

REPORT ON ARCHEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE VICINITY OF ANTAKYA

Proj. Dr. Wachtang Z- DJOBADZE

After obtaining the permission from the department of Antiquities in Ankara for the partial excavation and study of the following monuments:

1. The so-called church of S. Thomas near Suruthme,
2. The monastic complex of S. Symeon Stylite (592) on the right of the Oronthes on the Miraculous Mountain,
3. The Basilica of S. Barlaham on Mount Cassius,

I went early in spring of 1963 to Antakya to organize and prepare the field work.

On June 15th, 1963 I began the cleaning and excavation of the so-called S. THOMAS BASILICA in co-operation with the commissary assigned by the director of the Museum of Antakya. Our group consisted of 10-22 workers from nearby villages.

Our purpose was to establish the plan of the church, examine its fundament and technique of execution. Soon it became evident that it had in the western end not only a narthex, but also a square portico (4 X 4,5 m) with three steps on three sides, which is in a good state of preservation. At the western portico we uncovered numerous architectural fragments and decorative stoneslabs which certainly were used as decorative elements of this portico. Among others, there were cornices with extremely elaborated

and precisely carved plant ornaments, pilasters flanked with 3/4 columns. Most remarkable is the fact that these do not have the slightest resemblance to Byzantine church decorations, and beyond any doubt represent a foreign import, which is partly explained by the ethnical mixture in this area which since the early christian time until the Latin domination. On most cornices, mouldings, and profiles on the exterior of the church, geometric patterns were predominantly used. The architectural and decorative fragments which were found in the church and excavated in the north and west immediately under the wall of the church unequivocally show two different styles and traditions; one is absolutely alien for this area, while the other is derived from local tradition and finds its counterpart in many churches between Antakya and Celeucia Pieria.

The church which has a semicircular apsis connected with pastaphories at the eastern part, is of rectangular shape. The measurements of uncovered fragments confirm that the dome of the church should have had a high drum not known in this area.

The epigraphical material, eleven graffiti and four inscriptions (Greek and Georgian) suggest the possibility that the church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The church was built in the first half of the eleventh century, although it is possible to narrow the chronological limits of the construction within ten years.

The further excavation of the southern portico may reveal additional information. The fragments of the pottery, oil lamps and a few coins found there belong to the **XI-XIII** century. Fragments found in the debris and lower parts of the remaining church walls leave no doubt that it was decorated with wall paintings.

The MONASTERY of S. SYMEON STYLITE (the younger) in the Miraculous Mountain (excavation period from July 16th to August 6th).

Our first purpose in S. Symeon's monastery was to clean the main church or so-called eastern basilica from debris. As a result from this effort we were able to uncover floor mosaics and a mosaic inscription consisting of four lines in the western or main entrance. We also found loose figural and ornamental mosaic compositions often severely damaged. After an exhaustive study of the mosaics, the loose and damaged ones were fastened with cement, the the whole floor was covered by dirt ca. one mhigh to prevent further destruction. We excavated and partly restored the small baptistery situated to the northern side of the main architectural complex. In the process of this work we uncovered some fragments of the baptismal font, marble pieces which could have been fragments of the baldachin over the baptismal font. Near the northern entrance to the baptistery we found some coins, most of them are attributed to Basilios II, + 1025. We excavated also two southern chambers of the so-called propyleia, which obviously was used as a storeroom. I studied the cistern and water supply system of the the monastery and wasable, in the process of the excavation, to draw a plan of the monastic architectural complex based on precise measurements.

THE BASILICA OF. S. BARLAHAM on Mount Cassius (excavation period from August 11th to September 10th).

The basilical church on Mt. Cassius dedicated to the local martyr Barlaham (Barlaam) consists of a nave and two aisles. The apsis of the church is hemispherical in the interior, rectangular on the exterior flanked by pastaphories, one of which (north) is connected with the apsis.

In the process of cleaning the church from accumuluated debris (ca. 2m) we found three Ionic columns (coarse grained white marble) of crude carving (IV cent.?). The five Corinthian capitels of the same material with four leaves and no spirals could belong to the end of the fifth and beginning of sixth century. In the area of the apsis (on the left part of the cinthronos) fragments of an marble architrav were revealed. **On** the outside, 2.5 m south of the church, was located a badly damaged fragment of an Ionic column. **On** the floor level were scattered fragments of bases and columns of various length and diameter. To the early period could belong a decorative cross (sandstone) with a badly damaged Aramaic inscription. Small fragments ofthe altar screen and two decorative panels of fairly good craftsmanship indicate the eleventh century. The study of the structural elements may indicated that the church was built at the end of the fifth or very begining of the sixth century (before 526). **On** the southwest of the basilica a necropole is located consisting of two sories (2 X 3.30 m and 3 X 3.30 m) upon which a small oratorium was erected. Roughly picked large stone slabs were located 50 cm under the present floor. Future inquiries mayconfirm the possibility that the church was erected on the foundation of the temple of Zeus Casius.

At the end of this short account it is my pleasant duty and desire to thank the Fulbright Commission in Ankara for their generous financial support, which made the realisation of this truly difficult

task possible. I would like to thank personally the Executive Secretary of the Fulbright Commission, Mr. Omer H. Mart, who encouraged and vigorously supported my project before and during the process of excavation. I also would

like to express my thanks to the General Director of Antiquities in Ankara, Mr. Hikmet Gürçay and my colleagues of the University in Istanbul, especially Prof. Dr. Oktay Arslanapa who facilitated my work.