

Rural continuity and change in Late Antiquity in Rough Cilicia: A case study on Yanıkhan

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Received: November 2024 • Final Acceptance: October 2025

Abstract

This study investigates the resilience, adaptability, and continuity of rural settlements in Rough Cilicia during Late Antiquity, focusing on Yanıkhan as a modest yet representative example. Employing an architectural and urban perspective, it analyzes how socio-economic, geographical, and historical turning points shaped settlement patterns over time. The research offers new insights into the integration of Hellenistic urban planning elements and the adaptive use of Late Antique structures, contributing to the understanding of rural dynamics in Byzantine Anatolia.

Drawing on fieldwork, architectural surveys, and historical analyses, the study examines settlement layouts, infrastructure, and construction techniques. By shifting attention from individual buildings to the broader organization of the settlement, it emphasizes the layered and adaptive nature of Yanıkhan's development. These findings enrich the study of rural settlement continuity and transformation within historical contexts, with implications for understanding similar sites across the region.

Keywords

Late Antiquity, Rough Cilicia, Rural settlements, Urban transformation, Yanıkhan.

1. Introduction

Rural activities and industry are vital for supporting both the economies of urban centers and the broader provisioning networks across the Mediterranean. Constantine's decision to relocate the capital to the East increased supply needs. This may have contributed to the growth of rural activities in provinces such as Isauria. Political events, reflections of the demands of a Christianized society from urban environments and settlements, and territorial losses in the east and west, including the provinces of Northern Africa and Egypt, marked the onset of a Transition Period (7th–9th centuries) (Ousterhout, 2019, p. 245). These changes created a demand for grain and other supplies from Anatolia, paving the way for an increasingly rural medieval society in the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, many urban centers shrank or disappeared, while their populations transitioned to a more rural way of life. Rural development, influenced by the need to supply the capital and the impact of central administration, was particularly evident in Eastern Rough Cilicia. At the same time regional needs significantly impacted the structural development of the area. Especially from the 6th century onward, with the increase in Arab raids, Eastern Rough Cilicia, defined by the natural boundary of the Lamos River and its valley, became a strategic frontier for the Byzantine state (Durak, 2013, p. 146). This natural division—originally described by Strabo as the boundary between Rough (Tracheia) and Flat (Pedias) Cilicia—continued to shape the region's historical and administrative development (Strabo, *Geographika*, 14.5.1). In this context, rural areas of Rough Cilicia may have contributed to the provisioning of military personnel and food supplies.

Overall, rural areas in Byzantine society were essential for food production, tax revenue, military support, security, and social resilience. Despite the presence of large urban centers like Constantinople, the empire remained predominantly rural, and the stability of rural structures directly underpinned the strength and continuity of

urban centers. Rough Cilicia can be considered one of the regions where amplified rural industry can be studied on a broad scale. It is well-documented that agricultural activities were widespread across the rural settlements of the region, with the production of olive oil and wine being particularly prominent. These industries were central to the local economy and demonstrate the sustainability and adaptability of rural life in the region. Yanıkhán, a settlement dating back to the Hellenistic period, exemplifies this rural continuity, reflecting both stability and resilience within the region. Demonstrating the concept of a *komepolis* (village-city), Yanıkhán's economic and social structure integrates both rural and urban elements. While major centers like Seleucia and Olba dominated the region, smaller, isolated settlements such as Yanıkhán developed unique settlement patterns shaped by the surrounding natural landscape. Unlike the better-documented monumental sites, settlements like Yanıkhán provide insight into the lived experience of rural communities and their architectural adaptation to challenging terrain.

A key aim of this study is to explore the processes of development and transformation within rural areas in light of historical turning points and to reassess the settlement patterns of medium and small-scale communities from both architectural and urban perspectives. In doing so, it also seeks to contribute to the architectural documentation of such sites, addressing gaps in earlier research and providing a baseline for future studies. Interpreting historical contexts through a contemporary lens brings unique challenges, particularly in understanding how key turning points have shaped the socio-economic and urban dynamics of this region over time. In Eastern Rough Cilicia—a rugged terrain nestled between the Lamos (modern Limonlu) and Kalykadnos (modern Göksu) rivers—geographical and environmental factors have markedly influenced local development (Figure 1). This challenging landscape provided settlers with both protective isolation and limited resources, profoundly impacting the architectural and urban formation of

settlement structures. The study approaches Yanıkhan's transformation through concepts from landscape archaeology and resilience theory, focusing on architectural continuity, spatial adaptation, and local agency.

Yanıkhan, situated within this mountainous region, serves as a compelling example of rural adaptation and its enduring legacy across centuries. This study examines the evolution of Yanıkhan's settlement structure, tracing its architectural, economic, and social transformations from the Hellenistic period through Late Antiquity and beyond. By reevaluating Yanıkhan's settlement organization within an architectural and urban framework, this paper seeks to redefine the concept of rural settlement as it applies to this specific region. The evolving identity of Yanıkhan reflects broader trends in rural organization, resilience, and transformation, offering valuable insights into the long-term development of settlement structures across the ages. In framing the study, landscape archaeol-

ogy provides a conceptual approach for examining settlements as dynamic and interconnected systems shaped by both environmental constraints and human agency. Rather than viewing Yanıkhan as a static collection of structures, this perspective highlights how natural topography, resource distribution, and socio-political networks influenced its spatial organization and architectural development. Resilience theory further informs the analysis by emphasizing the adaptive strategies through which communities responded to shifting political, economic, and environmental pressures. Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced interpretation of continuity and transformation, situating Yanıkhan within broader debates on rural adaptation and long-term settlement dynamics in marginal landscapes. Through its emphasis on architectural continuity and systematic documentation, the study also offers a reference model for future interdisciplinary research on rural resilience, particularly in peripheral regions.



Figure 1. Geographic map of Yanıkhan: The map illustrates the location of Yanıkhan between the Lamos (modern Limonlu) and Kalykadnos (modern Göksu) rivers in Rough Cilicia.

2. Methodology

The methodological framework of this study combines detailed fieldwork, architectural documentation, and elevation-based spatial analysis to systematically record and interpret the settlement, drawing on data collected at Yanıkhan between 2020 and 2021. Terrain and built features were recorded in high detail using total-station equipment, while photogrammetric aerial imagery supported the mapping of circulation paths, housing clusters, and unbuilt areas that might otherwise have been obscured by vegetation or surface loss.

The resulting site-based dataset was integrated into a doctoral GIS database, enabling spatial cross-referencing with other rural settlements—an integration that, although outside this article's scope, significantly enhances our understanding of regional settlement patterns, spatial organization, and interconnectivity.

Previous work in Rough Cilicia has often focused on monumental church architecture; in contrast, this study emphasizes the wider settlement fabric through meticulous documentation and comparative analysis. Direct historical sources for small-scale settlements are scarce, so the methodological approach relies heavily on archaeological interpretation, morphological analysis, and architectural typology.

To further situate our approach, we draw on comparative studies from across the Byzantine world. Research in western and central Anatolia has identified region-specific patterns of rural expansion and contraction through settlement surveys and environmental archaeology (Izdebski, 2017, pp. 82–90). Similar methodologies on the Aegean islands (Kondyli, 2022) and in central Greece (Vionis, 2017) have highlighted the roles of topography, connectivity, and resilience in structuring rural landscapes. Investigations at Kilise Tepe in the Göksu Valley represent one of the rare excavation-based studies at a Byzantine rural settlement; although various surface surveys and documentation projects exist, direct excavation remains very limited (Jackson, 2015; see also Ousterhout, 2019, p. 647).

While environmental and political contexts differ between regions, these collective findings offer valuable insight into interpreting rural space through interdisciplinary, landscape-based methodologies. In particular, recent debates on rural settlement categories—*kome*, *chorion*, and *komepolis*—enrich this study's interpretive framework and help situate Yanıkhan within broader discussions of hybrid rural-urban formations in the Byzantine countryside.

3. Historical background and general context

Addressing the historical transformations and critical turning points in the region is essential for understanding the context in which rural settlements and Yanıkhan developed. Eastern Rough Cilicia, located between the Kalykadnos (modern Göksu) and Lamos (modern Limonlu) rivers, underwent a significant urbanization process beginning in the 2nd century BCE during the Seleucid period (Akçay, 2019, p. 80; Aşkın, 2010, pp. 83–88; Durugönül, 1995, p. 75). Roman influence intensified in the last quarter of the 1st century BCE, and the construction wave that began during this period reached its peak in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries (Kaplan, 2011, p. 109). By the late 4th century, the province of Isauria had gained a considerable strategic position, emerging as a frontier province with increasing military significance (Kurt, 2018, p. 821). In the late 5th and early 6th centuries, architectural activities surged once more with the construction of additional residences and churches, transforming previously settled areas into larger and more complex communities (Mitchell, 2016, pp. 497–500; Mörel, 2016, p. 22).

Researchers generally agree that the period between the 4th and 7th centuries marked a dynamic phase in the region's development, characterized by significant construction and expansion (Varinlioğlu, 2008a, p. 49). From the 6th century onward, it is widely accepted that many settlements in the region faced abandonment due to factors like Arab invasions, outbreaks of

disease, and broader socio-economic challenges. Recent interdisciplinary studies have also emphasized the role of climatic fluctuations, particularly the shift to cooler and drier conditions after the mid-6th century, in shaping rural resilience and land-use strategies (Haldon et al., 2014). These shifts may have compounded other stressors, and in the case of Yanıkhán, the absence of new construction phases after the 6th century could reflect a functional transformation or contraction of the settlement, possibly linked to environmental pressures. While its topographical seclusion might have offered protection from immediate threats such as Arab incursions, long-term environmental changes may have exerted pressure from within. Therefore, instead of abrupt abandonment, Yanıkhán might have undergone a gradual reconfiguration in response to both internal and external dynamics. However, how much the mountainous micro-region between the Lamos and Kalykadnos rivers was affected by these events remains a matter of debate. The rugged, rocky, and difficult-to-access terrain of this area provided a level of natural protection, allowing the region to remain relatively isolated.

These challenging geographical conditions limited external access, yet local communities developed an intricate internal network of paths and passages, which facilitated movement within the area. This micro-region between the Lamos and Kalykadnos rivers is filled with familiar routes known to the local inhabitants, enhancing its defensive advantage and making it relatively isolated from outside threats.

The isolated and sheltered nature of the region likely enabled the continuation of local economies. Relying on agriculture and pastoralism as primary sources of livelihood, local communities maintained a self-sufficient economy, which could have minimized the impact of external disruptions. This inward-facing organization likely strengthened social resilience, allowing communities to remain economically and socially vibrant even in the face of outside pressures.

In this context, the mountainous area between the Lamos and Kalykadnos rivers may have provided local populations with both a refuge and a

stable area for ongoing economic activity. Despite external threats, these communities managed to preserve a unique way of life, maintaining social and economic vitality within the region.

Based on studies of the region's history and the construction of buildings utilizing polygonal and mortarless techniques, Yanıkhán's history can be dated back to the 2nd century BCE. Additionally, at least two churches and some other structures were erected during the Late Antique centuries. Medieval towns occasionally underwent considerable renovations that altered their historical structure, making it challenging to revive their original layout. However, the different periodic layers and settlement structure are explicable in this specific case, as Yanıkhán's distinct architectural elements and construction techniques allow for a clearer understanding of its chronological development. One of the key methods used in dating this settlement has been the analysis of wall construction techniques: mortarless polygonal stone walls are attributed to the Hellenistic period, while walls constructed with mortar using ashlar and roughly shaped rubble stones are associated with Late Antiquity. Despite being considerably unperceivable through a walk among the ruins of the settlement, thorough documentation clearly reveals the medieval urban structure, which has been occupied since the Hellenistic era. The Hellenistic grid system is still plainly visible in the housing area, and this structure has remained mostly unchanged. It is difficult to offer an explanation for the continuity of this pattern. Subject to topography, it is crucial to note that the primary axes of the settlement were altered during Late Antiquity, and this change is obviously discernible.

Historical primary sources do not provide specific information about such settlements, and as a result, scholars are confined to relying on archaeological data obtained from surveys and excavations. The majority of the data related to the Yanıkhán settlement presented in this study has been obtained through extensive field research. The fieldwork data was primarily gathered

through aerial photography (Figure 2) and precise on-site measurements using a total station. Without detailed documentation and aerial photography, understanding the structure of the settlement layout is challenging due to dense vegetation and significant damage. Although its accessible location has attracted interest, previous investigations have mainly focused on the two main churches—North and South—and have not provided a broader perspective on the settlement as a whole (Cortese, 2022; Gough, 1965; Hild & Hellenkemper, 1986; Hill, 1985). Other structures, whose original functions are not fully understood, may have served functions related to infrastructure, production, storage, and possibly even commercial activities, and are of great importance for a comprehensive understanding of the settlement.

Upon examining the entire settlement of Yanıkhan, it is crucial to observe the Hellenistic grid system alongside Late Antique structures. In many instances, this pattern could not be discerned as clearly as in this case, which aids in better understanding the transition of the settlement pattern. Nevertheless, as the current data is based solely on surface observations, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions without more detailed excavation. Within the continuity between the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, the lack of prominent Roman interventions is particularly noticeable. Specifically, the extensive and monumental Roman constructions common-

ly observed in central cities seem to be missing in this rural region (Elton, 2019, pp. 76–77). This lack of visible Roman-period traces on the surface likely reflects the characteristics of small rural settlements in this area, where construction practices were shaped by different priorities during that time. Considering the socio-economic dynamics of the period and the region's adaptation to its environmental and political context, it can be suggested that rural life persisted in a sustainable manner during this era.

It can be noted that in Late Antiquity, not all functional elder structures in rural areas were demolished; they continued to be in use, sometimes with altered functions. Moreover, the new structures required for the era found optimal positions within the settlement, resulting in a harmonious integration of old and new.

This comprehensive examination suggests that analyzing specific types of structures in rural settlements may not be sufficient for a full understanding of the area. From an academic perspective, it becomes evident that further comprehensive studies of other small and medium-sized rural settlements in the Eastern Rough Cilicia region are necessary.

4. Settlement layout and architectural description

Yanıkhan is situated about 6.5 km inland from the coast, near the southwestern boundary of the Lamos Valley. It lies along a road that begins south of the Lamos River and

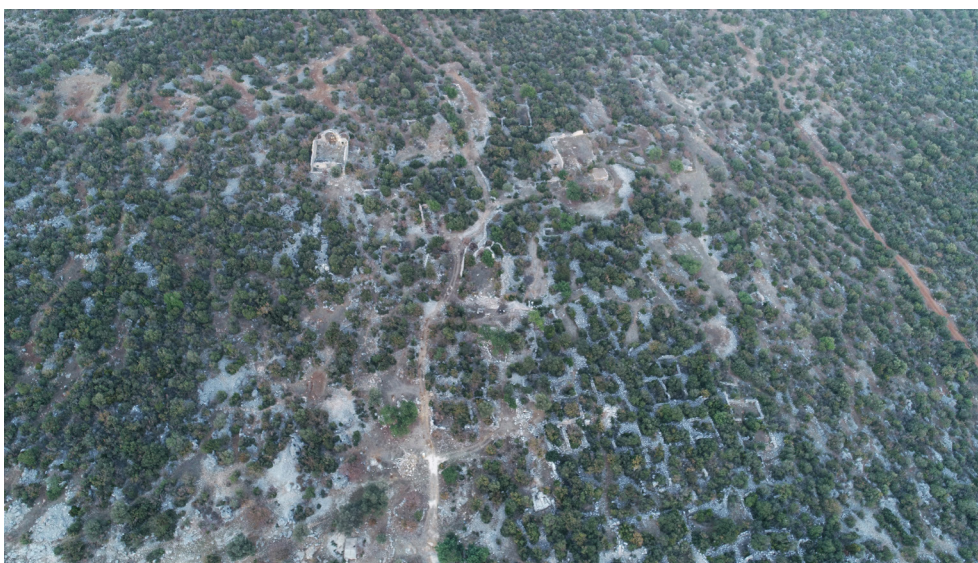


Figure 2. General aerial photograph of Yanıkhan.

leads northward to the present-day Esenpınar District, which continues northward towards the ancient city of Olba. Considering the natural boundary formed by the Lamos Valley to the northeast, there is no reason to doubt that this road served as the main route for access to the settlement in ancient times as well. With its relative proximity to the coast, Yanıkhan offers easy access to both coastal and inland areas. The settlement was established on forty-two hectares of land with an incline of roughly 11 percent. The structures had been constructed to accommodate the sloped terrain through a method of terracing the land. Settlement serves as a notable example of how terrain shapes settlement patterns. Based on measurements, if we take the southern church as the center point and set the ground level at ± 0.00 , the northern church is positioned at $+5.00$ meters,

while the marketplace building is located at -5.00 meters (Figure 3). Data gathered from field studies indicates that the Hellenistic grid system remains prominently intact within the housing area, showing minimal alteration over time. The remaining structures, with their polygonal walls, are one of the prominently visible characteristics of this section of settlement. The continuity and traceability of the Hellenistic grid system are important for understanding the urban characteristics of the period. This grid system, observed in major Hellenistic cities such as Miletos, Priene, and Pergamon, is indicative of its effectiveness in rural areas as well as in urban planning.

Like a majority of other settlements in the region of similar sizes and functionalities, Yanıkhan is not enclosed by fortified walls, and access is available via the main road along the southwestern boundary, now a modern asphalt route

YANIKHAN SETTLEMENT

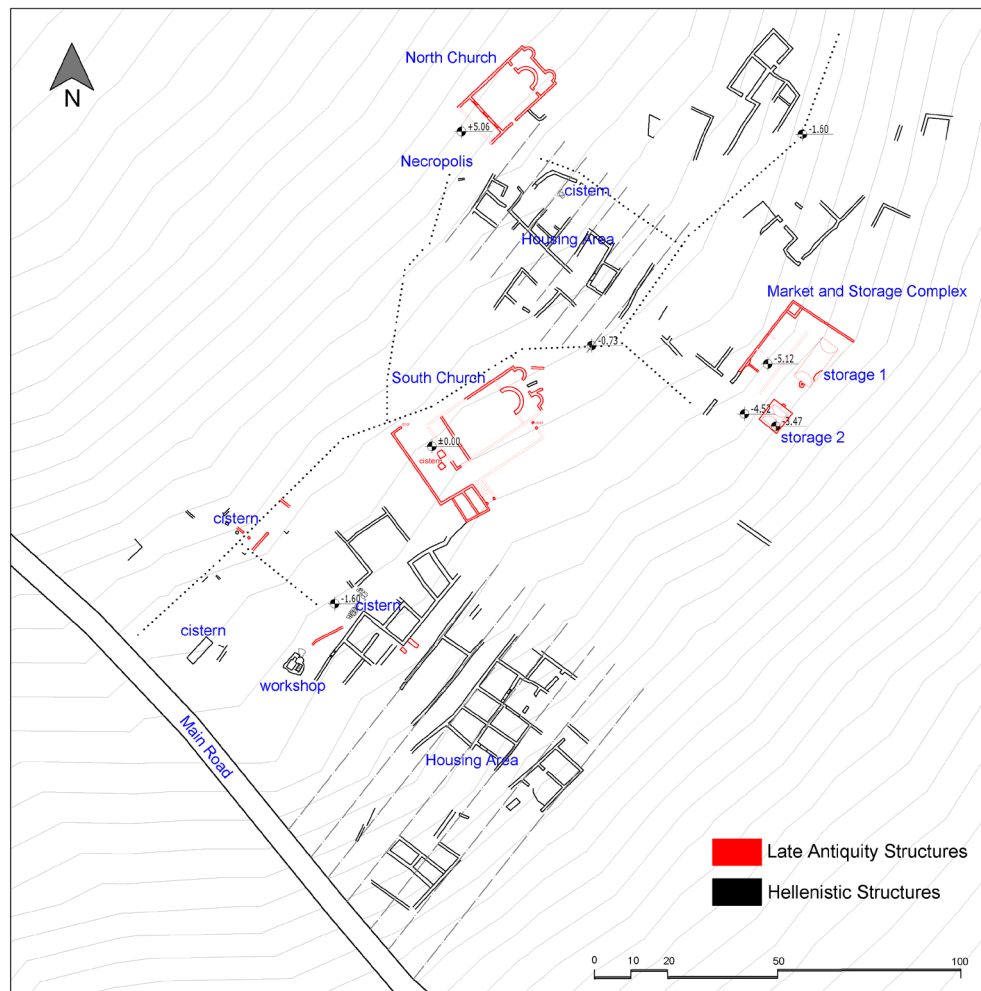


Figure 3. Yanıkhan Settlement Plan: This plan illustrates the layout of the settlement, showing the Hellenistic grid system and Late Antiquity structures.

for vehicles. Its location along a road and ease of accessibility are notable features; however, it is worth noting that not all settlements in the region with similar characteristics have such convenient access. Among the other numerous small, medium, and large-scale settlements within this distinctive micro-region between the Lamos and Kalykadnos rivers during Late Antiquity, examples fortified with walls and/or castle towers are scarce. In case of their existence, these fortifications generally took shape during the Hellenistic period. Yanıkhan was certainly in use during Late Antiquity, but its continuity into the transitional period (7th–9th centuries) remains unclear. The lack of fortifications may indicate either sufficient natural protection or abandonment, making defensive structures unnecessary.

The settlement is positioned parallel to the slope in a southwest-northeast orientation, and an internal road perpendicular to the main road and parallel to the slope leads to the inner parts of the settlement. It can be presumed that the inner road, accessible from the main road, functioned similarly during periods of active use of the settlement, considering its relationship with the topography and urban environment. However, it should also be noted that the inner road underwent revisions with new structures added during Late Antiquity. Access from the southwestern border of the settlement to the northeastern border is achieved by walking approximately 270 meters along this inner road. Along the way, it forks to provide access to settlement zones and buildings. The original paving stones of the path connecting the entrances of the South and North churches have been partially preserved to this day. This path may have functioned as a processional route linking the entrances of the two churches. Additionally, based on the organization of the church structures within the settlement, it appears that the internal road system was also renovated to align with this layout.

The general layout of the settlement, taking the South Church as a reference point, is as follows: a residential area lies to the south of the church, a storage and market area to the northeast, a second residential area extending

northeastward from the north, and finally, the North Church situated further to the north. While the settlement plan is largely discernible, it should be noted that certain sections have been lost or left with indistinguishable traces due to recent use by local residents. In particular, the area between the market and the southern residential zone cannot be clearly identified without excavation.

Residential structures, most of which date from the Hellenistic period, are situated to the southwest and can be accessed via the first road branching south from the main route (Figure 4). Along the road leading to the southern residential area, cisterns and a clearly identifiable workshop have also been preserved. Dense vegetation and sloping terrain make access to this area challenging. The grid plan of the residential structures appears to have been in use during Late Antiquity. Although these structures, built with a polygonal construction technique, are largely preserved, additional walls were added to some of the original buildings during Late Antiquity. Door lintels with cross symbols, possibly carved at a later time, are also visible.



Figure 4. Aerial photo of the southwest housing area.

Another grid-planned residential area is also visible between the North and South churches, although many buildings in this zone are significantly damaged. Some polygonal wall structures and door frames remain partially intact in situ, and a cistern has been identified within this area. The residential zone extends into the northern part of the settlement, which is one of the sections where structures are more deteriorated, with remnants not well-preserved to the present day.

Due to the current condition of the housing areas, determining the population size that the settlement might have supported, as well as estimating the number of residential structures, is challenging without conducting extensive archaeological excavations. The grid-like layout and interconnected arrangement of buildings in residential areas leave open the question of whether these structures can be considered independent units. Although some studies focusing on church structures within the settlement provide various estimates for the number of residential buildings, these figures remain largely hypothetical (Cortese, 2022, p. 181; Hild & Hellenkemper, 1986, p. 83).

Generally, in family-oriented feudal settlement patterns, particularly in the southeastern and eastern regions of Anatolia, housing systems often expand organically with need-based additions as families grow. A similar process may have influenced the housing fabric in this settlement. Given that these structures were initially built in the Hellenistic period and later likely underwent modifications and expan-

sions during Late Antiquity, the current layout suggests a possible model of organic, need-driven development.

The South Church (Figure 5), situated almost at the center of the settlement, follows a typical regional plan but is distinguished by the addition of an atrium and a south corridor, placing it in a more specialized position in terms of liturgical activity, facilitating specific liturgical practices, and potentially serving as a central point for communal gatherings and religious ceremonies. Including its narthex and eastern chambers, it measures 30.71 by 14.87 meters. While the wall fragments provide a broad layout of the construction, the South Church's structural stability is severely deteriorated. The apse wall rises to the height of the lower level of the window opening, while the eastern chambers and north wall remain partially intact. The remaining sections of the structure can be traced at ground level through the wall remnants.

Access to the atrium of South Church, which is rectangular in shape and measures 22.70 by 8.30 meters, is provided from the north and south. There are two entrances: one is a door on the northern wall that connects to the road continuing from the north side of the church, and the other is accessible via stairs from the south. The church is situated on sloping terrain; thus, the elevation difference at both the north and south entrances is resolved with steps. Additionally, within the atrium, there are two underground cisterns. No traces of door openings or thresholds have been found on the western wall of the atrium; however,

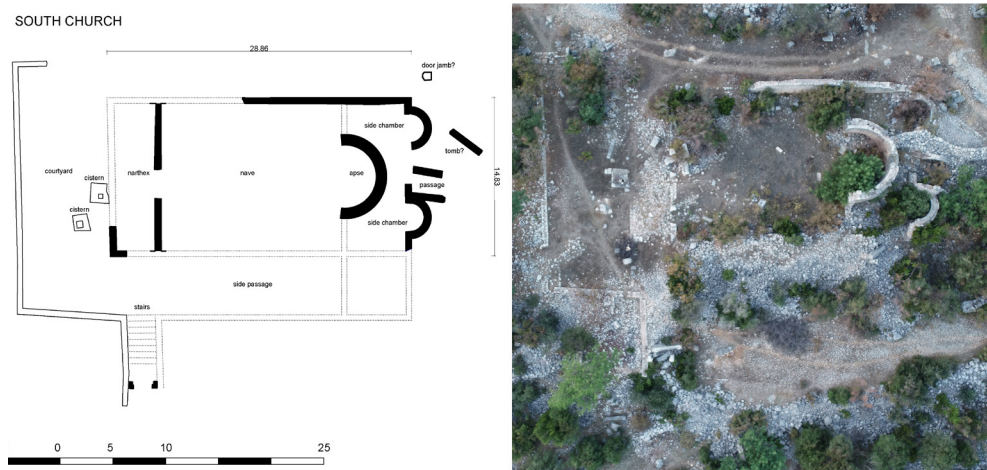


Figure 5. Plan (left) and aerial photo (right) of the Yanikhan South Church.

this may be due to the wall having collapsed down to ground level, making identification difficult. To the south of the atrium, west of the stairway entrance, remnants of walls suggest the presence of two rectangular rooms oriented in a north-south direction. It is challenging to hypothesize the functions of these rooms.

At the eastern end of the south corridor, there is a door opening that leads either to a room or to the outside. It has not been possible to determine whether this corridor terminates in a room, as previously suggested by Hill (Hill, 1996, p. 259). Currently, this part is in a completely ruined state and is covered with a pile of rubble, making it impossible to identify its south wall. However, based on the findings of Hild and Hellenkemper, as well as Hill, and considering the existing structural traces, it is suggested that the width of the corridor may be 5.45 meters. Adjacent to the walkway, a stairway provides access to the lower entrance on the south side. These stairs, which connect to the southern corridor of the church, are opposite the narthex, and it is likely that there is a door in the narthex corresponding to these stairs.

Approximately at the center of the two apsidal rooms located to the east of the church, there exists an arched recess interpreted as a burial structure. When the location of this structure is measured precisely and mapped, it becomes evident that its relationship with the apsidal rooms does not correspond with the plan proposed by previous researchers (Cortese, 2022, pp. 182–183; Hill, 1985, p. 95; Hill, 1996, pp. 256–260). It is pos-

ited that this structure functioned as a martyrion, where the relics of the saints referenced in the inscription associated with the church were likely housed. While the possibility of this interpretation remains, questions concerning whether the burial niche was constructed contemporaneously with the church or whether the church was erected over an existing burial site continue to be relevant. To the east of the northern chamber of the church, a partial wall remains from the Late Antique period, running parallel to the road, and has been identified behind the arched grave. This formation is significant in terms of emphasizing the road axis at this point, and this road continues northward.

The North Church stands approximately 60 meters north of the South Church (Figure 6). It shares a similar plan with the South Church but lacks an atrium or a surrounding walking corridor. Measuring 25.92 meters by 13.75 meters, including its narthex and eastern passage. It is understood that the church was constructed on a necropolis area, suggesting a potential function related to burial rituals. At the narthex and the eastern chambers of the church, there are chamasorion-type graves carved into the bedrock. The condition of the building is better than that of the South Church. The outer walls, apse, and dome remain in situ. Fragments of columns and bases lie inside the church. The church's main walls were constructed with rough-cut rubble stones, while the apse walls and the dome were built using larger, finely cut ashlar blocks (Figure 7).

NORTH CHURCH

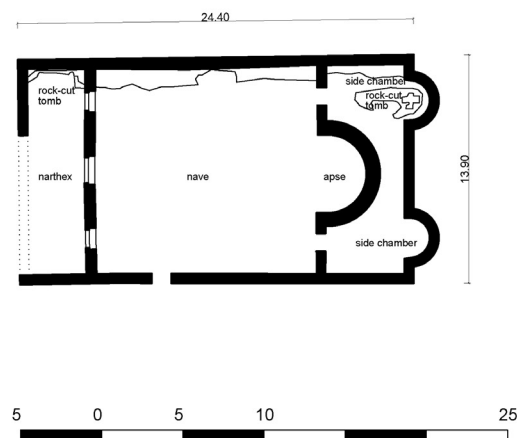


Figure 6. Plan (left) and aerial photo (right) of the Yanikhan North Church.



Figure 7. Southwest aerial view of Yanikhan North Church.

The exact construction dates of the churches remain uncertain [1], as verifying any theory is not possible without conducting excavations in the area. No comprehensive excavations have yet been carried out in the Olba region that could serve as a reference for similar-sized rural settlements. Nevertheless, considering that churches in the region are generally dated to the 5th and 6th centuries, a similar timeframe can be proposed for these structures. The inscription found on the lintel of the main door of the naos in the South Church indicates that this settlement was regarded as a significant religious site. This suggests that the church might have attracted not only the local inhabitants but also visitors from outside the settlement. In this context, the roles and functions of other structures, along with the religious buildings, gain considerable importance in understanding the overall organization of the settlement.

Churches in Rough Cilicia were integral to both the religious and social fabric of these communities. They were not merely places of worship; they also acted as community hubs, playing a central role in the local economy and governance. Often built in strategic locations within settlements or along

important trade routes, these churches connected rural areas with urban centers, reinforcing the expanding Christian network. The basilica-style architecture, typical of Late Antiquity, was commonly used, with adjustments to the challenging terrain. Local limestone was a key material, and spolia was frequently incorporated, offering both practical benefits and symbolic connections to the region's past.

One of the significant additions from Late Antiquity in the settlement is a complex that includes storage facilities and possibly market-related structures (Figure 8). The building measures approximately 24 meters by 20 meters, presenting a monumental scale competing in size with the major religious structures. The northwest and northeast walls of the structure are constructed of rubble stone and have partially survived to the present day. The flooring traces observed on the northwest wall suggest that the structure is a two-story building with a partial basement. It is evident that the main structure has been positioned on a vaulted substructure to the east, taking advantage of the terrain's slope. The internal dimensions of this vaulted structure, which is below the ground level, measure 5.35 meters by 13 meters. To the

south, there is another smaller vaulted structure built at the same level. The internal space of this smaller structure is nearly square, measuring 4.80 meters by 4.82 meters (Figure 9).

It is difficult to make a definitive restitution of the building based on the existing traces; however, there is a wall trace at the center of the building that runs longitudinally at ground level. As indicated by the perpendicular wall traces, it is likely that the structure features a plan consisting of adjacent, sequential rooms. A doorway has been identified in the northeast wall of the building. The northwest wing comprises two stories of sequential rooms above the basement, while the section accessible through this door may have served as an enclosed courtyard located above the vaulted substructure. Also, traces that can be followed southwest of the northwest wall suggest that the existing structure may continue in that direction. Additionally, the rock-cut sections revealed at the basement level of the northwest wall are noteworthy.

The building's multifunctional design is evident. One of its primary functions was likely related to storage, supported by the two vaulted structures that appear to have been constructed specifically for this purpose. The market complex exhibits structural adaptations reflective of its multifunctional use, with storage units and upper-level spaces designed to meet differing load requirements. It is well-known that storage structures typically have thicker walls to withstand the pressure exerted by the grain stored within (Rickman, 1971, p. 2). Accordingly, the ground-level storage units in this complex feature walls measuring 75–110 centimeters in thickness, designed specifically for storage purposes. By contrast, the walls of the superstructure, likely functioning as shops or perhaps an inn, measure only approximately 45–55 centimeters in thickness, reflecting the reduced structural demands of these spaces (Figure 10).

Despite its significance as an important Late Antique structure within the settlement, the market complex has remained largely unstudied, with Hill's brief remark being the only reference

MARKET AND STORAGE COMPLEX



Figure 8. Plan (left) and aerial photo (right) of the Yanikhan market and storage complex.



Figure 9. Interior views of underground storages: North storage (left) and south storage (right).



Figure 10. North wall of the market building.

to its existence, noting a central marketplace and a three-storeyed public building (Hill, 1996, p. 256). Although the exact function of the potential section comprised of sequential rooms is difficult to ascertain, it is highly likely that this area served as a public market within the settlement.

The existence of such a large-scale structure within this medium-sized settlement highlights its importance, offering insights into storage systems and possibly commercial activities. Rather than functioning solely as a self-sufficient rural unit, the settlement may have played a wider role in its micro-region, supporting not only its own population but also nearby communities. Its religious, social, and economic features suggest a level of organizational complexity that, while modest in scale, extends beyond what is typically expected from a small village.

5. General evaluations on the settlement layout - classifying and defining Yanıkhān

Rural settlements in Late Antiquity were small to medium sized communities sustained by agriculture and pastoralism. Despite their challenging environments, such as the rugged terrain of Rough Cilicia, they played a significant role in local economies and maintained connections with urban centers through trade, religion, and administrative networks. Their resilience reflected an ability to blend long-standing traditions with adaptive innovations, enabling them to endure socio-economic changes.

Churches, as central institutions, served both religious and socio-economic functions. In Rough Cilicia, they symbolized authority and continuity while also stabilizing local economies through land ownership and agricultural production. These structures were integral to the community, offering both spiritual and material support during periods of crisis.

Yanıkhān reflects the impact of Christianization during Late Antiquity. Christianity brought significant changes to the social structure, leading to architectural transformations in the settlement. However, these changes did not erase earlier elements; instead, new structures were layered upon existing ones, enriching the architectural fabric. The settlement features two main churches and a monumental market building, all constructed in the same period. These churches and the market building became central to both the physical and social organization of Yanıkhān. The churches served as places of worship and community centers, while the market structure likely supported storage and commercial activities. Together, these structures organized the social and economic life of the settlement. Yanıkhān, therefore, exemplifies a transformation that integrates old and new elements, highlighting the evolution of rural settlements in Late Antiquity, especially as a modest rural example. Its layered architectural fabric, combining pre-Christian and Christian elements, illustrates both the resilience of traditional settlement pat-

terns and the adaptability of local communities to new religious, social, and economic realities.

Although many rural settlements within the same micro-region exhibit common construction periods and share similar building materials and techniques—particularly the use of local limestone and traditional masonry—there are also notable differences in terms of site scale, functional diversity, architectural detailing, the number of churches, and preservation levels. For example, settlements like Karakabaklı and Işıkkale feature more refined masonry in domestic buildings, which may suggest the presence of wealthier households (Varinlioğlu, 2008a, 2008b). In contrast, the absence of Late Antique structures in Adamkayalar and Mancınıkkale implies that these settlements may have been abandoned earlier or did not undergo a phase of transformation. At Takkadın, the presence of a medieval fortification (Özdizbay & Dinçer, 2018, pp. 173–174) indicates a reorganization of the settlement with a defensive function, while Kanlıdivane (ancient Kanytella), with its multiple churches, clearly functioned as a regional religious center (Eyice, 1976; Eyice, 1980). These selected examples illustrate how settlements subject to similar environmental and historical conditions can nonetheless develop diverse architectural and social configurations. While this discussion includes only a few representative cases, the broader region exhibits a wide range of rural settlement types that reflect both continuity and transformation. In this context, Yanıkhan occupies a significant position—not only as a representative case of rural resilience but also as a site with distinct spatial and functional characteristics that merit close study.

In addition to religious and residential structures, some rural settlements in the region also contain towers, indicating a spatial organization shaped by strategic positioning. Some of these towers were originally built in the Hellenistic period and continued to be used during Late Antiquity, often undergoing renovations. One of the most prominent examples is the tower at Uzuncaburç. Others, such as the

Gökburç structure in the Ovacık settlement, appear to have been constructed anew during the Late Antique period. The continued use or construction of these towers suggests a persistent need for surveillance, defense, or symbolic authority in the rural landscape and reflects local concerns for security and control. The absence of such structures in Yanıkhan, contrasted with their presence at strategic sites, also highlights the variability within the micro-region and underlines the importance of localized factors in shaping rural settlement patterns.

The question of how rural settlements in mountainous Cilicia should be defined is central to this discussion. In this respect, the terminology used in Byzantine sources—such as *kome*, *chorion*, or *polis*—offers valuable insight into how these places were conceptualized during their active periods.

In distinguishing between urban and rural areas in mountainous Cilicia, Prokopius's definition of a "polis" provides valuable insight. According to Prokopius, for a settlement to be considered a polis, it must contain public structures such as baths, fortifications, churches, and cisterns, which serve both functional and symbolic roles in defining urban space (Procopius, 1940, *On Buildings*, 2.10.22). While urban settlements in mountainous Cilicia might be marked by these communal structures and greater social complexity, rural settlements often lack such extensive public infrastructure, presenting challenges in applying a uniform classification across all rural areas. The presence of churches or their number, settlement size, proximity to main roads, interrelations with neighboring settlements, economic foundations, and defensive features are critical factors for distinguishing between different types of rural settlements. For instance, a rural settlement with multiple churches may serve as a religious hub for surrounding villages, granting it a more central role within the local network. Likewise, rural settlements connected to main routes or fortified areas may hold additional economic or strategic importance, differentiating them from more isolated, smaller-scale farming communities. Therefore, categorizing rural settle-

ments in mountainous Cilicia requires a nuanced approach that considers their geographical location, social functions, and economic activities, rather than a one-size-fits-all classification.

In the Byzantine period, rural settlements were classified by various terms according to their functions and sizes, with the concepts of *kome* and *chorion* standing out in this context. Initially, the term *kome* was used mainly in narratives and stories; however, from the 3rd century onward, it began to appear more widely in written texts to describe rural settlements (Kazhdan, 1997, pp. 43–44). The term *kome* generally refers to smaller and modest settlements that primarily subsisted on agricultural activities. These settlements were dependent on administrative and religious centers and did not possess economic independence. Additionally, *kome*-type settlements had limited production and commercial activities, though they maintained connections with larger centers in the rural landscape (Lefort, 2002, pp. 235–238). In contrast, *chorion* described economically developed settlements with connections to nearby villages and played a central role in the rural landscape (Haldon, 1999, pp. 102–104; Harvey, 1989, pp. 52–55). These concepts provide a fundamental framework for understanding the social and economic organization of rural Byzantine society.

Additionally, studies reveal that terms like *metrokomia* and *komepolis* have been used to describe mixed settlement models that, while primarily rural, incorporated certain urban characteristics. Morrisson and Sodini (2002, p. 179) observe that such settlements combined rural and urban features; for example, a village with multiple churches could serve as a religious center for surrounding villages, thereby assuming a more central role within the local network. Similarly, rural settlements connected to major roads or fortified by walls could hold greater economic or strategic importance compared to isolated agricultural communities. Kazhdan also references such settlements under the term *komepolis*, describing these mixed-function settlements as incorporating both rural and urban elements (Kazhdan, 1991, p. 2168).

In the case of Yanikhan, it can be suggested that the settlement was not limited to agricultural production but also functioned as a religious center, potentially serving as an attraction point in the region. In this respect, Yanikhan might be distinguished from smaller *kome* settlements in terms of its social and economic significance. However, the academic debate remains open regarding the most appropriate classification for a settlement of this scale and function. Given its religious, commercial, and social connections to other surrounding settlements, Yanikhan may be considered an important settlement that combines village-city characteristics within the Byzantine rural system and could possibly be categorized under the term *komepolis*. In this respect, Yanikhan not only provides insight into a specific rural community but also offers a lens through which broader regional dynamics and classification challenges in Late Antique Rough Cilicia can be better understood.

6. Conclusion

In the case of Yanikhan, it appears that the settlement was not solely focused on agricultural production but also played a role as a religious hub, possibly acting as a focal point of interest within the region. Yanikhan embodies the persistence, adaptability, and layered transformation of rural settlements, revealing the vital role these communities played in the social and economic structure of the Byzantine world. From its origins in the Hellenistic period through the transformations of Late Antiquity, Yanikhan offers a nuanced perspective on how a rural settlement could navigate and adapt to historical shifts while preserving a unique identity. The largely preserved Hellenistic grid plan, together with the integration of ecclesiastical architecture, underscores Yanikhan's capacity to balance continuity with change, maintaining a cohesive settlement framework across centuries.

Set within the challenging terrain of Rough Cilicia, Yanikhan's resilience speaks to the strength of its inward-focused economy, rooted in agriculture and resourcefulness. This self-suffi-

ciency, along with its strategic location and connections with nearby settlements, enabled Yanıkhan to endure external pressures and remain a cohesive community. In contrast to larger urban centers, Yanıkhan is a representative example of the settlements of the aforementioned micro-regional model where both economic stability and social cohesion were achieved without the fortifications or extensive public infrastructures typical of larger Byzantine towns.

Yanıkhan's evolution reflects broader patterns of rural resilience and transformation, but it also offers insights specific to the unique socio-economic fabric of Cilicia. Through the lens of *komepolis*, or village-city, Yanıkhan's structure merges rural stability with certain urban characteristics, suggesting a model of settlement that defies simple classifications. This blend of roles illustrates a complex rural landscape, where Christianization introduced new forms of social and architectural organization that harmonized with existing traditions rather than replacing them outright.

Such resilience—evident in both architectural adaptation and socio-economic continuity—demonstrates how local communities negotiated long-term change while maintaining functional coherence. Yanıkhan thus provides a grounded example of how resilience and adaptability were spatially and materially manifested in marginal landscapes of the Byzantine countryside.

Moreover, the comprehensive architectural documentation carried out in this study contributes to the visualization of rural transformation across time. The mapping of elevation levels, spatial organization, and building typologies not only strengthens our understanding of Yanıkhan itself but also provides a methodological framework for assessing other rural sites with similar diachronic layering.

As such, this case highlights the importance of fine-grained, site-specific studies in revealing the diversity and complexity of rural settlement patterns in Late Antiquity.

Its rich architectural layering and spatial coherence provide critical material for future comparative studies on

rural adaptation and continuity. Future research and excavations in Yanıkhan and similar settlements will be crucial for uncovering the micro-regional dynamics of Rough Cilicia that sustained these communities and furthering our understanding of the diverse Byzantine countryside.

Endnotes

[1] Hild and Hellenkemper generally dated the churches in Rough Cilicia to the late 5th or early 6th century (Hild & Hellenkemper, 1986, pp. 80–85). As an alternative interpretation, Hill suggested that the churches in the Yanıkhan settlement might date back to the late 4th century, basing his argument on an inscription he identified on the lintel block at the main entrance from the narthex to the naos of the South Church (Hill, 1985, pp. 93–97; Hill, 1996, pp. 256–262). Hill believed that this inscription might bear the name of Matronianus, Comes Isauriae, mentioned in Codex Theodosianus IX.27.3, a 5th-century collection of Roman laws issued under Emperor Theodosius II. Later, Arabella Cortese re-evaluated this inscription, suggesting that the Southern Church could be associated with local saints such as Saint George, Konon, Christopher, Kerykos, and Ioulitta. These saints were known as important protective figures in the region and played a significant role in worship practices during their active period, making it likely that the church could have attracted visitors from the surrounding areas if it was popular as a sacred site (Cortese, 2022, pp. 179–184).

Acknowledgements

The field surveys conducted within the scope of this study were carried out in 2020–2021 within the framework of official permissions granted by the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, as part of a student research project.

We would like to thank the staff of the Mersin Museum and the Silifke Museum for their support and cooperation during different stages of the study.

This article is based on the first author's doctoral dissertation.

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