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Building on the Past:
Gertrude Bell and the
Transformation of Space in the Karadağ

MARK JACKSON

The ancient volcano known as the Karadağ located 25 km NNW of Karaman in southern
Anatolia dominates the southern part of the Konya plain. For nearly three thousand years, a
series of structures each important in their own time has stood at Mahaleth, the highest peak
of the Karadağ.

On the very summit of Mahaleth at about 2,271 m today is a modern Turkish communications
building. Visible from a considerable distance, this post is situated right over the western
end of a Byzantine ecclesiastical complex which in turn is located in close proximity to, and
possibly also over, a cult place of pre-classical times.

Studied in isolation these remains provide interest for specialists of particular periods,
studied together they tell a rich and important story about the changing role of the mountain
over long periods. We can question the extent to which buildings, co-located in significant
places, but constructed at different times were related to and influenced by each other. Each
new building phase has obscured and remodelled elements of what went before. These physical
remains offer us an opportunity to consider an example of the way that the construction of new
monuments transforms topographically distinct places.

This paper will consider the Byzantine ecclesiastical buildings located on the mountain top
at Mahaleth. It will question whether this Byzantine complex was constructed with intentional
reference to the earlier cult site there and what its purpose may have been. Much of the evi-
dence for this was collected by Gertrude Bell and William Ramsay who worked at Binbirkilise
briefly in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Gertrude Bell Archive, given in 1926
to Newcastle University when it was Armstrong College, Durham by Elsa Richmond, Gertrude
Bell’s half-sister, provides a rich resource for study. Her library of books and her papers and
photographs have supported generations of academics and students of Byzantine and early
Islamic archaeology both at Newcastle University and beyond, especially since the placement of
most of the archive online during the late 1990s (Ritchie and Jackson 2015).

Gertrude Bell’s interest in Binbirkilise was sparked during a journey that she made in 1905
from Syria to Constantinople during which she travelled along the Cilician coast visiting sites
such as Kanlıdivane, the Corycian Cave (Cennet ve Cehennam), Corycos (Kiz Kalesi) and Silifke
(Bell 1906a–e, 1907). Her journey from the coast at Silifke to Karaman on the Konya plain took
her over the Taurus, not as the main road goes today through the Göksu pass via Mut, and
Alahan, or Dağpazarı, but via Kirobası. Bell made a detour to visit the Karadağ because it was
famed for Binbirkilise (the Thousand and One Churches). Having spent several days there,
she continued to Konya where by chance she met the New Testament scholar and Historical
Geographer William Ramsay. The two of them discussed an inscription from the Karadağ published later that year by Ramsay (Ramsay 1905; 1906: 258–9); and they resolved to work there together in 1907. Between May and June 1907 they conducted an expedition to record the churches, forts, monasteries and houses on the Karadağ known as Binbirkilise, The Thousand and One Churches (Ramsay and Bell 1909). The main Byzantine settlement at Binbirkilise was at Madenşehir at the foot of the Karadağ. The other was a substantial complex of large, probably monastic, buildings or elite residences at Değle which was located on a promontory on the north side of the volcanic crater some way up the mountain. Ramsay and Bell also recorded many of the smaller church buildings and complexes located elsewhere on this and neighbouring mountains, especially those constructed high on the peaks.

One of the most interesting of these churches was the Byzantine ecclesiastical complex planned by Bell at Mahaletch (Fig. 3). The lines of the walls on Bell’s plan can be made out on the satellite images in Google Earth but as is clearly visible from the satellite imagery a modern communications building was constructed over the western part of the area planned by Bell (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 239, Fig.198; Google Earth 2014).

This recent development serves to illustrate how a building, in this case the modern installation, can be sited at a significant place without any reference, or indeed apparent concern, for what went before but can nevertheless, even inadvertently, impact upon it physically. By contrast, a building complex might directly reference earlier remains through its construction, as was the case for the Byzantine architects who seem to have taken into consideration the earlier pre-classical remains such as Ramsay and Bell discovered in 1907.

**The Discovery of the Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions at Mahaletch**

In June 1907 Sir William Ramsay, Lady Ramsay and Gertrude Bell climbed to the top of the Karadağ, to the peak which Bell called either Mahaletch or Mahlech. Bell records in her diary and in a letter for the 17th June that in addition to recording the Byzantine church, they had been working also at the “Hittite chamber” located nearby on the top of the mountain.

The Karadağ and Kızıldağ inscriptions (Karadağ1–2 and Kızıldağ 1–3) belong to king Hattusas and his father Mursilis who bore the significant titles “Great King, Hero” (Hawkins 2000a: 429). They represent probably an early western group of indigenous Hieroglyphic inscriptions of the Iron Age, when the Neo-Assyrian kings accessed the southern part of the Anatolian plateau referred to as the land of Tabal via routes through the Taurus (Hawkins 2000a: 425). This western group of inscriptions, whose dating is controversial, provides some of the only archaeological, historical or epigraphic evidence for Tabal for the three centuries after the fall of the Hittite empire c. 1200–900 B.C., since, unlike the other Tabal inscriptions, it appears to date to earlier than the 8th century B.C. (Hawkins 2000a: 426, 429). The inscriptions have been well published recently and are not our concern here (Hawkins 2000a: 436–44), rather I wish to consider firstly the purpose of the Byzantine masonry which Ramsay and Bell cleared from the place where they were found.

Ramsay and Bell recognized at the site in 1907 that the Byzantines had modified the area where the earlier Karadağ inscriptions were found. Their record, although somewhat patchy, may have some bearing on interpretation of the place as a whole. Ramsay notes, “In the rocks
that support the church on the north side is a passage, partly natural, partly artificial, now to some extent narrowed by walls of the Byzantine period. On the rock walls of this passage, perhaps formerly hidden by Byzantine building are two inscriptions in ancient hieroglyphics...” (1908: 159). A month earlier, Bell had made a plaster cast of the main inscription from Karadağ [Kara Dagh] (British Museum, Cast Nos., C.217; Bell, Diary, 19 May 1907; Hawkins 2000b: Plate 241), and nearby Kızıldağ [Kizil Dagh] (Cast Nos., C.216, C.215, C.214) which she donated to the British Museum in April 1908 (British Museum, ANE Correspondence 1908, q.v. Bell 1 April, 6 April; Hawkins 2000b: Plates 236–237).

Ramsay and Bell’s description of the site leaves some questions unanswered. One of the most intriguing is their suggestion that some of the masonry associated with the earlier inscriptions belonged not to the period of the hieroglyphic Luwian inscription but to modifications during the Byzantine period. With the help of workmen, Ramsay and Bell excavated this Byzantine masonry so their record of the process is important. The operation is recorded in two photographs of the men in action G_93 and G_94 (Figs. 1 and 2).

Bell wrote in *The Thousand and one Churches*,

We cleared out the chamber W. of the Hittite inscriptions and found the masonry to belong to the Christian period. The rock on the N. side of the hill, E. of the chamber, forms an angle on the farther side of which the surface has been smoothed and a few Hittite characters inscribed on it. W. of the angle the rock has been cut away so as to form the S. wall of a short passage. The opposite wall of the passage is hewn out of a low ridge that crops out of the ground and
on the upper part of this ridge is the second inscription. The northern ridge ends in a pair of rock-cut steps (an altar?). In Christian times the rock walls were supplemented by masonry and the passage so formed was closed by a wall to the W. with a door in it (Fig. 212). The Christian building must have swept away all traces of older construction; of the Hittite shrine there remains only the rock-cut walls and the rock-cut steps. The latter had either been covered by the Christian wall or had broken the line of it. The Hittite passage had had the appearance of a large natural gateway; the Christian walls emphasised its character by prolonging the passage and setting a door at the end of it (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 255–56).

Ramsay wrote,

The church on the summit of the Kara Dagh (p.241) seems to have been built on the site of an old Hittite High Place which was almost totally destroyed or covered up. The only remnant of the High Place is found on the N. side about 20 or 30 feet below the summit, where a narrow passage running E. to W. between rocks bears two inscriptions, one on each side, in the Hittite hieroglyphics. This passage was partly, if not wholly, lined with Byzantine masonry, which was perhaps intended to conceal the evidence of heathen worship and writing; but most of the masonry has fallen. The passage was entered by a Byzantine door E., and by openings, now free from masonry, on N. and E. On the N. wall is an inscription in one line of incised hieroglyphs: opposite on the S. wall is a short inscription in relief, four symbols between columns (Fig. 374 b and c). This latter . . . (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 505).

This hieroglyphic Luvian inscription would appear to have been part of the entrance way to an earlier cult building complex perhaps a shrine or sanctuary located probably beneath the ruins of the Byzantine church (Hawkins 1992: 268; 2000: 436). It survives because rather than destroy the inscription, the Byzantines seem to have employed masonry to cover it up. What is interesting is that they also seem to have built walls to monumentalize the space where the inscription was found. We might question why in the Christian period this earlier structure became the focus of such attention. Why for example had they sought not to destroy the inscription but to conceal it behind masonry walls forming a chamber with a doorway at the same place?

We must suppose that Ramsay and Bell knew well the character of Byzantine masonry and were able to recognize it. By 17 June 1907, Bell had spent a month, describing, drawing, and photographing the churches and associated buildings at the Karadağ. Indeed Bell was primarily concerned with architectural remains; she was influenced by scholars at the time who often described their approaches as art history rather than archaeology, for them architectural style was important. One of her particular concerns when recording Byzantine buildings was to characterize the nature of the stonework. This was done to group the churches into types and to inform her interpretations about the chronology of the buildings. We can be fairly sure therefore from her identification that this was indeed Byzantine masonry and a Byzantine gateway that Ramsay and Bell found built into the chamber where the Luwian Hieroglyphic inscription was found.

It seems important, therefore, that we should accept their interpretation that this earlier structure was indeed modified by the Byzantines. Their second interpretation surrounding the Luwian discovery was that the Byzantine construction removed what had existed before (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 256). And yet clearly the very obvious inscription, which might easily have been removed, if that had been what was thought necessary, was left undamaged.
Although most of the earlier remains were “swept away” as Bell puts it (ibid.), the description also makes clear that there was a narrowing and lengthening of the passage through the addition of masonry to the rock-cut walls, and the adding of a door. From Bell’s description, this earlier “passage had the appearance of a large natural gateway; the Christian walls emphasised its character by prolonging the passage and setting a door at the end of it” (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 255–56). There seems, therefore, to have been both a deliberate embellishment of the earlier character of the building, by the construction of new walls and a doorway which
suggests that the older space was not suppressed entirely beneath masonry, but was monumentalized and transformed. Ramsay and Bell’s description of this space both as a chamber but also as a passage would suggest that it was used as a Byzantine monumental entranceway.

**The Byzantine Church Complex at Mahaletch**

There were, by the time Bell found and recorded it, multiple ruined but related Byzantine structures on the Mahaletch peak covering several phases. To the east was a church, cruciform in plan, which would have been topped with a dome. This building was extended to the west in a later phase with a narthex and subsequently the addition of an exo-narthex. A covered passageway (cryptoporticus) connected the north-west corner of the exo-narthex of the church to a second very small cruciform chapel, while a second longer passageway, built on a retaining wall, connected the south side of the narthex to a group of buildings located about 32m to the west of the main church. The buildings located to the west were not as well constructed as the church but consisted of a series of rooms covering an area of at least 15m x 20m, that is, a greater area than the church. These rooms would have enabled people to reside at the top of the mountain and to communicate with the church without going outside. Gertrude Bell described the situation to her stepmother Florence Bell,

I found a roofed passage between the church and the monastery which somehow throws a queerly human ray of light on the poor monks up there, snowed up for 4 months of the year and creeping to their prayers along the narrow stone passage. (Bell, Letter, 17 June 1907)

As Bell noted, the corridors would have enabled people to move from the building to the west of the church, to the church itself and the chapel without venturing outside. This network of interrelated interior spaces, framed by the stone walls of the buildings, offered the potential for confinement and isolation at a place which was in other aspects very exposed. The church’s location commanded a view over a huge territory and would have been subject to all the elements from rain, sun and snow, to wind, thunder and lightning. Its elevation placed it high in the air away from the land where most people dwelt. The walls, therefore, would clearly have provided a practical barrier against the elements but they would also have helped to shape the community living there.

In the space between the church and the annexe buildings to the north of the passageway was a vaulted cistern and another such building on the south side, both associated in the early 20th century at least with stone troughs for watering animals. South of the church, at a lower elevation is a small apsed building abutting a square chamber which may have been a tomb. To the south of this chamber was a cave, in which Bell found evidence for two burials (Bell, Diary, 18 May 1907).

Although Bell’s published plan does not distinguish between phases of masonry, in fact her photographs, her field drawings and the descriptions that she and Ramsay made, reveal that the main building had at least four phases. Bell’s photographs G_75 and G_69 show that the arms of the cross predate the north and south walls of the church to their west (Royal Geographical Society, Bell notes 1907: 3/11).
The first phase of the main building was the cruciform church. The second phase was the addition of a substantial narthex running the width of the building that was constructed onto the west side of the original cruciform structure presumably at the same time as the north and south walls were added. The narthex was oriented north-south with two transverse arches dividing it into three parts and the whole narthex roofed by a north-south barrel vault. The south side of the narthex provided access through a doorway to the north side of a long passage which communicated with a complex of buildings 32m to the west of the church.

The third phase was a tripartite exo-narthex, which spanned the entire width of the building, and was built up against the west side of the narthex, (Ramsay 1909: 254). The west wall of
the exo-narthex was itself remodelled in antiquity in a fourth phase, when the original triple-arched entrance built on double columns was modified so that the outer arches no longer existed and in their place there were stone walls fitted around the springing stones (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 241–242).

The passage to the chapel located 4m to the north-west of the church allowed movement from the north wall of the exo-narthex to the east wall of the southern arm of the cruciform chapel. This was a memorial chapel perhaps to a certain Leo who is recorded to have been buried there by an inscription on the outside of the east wall (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 556).

Ideally given the relatively good state of preservation of the buildings, the site would benefit from the checking of some of these details; a detailed buildings survey, for example, would be desirable. The plan published by Ramsay and Bell puts the chamber some 21m north of the church, but Bell’s photograph G_92 (Fig. 4) would appear to show the east end of the memorial chapel to Leo (compare G_087, Fig. 5) in the background behind the steps of the chamber. This would suggest that the chamber was due east of the small chapel and north of the main church.

Fig. 5. The ‘Leo’ chapel at Mahaletch, view from the northeast (Newcastle University, Gertrude Bell Archive, G_87).
I think this would agree with Hawkins’ description but close examination on the ground is needed to establish whether Bell has the chamber correctly positioned or not.

St Michael

Mahaletch, the name of the mountain, as recorded by Ramsay and Bell (1909) may suggest a former relationship, as they noted, to St Michael. Ramsay tentatively suggests two very fragmentary Byzantine inscriptions at Mahaletch that may also relate to the Archangel Michael but this is based on a very partial preservation of στρ which might be αρχιστρατηγος (i.e., the archistratgeos, commander of the hosts of angels, Michael) and an initial M located next to the fresco of a figure in black in the apse. It is noted that Michael also features (more clearly!) in an inscription and fresco in Church no 8, an octagonal church with cruciform projections at Madenşehir, the town at the foot of the mountain (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 538, no. 26).

St. Michael has been the name connected with mountains all over Europe since the Medieval period (Bouet et al. 2007), and he became of considerable significance during the late Antique period in Asia Minor. Ideas about Michael imported to Asia Minor, Mango has argued, were fused with the ancient local cult of Cybele and Attis, who were associated with mountains and springs of water; they can also be connected to the cult of Men (Mango 1986: 61; Niewöhner et al. 2013: 109). Furthermore, exported to Asia Minor, “he [Michael] belongs squarely to the world of Judaism, and more to that of Jewish-Babylonian magic than to the Bible; which is why his original role in Christianity, a role condemned by the official Church, was that of healer and guardian against the occult powers of evil.” (Mango 1986: 61). As Mango and Ramsay have noted, angels were venerated in western Asia Minor by Jews, Christians and pagans. Paul warned the Colossians against angel worship (Colossians 2:18); it was also prohibited by canon 35 of the Council of Laodicea in Phrygia about AD363 and Theodoret’s commentary of the letter to the Colossians spoke against the worship of angels in Phrygia and Pisidia, Lycaonia and neighbouring regions. Michael is testified to by church dedications and by epigraphic evidence (Ramsay 1907: 477 and Mango 1986: 53–54). The Archangel Michael figures, for example, with Gabriel on the doorway between the nave and the narthex at the West Church at Alahan (Gough 1962: 131, fig. 2)). Mango (1991: 300) has proposed that Alahan was a healing shrine perhaps dedicated to the Archangel.

A pre-Christian precedent can often be identified for places identified with St Michael (Niewöhner et al. 2013). Healing centres such as the important pilgrimage centre at Germia (Yürme) in Galatia and the greatest Byzantine cult centre of St. Michael at Colossai were closely connected with water (Mango 1986: 53; Niewöhner et al. 2013). The irregular plan of the West Church at Alahan which suggests that the building was designed carefully to fit the existing topography, may be interpreted as evidence that the building was referencing an earlier cult place (Gough 1962: 179–180). This idea is reinforced by the carved reliefs of the Archangels Gabriel and Michael apparently “trampling down the enemies of Christ” (Gough 1962: 180).

Ramsay proposed that, under threat from the Arab raids in the 7th to 9th centuries, the local people venerated Michael, commander of the heavenly hosts, and other saints on the mountain tops of the Karadağ as part of their local defence strategy (Ramsay 1908: 158), but Michael was also venerated in western Asia Minor primarily as a wonderworker. If indeed the
mountain was dedicated to him as elsewhere then his shrine at the mountain might have been also connected with healing. There are cisterns at Mahalelch, but unsurprisingly so high up there is no spring, and there remains Michael's connection with mountains.

In speculating why these buildings might have been used here, we might wonder whether they were visited by people from the surrounding area. It is possible that the buildings next to the church at Mahalelch were for accommodation not just for those who were directly connected to the church but also for pilgrims or for the sick who journeyed up the mountain. Incubation was a common feature of Byzantine healing sanctuaries, as at the Michaelion in Constantinople, where the sick would sleep at the sanctuary of St Michael, in the hope of a manifestation of the heavenly physician. As Niewöhner et al. have recently argued for Germia, the distinctive topography of certain ‘definite places’ against the uniformity of much of the plateau provides some sites an enduring significance (Niewöhner et al. 2013: 130). Ramsay and Bell recognized that the mountains of the central Anatolian plateau seem to have served to give narrative to the people of central Anatolia over many centuries.

**High Places**

As Bell demonstrated, the placement of churches on high peaks is a regular feature of the Byzantine period in southern Anatolia. She noted that cruciform churches very similar to that at Mahalelch were located at the summits of three of the other highest mountains in the region notably: at Hasan Dağı located 125km to the north-east of the Karadağ; at Kurshundju on the Karacadağ some 70km to the north and at Hayyat on the Ali Sumas Dağı above Kilistra ca. 90 km to the north-west. The latter two are both associated with complexes of rooms which developed around them (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 348–351). Part of one of the large complexes at Değle on the high promontory stretching out north from the Karadağ includes a small church, no. 44, a cruciform structure with a chamber appended in a similar way, which was interpreted as a tomb (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 225). It is likely that these cruciform structures embellished the tombs of notable people and subsequently became the foci of further building and religious activity including pilgrimage (Bell, Diary, 18 May 1907).

The tradition of building churches on the highest peaks in southern Anatolian is replicated at Binbirkilise where several of the other hilltops of the Karadağ and its immediate vicinity are topped with churches. Mostly, these were not entirely isolated but discovered with evidence for associated buildings (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 294). Ruins spread across the hilltop at Madendağ, immediately to the west of Madenşehir, include a small church with nave, aisles and an apse (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 259–268), and two churches were reported by Bell, at Tchet Dagh [sic] (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 268). A further church and chapel with associated buildings lay on the peak on the Karadağ called Asamadi to the east of Mahalelch. Here, there was a cistern in the courtyard outside the church and below the ridge on which the buildings were constructed there was a spring (Ramsay and Bell 256–259). Several scholars have criticized Bell and other early travellers for providing monastic interpretations of sites all too liberally (Hill 1994; Kalas 2004). Bell had for example interpreted the less well constructed complex of rooms to the West of the church at Mahalelch as monastic (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 254), but certainly, these buildings would suggest that there were small communities of people living alongside the churches.
The outlying hills around the Karadağ also often feature churches near their summits. Somewhat confusingly, there are at least three outlying peaks near the Karadağ called Kızıldağ: one located above the village of Dinek to the east of the Karadağ which was fortified; a second lies to the east of Madenşehir, and the third is the hill 12km to the north-west of the Karadağ on which Ramsay and Bell discovered Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 279; Hawkins 2000a: 433). It worthy of note that there is a small cruciform chapel on the Kızıldağ, located immediately east of Madenşehir (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 268), but there is no sign of a church on the Kızıldağ with the earlier inscriptions. In the light of all these examples of the siting of churches on hill tops and high places, it is interesting that there is no evidence for a Byzantine church on the Kızıldağ with its obvious pre-classical remains. Rojas and Sergyuenkova (2014) have recently discussed the monument at Kızıldağ and its setting as part of their paper on Greek, Roman and Byzantine interaction with Hittite monuments in Anatolia where they show that the throne at Kızıldağ had a complex biography that may have included ritual performance at the time of a Greek-speaking Craterus (2014: 143–147). The themes of performance and the developing biographies of space are relevant too for the monuments on the Karadağ. Thus it is interesting that it seems to be at Karadağ that the earlier inscription was adapted into a later building.

In view of the evidence at both the Karadağ and Kızıldağ, the Byzantines seem not to have sought to destroy or remove evidence of the earlier rock-inscriptions. The number of churches, perhaps used as memorial chapels on the highest points in the landscape, demonstrates that the Byzantines did place significance on the high mountains. The evidence from Mahalatch may be taken to suggest that the earlier shrine was incorporated and transformed as part of the wider church complex. Thus although the placement of the churches is clearly a Byzantine phenomenon it would appear that it is not completely without reference to the past.

Ramsay was interested in the topographical setting of the monuments, so he saw the choice of mountain top locations of several churches, such as Mahalatch, as the continuity into the Byzantine period of an ancient understanding of place visible in the pre-classical inscriptions of the Karadağ (Ramsay 1909: 19). Ramsay’s colleague D.G. Hogarth with whom Ramsay had travelled when he was preparing his volume The Historical Geography of Asia Minor (Ramsay 1890: 6) had worked in 1900 with Arthur Evans at peak sanctuaries and caves on Crete. Ramsay and Bell’s work at Mahalatch in 1907, therefore, reflects an established interest in peak sanctuaries and caves of the time (Bradley 2000: 18–20; 97–103).

We can, however, confidently infer from the multitude of churches (especially those on the peaks) that the whole mountain was regarded with veneration as having a sacred character; and we may also regard it as certain that this awe was an inheritance from ancient Anatolian religious feeling. The Christians considered the Black Mountain as holy, because their forefathers for centuries had thought so. What, then, was the origin and cause of this belief?

There seems no room for doubt as to the answer. During many years of study I have relied always on the principle that the pagan religious centres were found in places where the Divine power, which resided specially in the bosom of the earth, the Great Mother of all, was revealed to men by natural phenomena of an impressive kind, such as hot springs, valuable minerals or other mysterious exhibitions of the life and riches of the underworld. The sacredness of the Kara Dağ is derived from the great holes that lead down into the depths of the
earth, and especially from the two Maden in Maden Dagh, where men felt themselves brought close to the Divine nature (Ramsay and Bell 1909: 19).

Thus Ramsay likened the craters at the foot of the Karadağ, after which the village at Madenşehir (mine town) was named, to the sinkholes at Cennet ve Cehennem in Cilicia visited in 1905 by Bell. Although the Maden at the Karadağ have little real resemblance to the sink holes of the Cilician coast, it is clear from churches such as the Church of Mary, Cennet ve Cehennem, which Bell had visited on her 1905 journey, that the Byzantines did build churches at a range of striking places in the topography which had often captured the attention of earlier communities. Ramsay is very concerned to consider the stories and ideas conjured up in the minds of the ancients that were bound up in these extraordinary places. While we might not agree with all Ramsay’s interpretations, it would seem that the Byzantines were struck by the mountains around them and may have been influenced by long-standing views about the significance of these features in their landscape. The narratives, buildings and places which survived from pre-Christian times must have been negotiated, appropriated and transformed in the new Christian context, but we cannot assume direct continuation.

Bradley has contextualized Arthur Evans’ work on Crete at the turn of the 20th century within a transition point in Aegean archaeology “from a literary and philological pursuit into a discipline whose evidence was collected in the field” (Bradley 2000: 97). Likewise for Ramsay,

Topography is the foundation of history. No one who has familiarized himself with Attic history in books and has afterwards ascended Pentelicus and seen that history spread forth before him in the valleys and mountains and sea that have moulded it will ever disbelieve in the value of topography as an aid to history. . . . If we want to understand the Ancients, especially the Greeks, we must breathe the same air as they did and saturate ourselves with the same scenery and the same nature that wrought upon them. For this end correct topography is a necessary though humble servant. (Ramsay 1890: 51).

We see at Mahaletech, Ramsay’s desire to place both the hieroglyphic inscription and the Byzantine ecclesiastical buildings into a long-term topographical and historical context. His appreciation of the depth of time in the landscape context and the interconnected nature of its features is important and a contribution to The Thousand and One Churches that was rather neglected by Byzantine archaeologists of the 20th century who tended to follow Bell’s more typological approach to buildings without affording much interpretation of their context.

In discussing the icon stands and outlying churches of Sphakia, Greece, Lucia Nixon, has emphasized the way in which there is intimate knowledge of the landscape demonstrated by the naming of places by rural people. Drawing on the work of Gosden and Lock 1998, she has further shown how the built features in the landscape can be considered a manifestation of social relationships maintained though both physical effort and rhetoric (Nixon 2006: 104–105). The physical effort of maintaining the church buildings on the peaks over at least four building sequences in the Karadağ and perpetuating a presence at these buildings, as well metaphysical work in the form of prayer and church services, would have been an important part of perpetuating social memory and giving narrative to places. The burial of people and the construction of memorial chapels in southern Anatolia may be part of this process as particular people form part of this narrative. The performance of activities in and around the buildings and to and
from the buildings is an essential part of providing links between the places with their ancient stones and stories and the present (Nixon 2006: 101).

Kalas has suggested that in Cappadocia chapels took on a variety of roles not only ceremonial but also as landscape markers that defined settlement space (Kalas 2009: 88). Ousterhout has considered the ways in which churches in Cappadocia as places of burial served a role in the lives of the living through their commemoration of the dead at funerary chapels (Ousterhout 2010). The inscriptions and tombs which survive at Mahaleth help us to see that there was a commemoration of people buried on these mountains. By being associated with the memory of the named, these places would have gathered additional significance through the stories associated with the person. It would seem that initially these churches may have been memorial chapels which would have served to link a visible place in the landscape to the memory of particular people. These isolated churches and chapels are unlikely to have been abandoned for most of the year, for their number over such a large area suggests that they were employed as part of widely held practice. At Mahaleth there is evidence for other burials around the church. There is also evidence at other sites, as we have seen at Mahaleth, that certain of these churches have several phases showing long periods of use.

They are frequently subject to later phases and associated with other buildings that would have been inhabited by a community. There is the strong possibility in view of their visibility that these structures were not simply for ascetic monks, but that these places took on a number of roles for the wider populous, including acting as places of pilgrimage.

In addition to the regular cycle of daily and weekly prayers we can assume that there would have been festival days when the buildings would have been visited by those making journeys from local and regional sites. These places would thus have helped to structure time. At festival days we might imagine visitors coming to these sites perhaps in procession. As well as during the day, such events could also have taken place perhaps at night with lights used not only to illuminate the buildings but also pathways through the landscape.

The vaulted passageways may be explained in part, as Bell notes (1909: 254), by the presence of snow on the mountain top for up to four months each year, but once created, this internal system of passageways would have created an internal environment which would very much have impacted the experience of anyone at the site. There was the possibility of moving between the various parts of this complex without venturing outside. Such architecture would afford particular experiences of place. The enclosed interior space seems to contrast markedly with the extensive views over the region afforded by the location of the buildings.

Space is also defined in other passageways intimately connected to churches at pilgrimage sites, for example at Gemile Ada, an island off the coast of Lycia. There, pilgrims walked in tunnels on their approach to the sacred site (Asano 2010: 27). The architecture of such cryptoportici served to afford a particular experience of place for visitors as they were channelled between particular parts of the site. A similar device is employed at Meryemlik (St. Thecla’s), near Silifke (Jackson 1999: 77–81). At Mahaleth the experience of the churches may have been defined in part by the monumentalized passage with its gateway, as excavated by Ramsay and Bell, and by the two cryptoportici. If visitors were permitted into these parts of this building complex they would have been entering distinctly unusual settings.

High mountains make a very visible impression on the landscape and throughout history they seem to have been the focus of attention as people sought to give narrative to the places
around them. The monuments built on them often served multiple roles at the same time. It is tempting to think that the small complex of rooms located to the west of the site, was not simply the residence of monks who lived a life on show, but, at the same time isolated, from the surrounding population, but rather that the building was integrated into the lives of others in the settlements elsewhere on the Karadağ by being in part a place of sanctuary at times of need. The significance of monuments on these mountains was in part because of their position isolated from settlements, while they also served as a continual visible reminder communicating to people in the region since they were enduring aspects of daily existence. The Byzantine ideas about the mountains may have had precedents in past pagan ideas, but they developed and were transformed constantly as the various phases of the architecture make clear. Their role as places of burial in the Byzantine period helped to foster collective memory and to locate the mountains into a narrative biography of the landscape by claiming and naming of the peaks. Stories connected people with their landscape and appreciation of its past; they would have been perpetuated by various activities including pilgrimage journeys to the site, where the reality of earlier encounters with the place was monumentalized in stone.

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