

## **SPACIAL COMPOSITION OF CHRISTIAN PAINTINGS IN THE CAVE CHURCHES OF IHLARA VALLEY, CAPPADOCIA**

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### **Introduction**

In this study, we examine the spatial composition of the cave churches in the Ihlara valley of Cappadocia, Turkey with specific focus on their arrangement of rooms, location of windows and tombs, and the theme and layout of paintings. We describe herein how the layout of the paintings ascribes meaning to the architectural space. These churches have enormous implications for determining how a holy space was created.

In studies on the iconography of paintings, an iconographic image is compared to similar images or the relevant historiography. However, many Byzantine churches have been lost, some existing churches have almost no remaining iconographical materials, and almost no historiography refers directly to the original paintings. We found drawings and photos from previous studies and websites, created interior elevations using the paintings in the cave churches of Ihlara valley and analyzed the spatial composition with the theme and layout of the paintings. In this paper the five cave churches are single-naved and the three ones are cruciform in plan of the eight ones that we analyzed. Because of space limitations, we described below the two cave churches, that is to say, the Kokar Kilise church of a single-nave plan with a burial chapel and the Yilanli Kilise church of a cruciform plan with a burial chamber.

### **Kokar Kilise**

The Kokar Kilise church is located on the second story of the monastery, and consists of a single nave with an apse in the east portion and a burial chapel that is assumed to have been added to the west portion of the church (Fig. 1). The entrance is located on the western edge of the nave's northern wall. The chapel has an aisle with a bench on the west side and a room on the north side. The chapel's nave and aisle have an apse on their south side. Grave pits are located on the north side of the chapel's nave and in the aisle, found notably as one passes around the entrance, but no grave pits are found in front of the apse of the chapel's nave.

The walls of the church and chapel are resurfaced smoothly, and their walls and piers are decorated with cornices. Christian paintings of many colors are drawn on the plaster throughout the church and decorative red iron oxide patterns are painted partially in the chapel directly on the smoothly resurfaced ceilings and walls. It is generally accepted that Christian paintings are placed exclusively in important spaces within a monastery.

In the church, there are no paintings of the "Ministry of Jesus," but paintings of the "Incarnation," "Passion," and "Resurrection" are positioned clockwise from the east side of

the southern wall (Fig. 2). The "Deesis" is painted widely throughout the upper part of the church's western wall, which adjoins the chapel, signifying the "Salvation" of souls. Through the doorway of the lower part of the western wall, a bird eating a snake, which illustrates victory of souls over sin, and foliage patterns that represent eternal life are located in the chapel. There are many grave pits in the chapel in the church's west side and, in the aisle in the chapel's west side, the chapel apparently also served as a burial chamber.

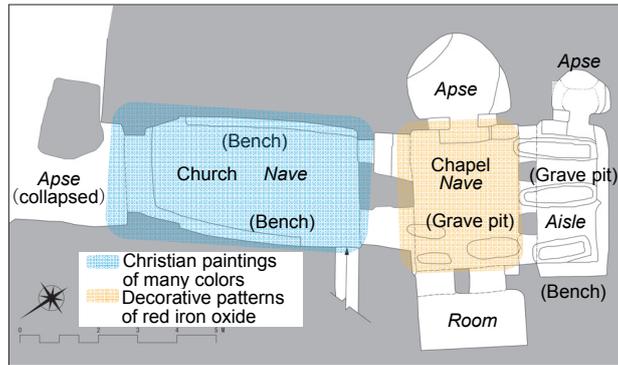


Fig. 1: Plan of Kokar Kilise (redrawn after [3])

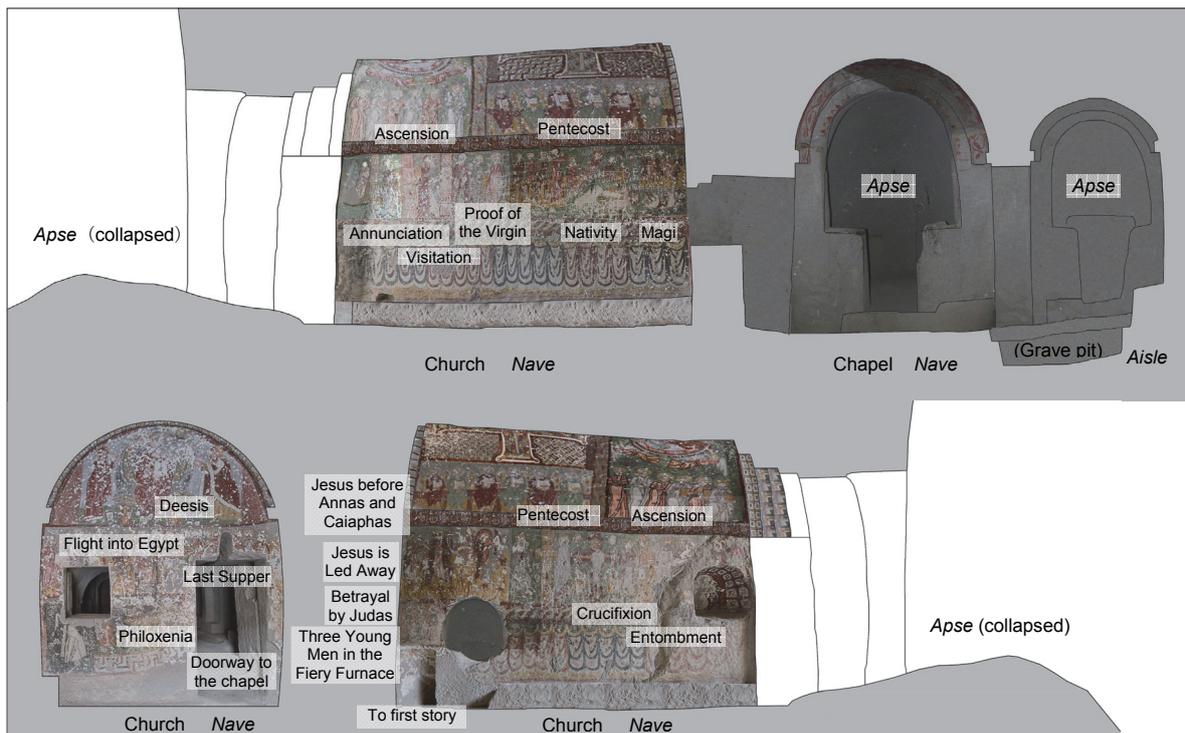


Fig. 2: Interior elevation of Kokar Kilise (photo by [5])

## Yılanlı Kilise

The Yılanlı Kilise church is located on the second story of the monastery. It follows a cruciform plan and has a front chamber and burial chamber (Fig. 3). The church has an apse in the eastern portion, the southern transept has a window, and the outside of the window and front chamber are decorated. The burial chamber also has an apse on the east side, an

arcosolium on the north side, and some grave pits on the floor. In the burial chamber, the surface of the walls and ceiling are rough with only the northern wall of the arcosolium smoothly resurfaced. The front chamber also contains an arcosolium on the west side, but there are no arcosolia or grave pits in the church. Christian paintings are painted on the walls and ceiling throughout the church, but are painted only on the walls in the front chamber and the northern wall of the arcosolium in the burial chamber. All of the paintings consist of many colors.

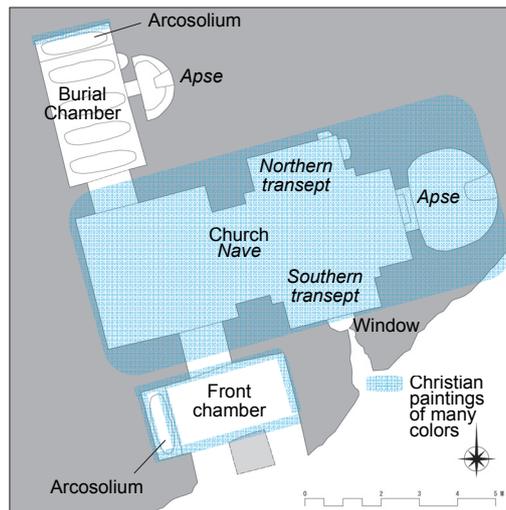


Fig. 3: Plan of Yılanlı Kilise (redrawn after [4])



Fig. 4: Interior elevation of Yılanlı Kilise (photo by [5])

Paintings of Constantine and Helena flank each side of the window in the southern transept of the church, extending their hands for the cross, which symbolizes Christ, in the upper part of the window. The center of the painting is illuminated by the window (Fig. 4). The window is not meant to light up the painting on the opposite wall, but does associate the window with the painting, emphasizing its meaning of the "Glory of Christ." There are no "Ministry of Jesus" paintings inside the church, but there are many paintings of the "Passion," "Forty Martyrs," which implicates "Death," and the "Last Judgment" distributed throughout the entire church.

The northern wall of the arcosolium in the burial chamber is resurfaced smoothly and painted, indicating that this is a place of importance. The burial chamber has an apse and a painting of the "Deesis," accentuating the "Salvation" of dead souls. In addition, the front chamber also contains an arcosolium and paintings of "Mary of Egypt" and "Daniel in the Lions' Den," which also represents the "Salvation" of souls.

We now understand that paintings that symbolize "Death" and "Salvation from Death" are found in the church's west side and in the front and burial chambers that connect to it.

## Conclusion

In this study, we created interior elevations using paintings and examined the spatial composition of the cave churches found in the Ihlara valley of Cappadocia, Turkey, focusing particularly on room arrangement, location of windows and tombs, and the theme and layout of the paintings. Many tombs are found in the cave churches of Ihlara valley, but few are found in the naves and none are located in front of the alters. All walls in the naves are painted, but the walls in other rooms are partially painted. Furthermore, many of the churches contain paintings signifying "Death" or "Salvation." These factors, based on the arrangement of rooms, location of tombs, and the theme and layout of the paintings, indicate that, for the cave churches of Ihlara valley, churches with an apse and burial chambers are important.

The cave churches of Ihlara valley establish a space that means "Death" and emphasize "Salvation" of souls with the theme and layout of the Christian paintings, focused particularly on the church and burial chamber. The burial chamber is especially significant, bolstered by the many paintings signifying "Death" and "Salvation" that are drawn in the church, giving a meaning to the holy religious space that is unique to the Ihlara valley.

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