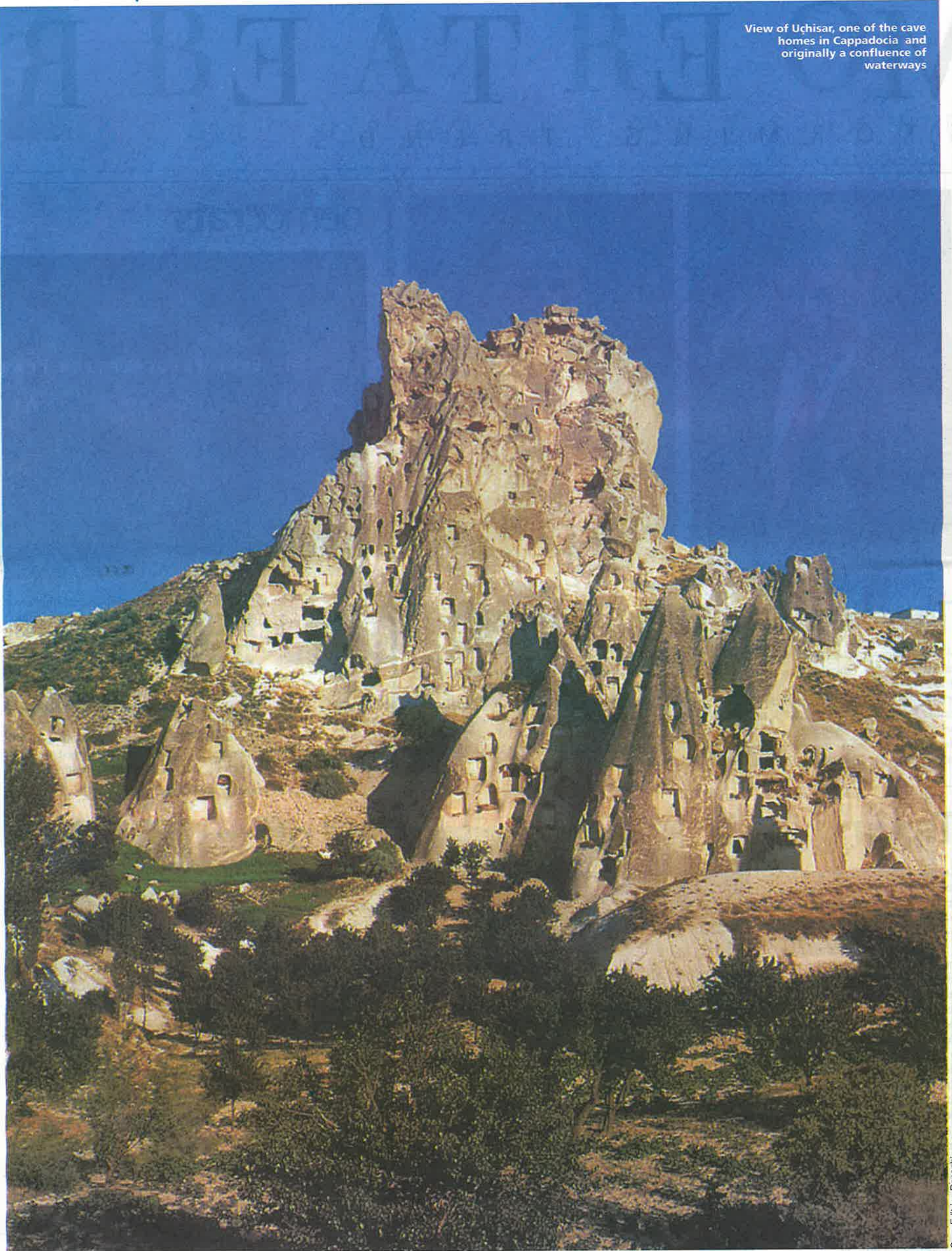


View of Uçhisar, one of the cave homes in Cappadocia and originally a confluence of waterways



Story and pictures
Carol Yong

hard rock

Cappadocia's sublime landscape makes it the wonderland of the Turkish tourist industry. Hasankeyf, less glamorous sister with historic caves by the Tigris River, is dammed. A story of water wielded as strategic power tool

It's very bad. Nobody wants to move from his house,' says 11-year-old Osman, gazing across the cave dwellings in Hasankeyf that have been hewn from the ground over thousands of years. The renowned Hasankeyf caves are still inhabited, in a way that is culturally unique to the Kurds in the smallest region of Turkey: the Southeastern Anatolian Region. The city of Hasankeyf is situated at a bend in the Tigris River around 60 miles south east of Diyarbakir, on the border with Batman province in Southeast Anatolia.

Flying from Istanbul to Diyarbakir takes just under two hours, but being on a tight budget, I took the Oz Diyarbakir instead, paying just a fifth of the price of a plane ticket. The Oz Diyarbakir is one of the earliest bus lines to run between Istanbul and Diyarbakir. We were provided free drinks and cakes, tastefully-chosen local music and songs, and there was a restroom stop every four or five hours. When passengers got back to their seats, the attendant sprinkled Turkish cologne on eagerly awaiting palms. It was summer (August) and the cologne was refreshing, besides keeping the bus fragrant.

The 20 million Turkish lira (RM11) bus ticket stretched for 22 hours through urban centres and small vil-

lages, extensive cotton, olive and *fistic* (pistachio nut) cultivation and treeless terrain.

Osman is painfully aware that his ancient Kurdish hometown will be lost forever, submerged when the Turkish government builds a new dam on the Tigris, about 65km upstream of the Syria-Iraq border. The proposed Ilisu Dam will displace thousands of most-

ly Kurdish people from their homes and submerge Hasankeyf. Until then, life goes on much as it has for centuries for the locals, including Osman our volunteer guide to the town's core.

Hasankeyf is one of the oldest settlements in the world. Some historians claim that the first settlers came to Hasankeyf in ancient Mesopotamia as long as 10,000 years ago. Still standing is a fortress, built from a single piece of stone, with secret passages to the Tigris. Other historical features include a small palace at the end of the fortress and the Ulu Camii Mosque. Within the caves at Hasankeyf, there are churches, ornate mosques and tombs with an astounding architectural and religious heritage spanning several civilisations, from the Byzantines and Sassanides through the Omayyads, Abbasides, Hamdanides, Mervanides and Artuks to the Eyyubians, and most recently the Ottomans.

As Osman, through our interpreter Shafi, tells us more stories, I and fellow traveller Claus, an artist from Germany, find ourselves more than just curious spectators of the archaeological and cultural elements. We want to know what lies beneath the city castle on top of the 100m-high hill to the south of the Tigris and its remaining three gates (there were once seven), the remains of founda-



Osman, the young tour guide and Turkish Kurd, whose home is under threat of 'development'

hard rock



The unmistakable wind hewn rock formations which characterise the Uçhisar territory, another region in Turkey which is home to many cave dwellers

tions, walls and arches.

Shafi tells us that Osman guides local and foreign visitors around Hasankeyf during the summer holidays to earn some money to help his family. He lives with his 30-year-old widowed mother, sister and two brothers. On a good day, he earns one to two million Turkish lira (RM5 to RM10). 'Everybody in the village likes Osman because he is so kind. He will still bring visitors around, even if they don't pay him. He is proud of his birthplace, Hasankeyf,' we're told.

The baking midday sun gives us an excuse to take a break in one of the caves used as a café. We drink local *cay* (tea) with kebabs and bread which Osman brings us.

While it is a fierce 44°C outside, the cave remains cool. 'Eat, eat, Osman, so you can grow bigger,' Claus teases, but Osman's only reaction is a blushing smile. He's a bright boy with a future beyond his hold. His fear and despair of the construction of the largest hydroelectric project due to start this year in Hasankeyf is palpable.

The Ilisu Hydro-Electric Dam and Power Plant is part of Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), a huge irrigation and hydroelectric scheme on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and their tributaries in the Kurdish part of Turkey. The RM121bil GAP envisions the construction of 22 dams and 19 power plants to provide irrigation and electricity, which Ankara says is needed to transform the economy of the troubled southeast. Since 1984, the region has been the staging ground for a bitter war between the Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

The contract for building the dam has been awarded to a consortium led by the Swiss company, Sulzer Hydro. Construction has been subcontracted

to a further consortium made up of, among others, Balfour Beatty (UK), Impregilo (Italy), Skanska (Sweden), and the Turkish companies, Nurol, Kiska, and Tekfen. The generating equipment will be supplied by ABB Power Generation Ltd (Switzerland) (formerly involved Malaysia's own troubled, protracted Bakun Dam project) and Sulzer Hydro. However, the project suffered a serious blow when Skanska, a Swedish construction group with the second largest stake (24%) was reported on September

Germany, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, in addition to the financing from the Union Bank of Switzerland.

If the project goes ahead, it will damage the 10,000-year-old city of Hasankeyf and at least 68 other towns and villages of mostly Kurdish people.

Hasankeyf has been designated historical site under the Protection of Cultural and Historic Sites Law, and was awarded complete archaeological protection by the Turkish Department of Culture on April 14, 1978. Under the Act, the town is granted protection from adverse development in its entirety. But during his September tour of the region, including Hasankeyf, Culture Minister Istemihan Talay gave no indication that any initiative would be taken to stop the construction of the Ilisu.

There is more at stake. The dam will block the flow of water to Syria and Iraq, which both rely on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for drinking water, irrigation and electricity generation. Control over the waterways will give Ankara important political leverage in the Middle East. Syria and Iraq have already protested the threat to their water supplies, and there are fears that GAP could aggravate an already tense regional struggle over water.

Ankara wants to implement GAP that it hails as a miracle of our time, one which will provide a clean source of energy to bring jobs and prosperity to

65 million people, giving the benefits of life enjoyed by the citizens of Western Europe and its industrial economies.

The threat of Hasankeyf's flooding has prompted local authorities to urge Turks to come see Hasankeyf while they still can. 'It is a waste to see Hasankeyf drown,' Shafii tells us, 'but if the state



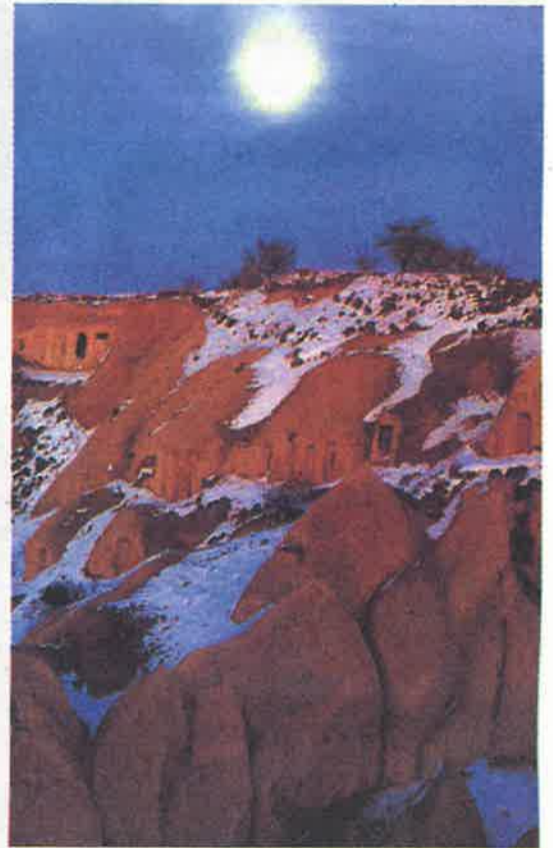
Promises of a better life after resettlement have translated into cautionary tales for the resettled and their cultural inheritance

26 to have withdrawn its participation. Balfour Beatty stated Skanska's decision was 'not related in any way' to claims that the dam would cause environmental problems and forced resettlement of local peoples.

Financing for the RM7.6bil Ilisu project is being sought through export credit agencies of Austria,



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Some remaining cave homes in other parts of Turkey... the castle of Uçhisar (left), and Güvercinlik Valley, near Uçhisar (top)

wants to build the dam, what can we do?' he concedes in the helpless resignation which also shows of on many other local faces.

Hardly any attention is focused on the plight of the thousands like Osman and Shafi, who will be displaced by GAP, and critics point to Turkey's abysmal record of resettlement provision. Stories of a better life after resettlement frequently translate into stories of misery for the affected people and dispossessed cultural inheritance, as experience have shown. The completed Atatürk Dam affected more than 50,000 people, while the Birecik Dam drowned two-thirds of the ancient Roman garrison city of Belkis (Zeugma) which contained one of the richest collections of Roman period mosaics in the world.

As with most big dam projects, the Ilisu is overflowing with controversy. A copy of an internal assessment of the Turkish Government's proposed Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) written by ex-World Bank official, Dr Ayse Kudat, was recently leaked to British media. Its findings confirmed and substantiated most of the misgivings surrounding the plan and compensation proposals provided under the Ilisu project. The report was commissioned by the Swiss Export Risk Guarantee, which coordinates a consortium of international export credit agencies considering funding the Ilisu.

Balfour Beatty estimates the number of people affected by the Ilisu Dam at 12,000 to 16,000. Dr Kudat's report puts the number at between 19,000 and 34,000, and the number of people potentially affected at 55,000 to 78,000 - two to three times higher than previously estimated. The report also reveals that the resettlement plan presents complications that break international guidelines and policy on resettlement (although the report's author, also Turkish, convinc-

ingly argues that they can be overcome).

Despite these problems, the Turkish government insists on building the Ilisu. Southeast Turkey has been a war zone for the Turkish military and the Kurdish independence movement, a conflict which has left 30,000 dead and from which thousands more have fled. The Kurdish community, both within and outside Turkey, sees the flooding of Hasankeyf as part of a wider political strategy to eradicate Kurdish culture. Indeed, there is wide-



The Kurdish community sees the flooding of Hasankeyf as part of a wider political strategy to eradicate their culture

spread perception that the GAP as a whole, and Ilisu in particular, is promoted by the Turkish authorities as a means of altering the demography and geography of Turkish Kurdistan through the displacement of Kurds into larger towns in order to exercise more effective control over a region where an armed conflict has raged for 16 years between the Turkish

security forces and the guerrilla forces of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Fifteen minutes to five. Time to go because the last public bus leaves for Batman at 5pm. On our way out, I pause by the entrance to the Hasankeyf Castle. Looking up, I'm mesmerised by the caves. I take one last look at the ruined Hasankeyf Bridge, the largest in the Middle Ages, and once a giant drawbridge protecting the town against invaders.

The minibus skims over the site of Hasankeyf. 'It is roughly two hours' drive from the historic city of Diyarbakir, but by public transport, one has to bypass the next door town of Batman and is likely to be questioned by paranoid police. Several minibuses ahead of us are stopped. We're lucky. On our way to Diyarbakir, I see again Osman's eyes and his tiny hands as he waved us goodbye. I could not wish for more than to be able to find Osman in Hasankeyf when I have the opportunity to come again to Turkey.

Back in Diyarbakir, I ask a young man how he feels about Hasankeyf. 'I have never been there but it is sad the dam will destroy it. It is such a valuable tourist site,' he replies guardedly. Then he murmurs: 'Destroying Hasankeyf would destroy the heart of our Kurdish culture and history.' It is difficult to speak freely about the dam as the area is still governed by security forces.

International campaign to support the affected people to stop the Ilisu project and to save Hasankeyf has gained momentum. Even within, Turkish intellectuals, professionals and concerned individuals have started their own campaign to save Hasankeyf, one of the few cultural and historical inheritances of the world. ▣