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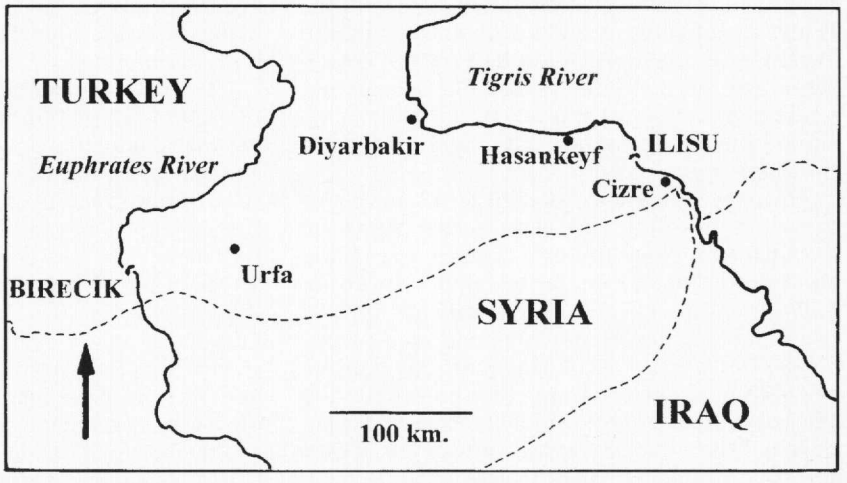


FIGURE 1. *Map of southeast Turkey showing location of Ilisu and Birecik dams.*



FIGURE 2. *View of Hasankeyf from the top of the ancient citadel, looking downstream towards the proposed location of the Ilisu dam. (Photo © Hannah Rumsby.)*

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The destruction of large parts of the Roman and Hellenistic cities of Zeugma and Apamea on either bank of the Euphrates River by the construction of the Birecik dam in Southeast Turkey received considerable media coverage in recent months. It is less well known, however, that this is just one of at least 22 dams planned as part of Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project ('GAP'). There can be little doubt that the devastation witnessed at Zeugma was the tip of the iceberg, should plans to dam the Tigris River proceed in the manner envisaged.

Of most immediate concern is the proposed construction of the Ilisu dam on the Tigris, 65 km upstream from Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq (FIGURE 1). A construction consortium led by the British firm Balfour Beatty has applied to a number of governmental export credit agencies in the UK, US and Europe, for the granting of credit guarantees designed to underwrite the $2 billion Ilisu project. Stephen Byers, UK Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, has said that he is 'minded' to provide $200 million cover, subject to the resolution of a number of outstanding concerns, including the production of 'a detailed plan to preserve as much of the archaeological heritage of Hasankeyf as possible'.

If constructed, the Ilisu dam reservoir would flood over 300 sq. km of the Upper Tigris Valley basin, selectively destroying precisely those areas that have seen most concentrated settlement in the region since at least the Middle Palaeolithic period. Only one-fifth of the area currently at risk of inundation has seen any form of archaeological survey work at all, and even this work has been beset with significant methodological and logistical difficulties (Algaze *et al.* 1991; Tuna 1999). Nevertheless, it is already known that the dam reservoir is set to destroy hundreds, probably thousands, of archaeological sites and ICOMOS Turkey recently described the project as 'a social, cultural and environmental disaster' (ICOMOS 2000).

Sites at risk include several mounds of a kind comparable to Çatal Höyük, some of which date from at least the pre-pottery Neolithic and may extend through into the post-medieval period (one such example is as much as 40 m high); large fortified sites dating to the 'Ubaid, Assyrian, Roman and Byzantine periods respectively, in one example enclosing an area of up to 30 hectares, and in certain cases preserving cultural deposits several metres deep; additionally there are an unquantifiable number of smaller settlements and structures dating from every period of human history. Particularly notable in this last category, but clearly underrepresented in survey and salvage work, are the sites and materials of the last 500 years that must be of most immediate relevance to any understanding of the more recent histories of those communities now threatened with inundation.

The region is located at the heart of the 'Fertile Crescent'; it functioned as a frontier zone between competing polities at the time of the very earliest formation of city states and the expansion of empires out of Mesopotamia, Assyria, Greece and Rome, and in the case of the town of Hasankeyf may have been home to one of the longest-lived Kurdish dynastic families in medieval Western Asia (FIGURE 2). Professor Olus Arik, the Turkish excavator of Hasankeyf, has recently observed that '[w]e need a minimum of fifty years here and we have just nine or ten — unless of course we can stop the dam' (cited in Young 2000).

Prevention of the dam is indeed the *only* realistic archaeological strategy. This is particularly the case since archaeologists increasingly recognize the rights of indigenous, ethnic minority and other local communities to play an equal part in decision-making about investigations of cultural heritage. The consultation with communities affected by the proposed dam has been wholly inadequate, both with respect to issues of resettlement and to questions of cultural rights and claims to the material histories of the area. Nor is it likely to be equitable in the foreseeable future, given the prevailing political realities in the region with regard to the human rights of Kurdish people. Accordingly, we urge you to write to your relevant governmental representatives, asking that they withdraw their support for the Ilisu dam immediately. For further information on the issues and how you can help, please visit the Ilisu Dam Campaign website (www.ilisu.org.uk) or contact the writers.

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