular apse there are three-tiered synthron; in the middle is a cathedra (F. 19). Three windows were opened in the apse, the circle in the centre. The cell to the right of the apse is a small chapel and receives little light from the corridor in front of the apse. The outer wall of the northern side aisle was destroyed, and the transept section on this side and the northern side cell were also badly damaged (F. 20).

To the east of the main apse of the church is a narrow and high corridor with a barrel vault. The same corridor continues to the south of the church and, after descending two steps, extends unevenly to the front of the holy spring, where it merges into the narthex. Thus, the narthex and these two corridors and the church are surrounded on three sides. The interior decoration of the church, including the narthex, is quite remarkable.



F. 19: Bema, apse, synthronon and cathedra **F. 20:** Deterioration of the north side cell and side nave (Mısırlı, 2019)

The holy spring, which is located in the south-west of the church, can be reached via a staircase between two pillars. In the square-shaped holy spring, the main room has been extended in three directions with semi-circular niches in the form of an apse. The dome in the middle is also carved out of rock⁴². At the corners of the square room are four architectural elements in the form of columns projecting forwards. Its capitals have the shape of a truncated pyramid and each side has its own composition (F. 21).

In front of the narthex, two rooms, one large and one small, adjoining the narthex and each other, form the third part of the complex. The large space next to the narthex has a rectangular floor plan and is covered with a barrel vault. The burial niches (arcosolium) on the walls suggest

⁴² Semavi Eyice, "Ayazma", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, c. 4 (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1991), 230.

that this was a burial chamber. This area with seven burial niches is entered through a door in the north (F. 22).



F. 21: Holy Spring **F. 22:** Burial chamber (Mısırlı, 2019)

The second and smaller room has a higher floor. An arcosolium is cut into the west wall of this room, which is understood to be a living area. This place was probably used as a sleeping area. There is a small apse on the opposite wall.

The church has decorations carved out of rock. This decoration can be seen most clearly in the narthex, in the apse of the holy spring and in the apse of the church.

2.7. Dereköy, Koyva Monastery

It is located at the exit of the village of Kuzulu (Koyva), 18 km north of Kırklareli, on the Koruköy side. The monastery complex consists of a church in the centre and monastery rooms lined up around it. It was created by manually carving part of a natural cave formation. In front of the main square there is a round apse (F. 23). Its dimensions are approximately 4×7 metres⁴³. Before you enter the main area, there is a narthex, and to the north of the narthex are the rooms. The passage is provided by a narrow corridor. There is a ruined iconostasis in the apse. In the apse are the steps of the synhtranon, with the south side destroyed. Its cover was carved in the form of a vault. Ertuğrul explained that the building can be dated to the 11th to 12th century⁴⁴.

⁴³ “Kuzulu Koyva Kaya Oyma Kilisesi”, Kırklareli Kültür Varlıkları Envanteri, erişim 17.04.2023, <https://kirklarelienvanteri.gov.tr/anitlar.php?id=265>.

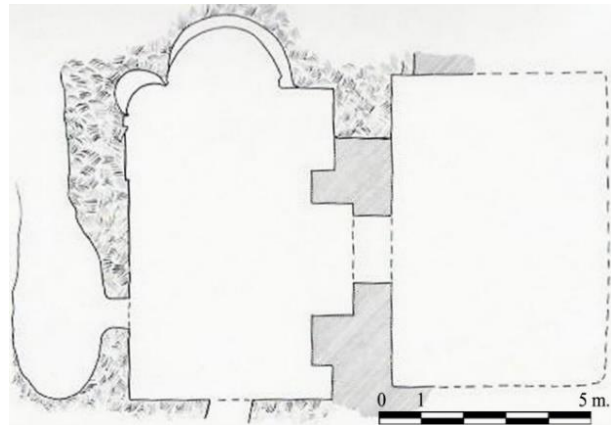
⁴⁴ Ertuğrul, “1995 Yılı Trakya Bölgesi’nde...”, 1.



F. 23: Koyva Monastery apse⁴⁵

2.8. Enez, Panayia Phaneromeni Chapel

The building is located below one of the old windmills in Enez and was carved into the rock. The single-aisled building with an apse was carved into the natural rock, with the exception of the south wall (F. 24). There is a corridor carved into the rock on the north side of the nave. On the south side of the naos there is another rectangular space measuring 4.65×7.40 meters. The passageway between the chapel and this place was later covered with masonry⁴⁶. To the north of the apse is a semicircular niche adjacent to the apse.



F. 24: Panayia Phaneromeni Chapel plan⁴⁷

2.9. Enez, Triada Chapel

It is located 15 meters southeast of the arched structure on the southern pier in front of Enez Castle, which provides access to the inner harbor. It was named Pan's Cave because of a marble

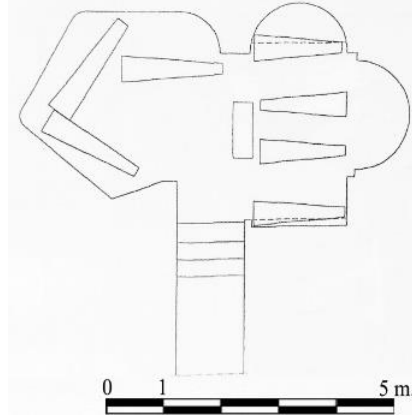
⁴⁵ "Kuzulu Koyva Kaya Oyma Kilisesi"

⁴⁶ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", 349-350.

⁴⁷ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", f. 76.

relief from the Hellenistic period (3rd-4th century) on the west wall of the cave entrance in a niche, which depicts two nymphs dancing with Pan⁴⁸. Originally associated with the Pan culture and with a natural structure, the cave was probably converted into an underground burial chapel in the 14th century and was given the name Aghia Triada⁴⁹.

The chapel is accessed through a brick shed with a single door in the garden of the house where it is located. The chapel, carved into the rock, has a single-aisle (**F. 25**). There is a semicircular apse in the northeast of the naos (**F. 26**) and a rectangular apse in the southeast. It is said that there were frescoes on lime mortar in the apses.⁵⁰



F. 25. Chapel's plan⁵¹

The entrance, originally from the axis of the chapel, was later closed and another entrance was opened to the south (**F. 27**)⁵². There are a total of seven tombs carved into the rock, five of them in an east-west direction in the naos and two in the west, arranged according to the irregular layout of the building. Together with the tombs, the building was given the character of a cross floor plan.

⁴⁸ Stanley Casson, *Macedonia, Thrace and Illyria: Their Relations to Greece from the Earliest Times Down to the Time of Philip Son of Amyntas* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 257.

⁴⁹ Afif Erzen, "1992 Yılı Enez Kazısı", *XV. Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı II* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1995), 460; Sait Başaran, "Orta Çağ'da Enez", *Sanat Tarihi Dergisi* 9 (1998), 8.

⁵⁰ Erzen, "1992 Yılı Enez Kazısı", 460.

⁵¹ Gül Beren Tuncay, "Enez'de Bizans Devri Dini Mimarisi" (Yüksek lisans tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2003), d. 10.

⁵² Başaran, "Orta Çağ'da Enez", 9.



F. 26: Apse and rectangular niche **F. 27.** Entrance (Mısırlı 2014)

3. Evaluation

The most important examples of Byzantine art are to be found in Constantinople due to its status as the capital; however, important settlements in Thrace also lead to frequent encounters with examples of religious architecture in this region.

Examining the construction dates of the buildings, it can be said that the Midye Agios Nikolaos Monastery and the Vize Cave Monastery were built in the 7th to 9th centuries, the Koyva Monastery in the 11th to 12th centuries, and the Triada Chapel is an example of the late Byzantine period (13th to 15th centuries).

Looking at the ground plans, two of the buildings carved into the rock (Vize Cave Monastery and Midye Agios Nikolaos Monastery) are complex; others appear to have been built as single-aisled chapels. The Midye Agios Nikolaos Monastery church has a three-aisled basilica floor plan. In the Vize Cave Monastery, one of the chapels (section A) has a triconch plan, the church (section B) is single-aisled and the other (section C) has a single-aisled floor plan. Most of the buildings are built on a barrel vault. Only in the narthex of Agios Nikolaos church is part of it shaped as a cross vault, and the holy spring of the same building has the form of a shallow dome. In the C section of Vize Cave Monastery, the ceilings of the narthex and the naos are flat, while the bema area has a barrel vault. In addition, Church 1 in Balkaya has no ceiling (**T. 1**).

The most common type among the buildings examined are those with a single place. These rectangular, single-placed, barrel-vaulted buildings have semicircular apses. Olcay Uçkan notes that it will be difficult to define these examples as churches due to their size, and that they can

be considered places of worship that appeal to small groups⁵³. Many examples can be found in the architecture of the Middle Byzantine period that can be identified and analyzed as individual places of worship⁵⁴. It can therefore be assumed that the single-aisled buildings examined in this study belong to the Middle Byzantine period.

Table 1. Comparison of buildings

	Plan Type			Roof Construction System				Architectural Elements						
	Single-aisled	Three-aisled Basilica	Tricocnh	Dome	Barrel Vault	Flat Roof	Cross Vault	Altar	Synthronon	Cathedra	Iconostasis	Arcosolium	Wall Niche	Apse Niche
Vize Cave Monastery Section A			●		●								●	●
Vize Cave Monastery Section B	●				●				●	●			●	
Vize Cave Monastery Section C	●				●	●							●	
Balkaya Cult Site	●				●			●			●			●
Church 1 in Balkaya	●													
Church 2 in Balkaya	●										●		●	●
Midye Chapel	●				●							●		
Midye Agios Nikolaos Monastery		●		●	●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Dereköy Koyva Monastery	●				●						●			
Enez, Panayia Phaneromeni Chapel	●												●	
Enez, Triada Chapel	●				●								●	

The Agios Nikolaos Monastery church has a three-aisled floor plan. Durmuş Kadir Church (6th-7th century), Çavuşin Hg. Ioannes Prodromos Church (6th century), Tokalı Alt Church (10th-11th century), Aynalı Manastır Church (11th century), Ayvalı Church (11th-14th century), Güzelöz 3a and 3b Churches, Soğanlı B and Kubbeli Alt Church (10th century) and Selime Kale Monastery Church (10th-11th century) in Cappadocia are three-aisled buildings⁵⁵. In Lycaonia, the Konya

⁵³ Olcay Uçkan, “Frigya (Phrygia) Bölgesi’nde Bizans Dönemi...”, 143.

⁵⁴ Thomas F. Mathews, “Private” Liturgy in Byzantine Architecture: Toward a Re-appraisal”, *Cahiers Archéologiques Paris* 30 (1982), 136.

⁵⁵ Ötügen, “Göreme”, 21-23, 30-31; Ötügen, “İhlara Vadisi”, 19-20, 35.

Kayadibi Church I (6th-8th century)⁵⁶ and the Koimesis Tes Panagias Church in Sille⁵⁷ are important rock-cut churches of this type. In Akmanastır near Sille in Konya, there is also a rock-cut church with a three-aisled floor plan and a holy spring. However, it can be observed that the decoration program is weak⁵⁸. The three-aisled churches in Phrygia are İbrahim İneri Church in Selimiye village, Ayazini C, D churches and İnpazarcık Yayla Alacain Church⁵⁹.

Among these three-aisled basilica plan churches, the Durmuş Kadir Church, the Selime Kale, the Soğanlı Alt Church, the Sille Koimesis Tes Panagias Church and the Konya Kayadibi Church I, the naves are covered with vaults. Although the pillars of the churches carved into the rock are usually two each, the Selime Kale Monastery Church, the Durmuş Kadir Church, the Sille Koimesis Tes Panagias Church and the Konya Kayadibi Church I each have three pillars. The Agios Nikolaos Monastery church also has two pillars and a barrel-vault.

The Agios Nikolaos Monastery, the Selime Kale Church, the Durmuş Kadir Church and the Konya Kayadibi Church I are comparable in size. The Durmuş Kadir Church measures 10.1×11.3 meters⁶⁰, the Selime Kale Church measures 12.5×11 meters⁶¹ and the Kayadibi Church I measures 5.86×7.84 meters⁶². While Kayadibi Church I remains modest in size, the others are close to each other. The dimensions of the Agios Nikolaos Monastery church are 15×9 meters. However, these dimensions do not include the corridor surrounding the naves. If the corridor (to the south and east) is added, it measures 18×13.5 meters (**F. 28**). In addition, the church can be distinguished from other churches by its layout in plan. In particular, the Agios Nikolaos Monastery is distinguished from other examples by its rich floor plan, the presence of a holy spring and its rich decoration.

⁵⁶ Yelda Olcay Uçkan ve İlker Mete Mimiroğlu, “Konya Kayadibi Köyünde İki Kaya Kilisesi”, *IX. Ortaçağ ve Türk Dönemi Kazıları ve Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları Sempozyumu* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, 2006), 353-359.

⁵⁷ Marcell Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), 181-182.

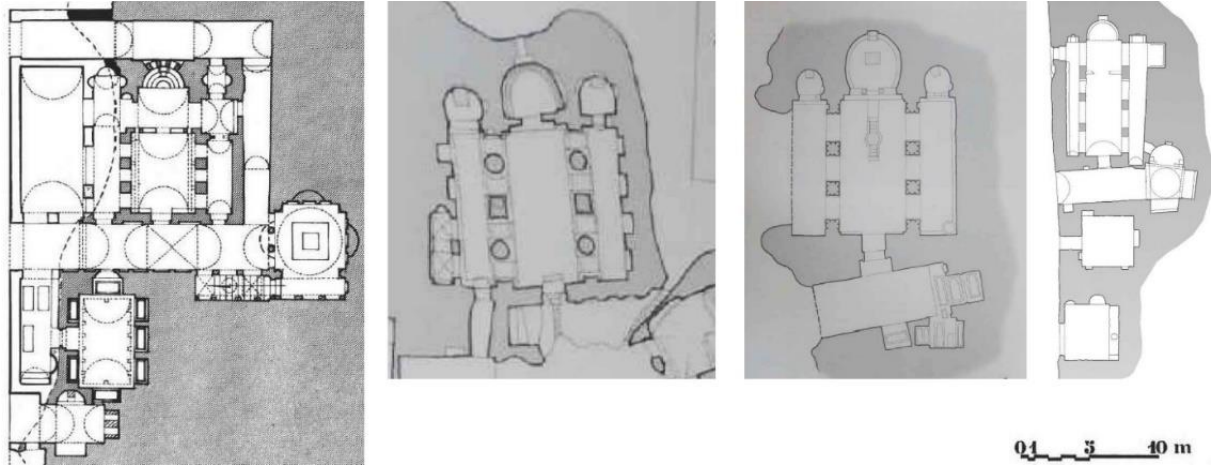
⁵⁸ Eyice, “Konya ile Sille arasında Akmanastır”, pl. XII.

⁵⁹ Evcim, “Frigya Bölgesi’nde Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisi”, 866.

⁶⁰ Ousterhout, “*Visualizing Community...*”, 51.

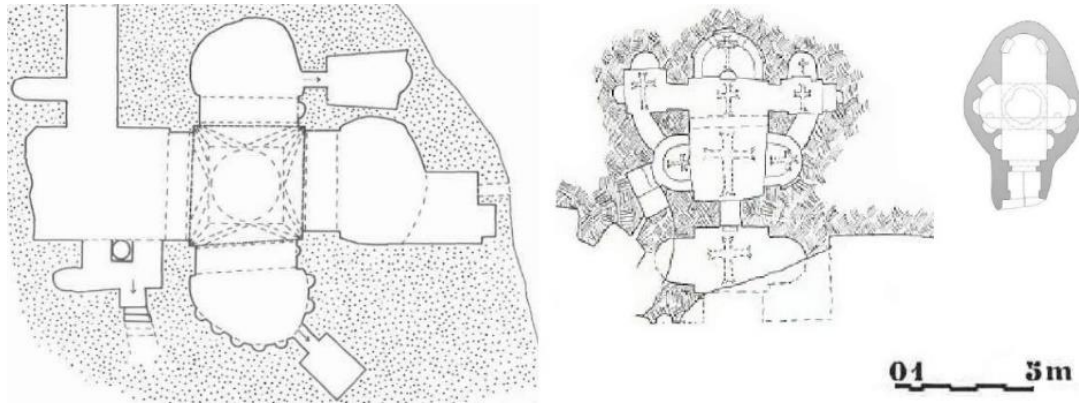
⁶¹ Ousterhout, “*Visualizing Community...*”, 336.

⁶² Mimiroğlu, “Konya’nın Bizans Dönemi Dini Mimarisi”, 62.



F. 28: Agios Nikolaos Monastery⁶³, Selime Kale Church⁶⁴, Durmuş Kadir Church⁶⁵, and Konya Kayadibi Church I⁶⁶ plans

The triconch floor plan section A of the Vize Cave Monastery can be compared with the Tağar Church in the Cappadocia region and Kızılören Church I in Konya. Although they are similar in shape, there is a significant difference in size. While the Church of St. Theodore measures 13 meters long and close to 11 meters wide⁶⁷, Kızılören Church I 5 meters long and close to 3,5 meters wide⁶⁸, the triconch plan of the Vize Cave Monastery is 6 meters long and 5 meters wide, about half the size of the St. Theodore church but is bigger than Kızılören Church I (F. 29).



F. 29: Tağar (St. Theodore) Church⁶⁹, Vize Cave Monastery Section A⁷⁰ and Kızılören Church I⁷¹

⁶³ Ousterhout, "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace...", 839

⁶⁴ Ousterhout, "Visualizing Community...", 337.

⁶⁵ Ousterhout, "Visualizing Community...", 52.

⁶⁶ Mimiroğlu, "Konya'nın Bizans Dönemi Dini Mimarisi", 395.

⁶⁷ Ousterhout, "Visualizing Community...", 113.

⁶⁸ Mimiroğlu, "Konya'nın Bizans Dönemi Dini Mimarisi", 71.

⁶⁹ Ousterhout, "Visualizing Community...", 114.

⁷⁰ Eyice, "Trakya'da Bizans Devrine Ait Eserler", f. 17.

⁷¹ Mimiroğlu, "Konya'nın Bizans Dönemi Dini Mimarisi", 399.

4. Conclusion

Thrace was an important region in Byzantine times, not only militarily but also artistically, as it was located on the connecting roads between Eastern and Western Rome, near the capital and was the gateway to the West.

Rock-cut churches are part of Anatolia's cultural heritage. They are widely represented in Anatolia's religious architecture and are even recognised worldwide. Rock-cut churches with a variety of floor plan typologies such as single-aisled, cross-in-square and triconch etc. have survived to the present day in greater numbers and more robustly than masonry churches. In this respect, they are important buildings that reflect the religious architecture, aesthetic understanding and cultural structure of the region in which they stand.

The churches in Thrace differ in size. There are not only small buildings, but also monumental structures. Churches and chapels with different ground plans and decorative features contribute to the understanding of the rock-cut architecture of the region from the Byzantine period.

Looking at the locations of the buildings, it can be seen that they are not in areas independent of the city of Enez and K1y1k1y, which are port cities. As Evcim stated⁷², the rock-cut buildings were not built to be hidden and out of sight, but according to the climatic and geographical conditions and moreover according to the culture of rock-cut architecture. However, it is clear that the samples found in Vize are located in rural areas.

It can be seen that the cross-in-square plan type was widespread in Cappadocia after the Iconoclast period, but in the Thracian region the change did not proceed at the same pace. Although masonry churches with a cross-in-square plan were built in the region (Enez Hagia Sophia, Enez Agios Ioannes Prodromos Church, etc.), they are not reflected in the rock-cut architecture. Compared to Cappadocia, which is at the top in terms of the richness of wall paintings, it can be seen that the buildings in Thrace lag far behind the richness of wall paintings.

In particular, the triconch section of the Vize Cave Monastery attracts attention with its ground plan, and the Midye Agios Nikolaos Monastery with its wealth and the dimensions of the ground plan. The buildings carved into the rock, which have survived to this day, are important to show the traces of the past and the characteristics of the era. If we evaluate the religious buildings from the Byzantine period in Thrace according to their historical and architectural features, they still preserve the characteristics of their era, even if only partially.

⁷² Evcim, "Frigya Bölgesi'nde Bizans Dönemi Kaya Mimarisini", 875.

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