

RECENTLY EXPLORED UNDERGROUND CITIES AND CAVE DWELLINGS OF EASTERN CAPPADOCIA (TURKEY)

Ali Yamaç¹, Ezgi Tok^{1,2}

¹ OBRUK Cave Research Group; Acikhava Apt. 16/7, Nisantasi, Istanbul, Turkey, ayamac@gmail.com

² ITU, Istanbul Technical University, EURASIA Institute of Earth Sciences

Abstract

Although the region known as “Cappadocia” is located in the Nevsehir-Urgup-Goreme triangle of Anatolia (Turkey), the capital of that region in ancient times was the antique Caesarea city which is known as Kayseri today. Kayseri, located 75 km east of the present Cappadocia, has also been affected by the intensive volcanic activities which began 10 million years ago. Some were only small vents, but a total number of 68 volcanoes around Kayseri had been erupting during the whole Pliocene-Pleistocene periods. That eruption phase, which continued even until historical times in few volcanoes, piled up a very thick ignimbrite and tuff around Kayseri. In antique Caesarea, similar to Nevsehir-Urgup-Goreme, this volcanic rock was dug by the local people, to built houses, churches and underground cities.

Different from the known touristic parts of Cappadocia, the rock dwellings and underground cities of Kayseri have not been explored before. Nevertheless, underground structures of that region have such an architectural quality to compete with the dwellings of other parts of Cappadocia. Around the city, which had been the cradle of Christianity in Anatolia beginning from the 3rd century, there are several underground cities carved in order to shelter from the invasions beginning by the 7th century. This new project of OBRUK Cave Research Group is totally different from all our previous works. We find new and hitherto unexplored underground cities on every spot around Kayseri. Apart from several rock settlements and rock churches, 14 different underground cities on the walls of deep valleys around the city, which were unknown and not recorded before, had been explored and surveyed. Those underground cities are rather different than the ones around Goreme. Apart from the architectural differences, at least some of them were not used again after the first construction period, whilst in other cases even the excavation of the underground city is uncompleted. When appreciated in this context, the underground cities of Kayseri have features to shed light on the beginning of this type of architecture, which is different from Goreme, where most examples were continuously enlarged and new passages added during the history.

Keywords: underground city, artificial caves, Kayseri, Cappadocia.