

# *Hasankeyf*

## *The Capital of Civilizations*

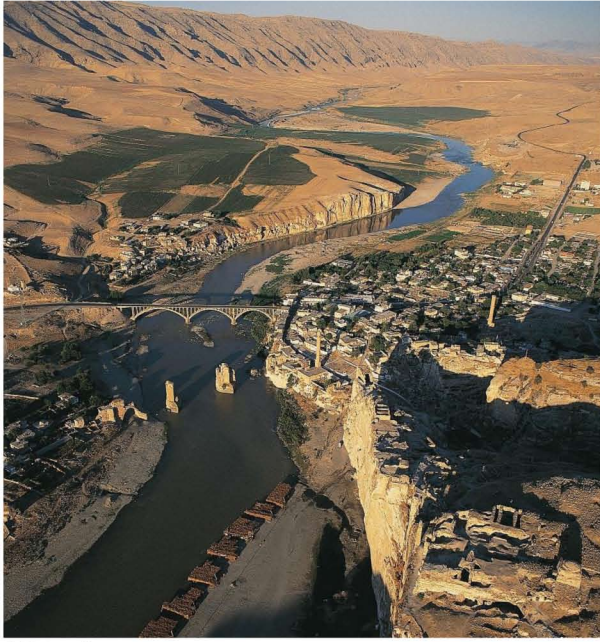
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## Hasankeyf: The Capital of Civilizations\*

The lands nourished by the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers originating in Eastern Anatolia are home to the first civilizations and oldest settlements in the world.

The Greeks named this fertile land 'Mesopotamia', meaning 'in-between two rivers'. After the Arabs conquered the land, it was divided into two: the south was named *Sevad* or *Iraq*, and the north was called *Al Jazeera* meaning 'island'.



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Al Jazeera, also referred as 'Upper Mesopotamia' or 'fertile crescent', was a junction where the Near Eastern culture merged with Anatolian culture. The cultural and historical value of this region can easily be observed in remains such as cairns, ruins and monuments that can be seen almost everywhere.

The excavations at Halan Çemi (now flooded by the Batman Dam), Çayönü, Nevala Çori and Göbekli Tepe, revealed the region's importance for understanding the beginning of the Neolithic age.

The town of Hasankeyf, located at the intersection of Mesopotamia and Anatolia, is part of an uninterrupted historical process since the Neolithic times.

Excavations at the site known as Hasankeyf Cairn held between 2009 and 2011 proved that this town was part of the Neolithic revolution. This takes the known history of Hasankeyf back 10,000 years.

Hasankeyf, 'the throne of cave people', was chosen as a military base by many rulers

because of its strategic location. The town was the first capital of the Artuqids and hosted the Ayyubid Dynasty for many years. Hasankeyf is one of the few settlements in the world which developed from a simple cave settlement into a sophisticated palace, thus exhibiting the developmental milestones at different stages of civilization.





However, only during the Islamic reign it acquired its true identity as a 'medieval Islamic town'. The region around Hasankeyf is one of the most important historical sites for the Islamic world.

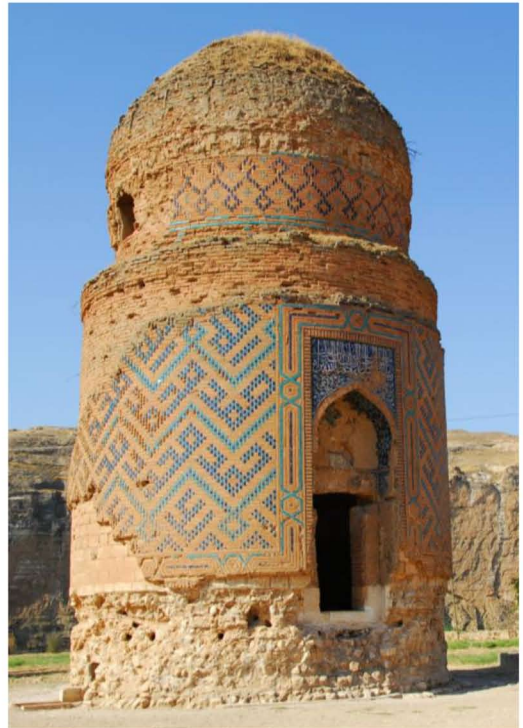
Acting as a bridge between east and west, Upper Mesopotamia and Anatolia, Hasankeyf was one of the indispensable locations where humans, in the words of Ibn Haldun "established civilization".

In the periods of the Assyrian-Hittite, Assyrian-Urartu, Roman-Persian and Byzantine-Sassanid, Mesopotamia was a region whose control was important due to its location at the junction of major routes connecting Syria and Anatolia. The desire for the control of this region, known as the cradle of civilization, appears in the oldest written records in existence.

Hasankeyf was also one of the major stops on the medieval river transport route starting in Diyarbakır, going through Cizre and Mosul to Baghdad. This was made possible by the Tigris River, which is now threatened by the construction of the Ilisu Dam project that would stop its flow and have severe impacts on the region it has nourished since the start of civilization.

Hasankeyf encountered Islam around the mid-seventh century, being among the first settlements in Anatolia to be Islamicized. In 639, during the caliphate of Hz. Ömer, armies of Islam commanded by Iyaz b. Ganm of the Damascus base, entered Southeast Anatolia via Syria and conquered Edessa (Urfa), Harran, Re'sü'layn (Ceylanpınar), Amid (Diyarbakır), Meyyafarikin (Silvan) Erzen, Nisibis (Nusaybin) and Hasankeyf within a year. The Upper Tigris basin, including Hasankeyf, was the first region where Islam set its roots in Anatolia. The Muslim Arab clans, migrating from the south in the Omayyad and early Abbasid times, played an important role. One of these clans, the Bekri (Bekr b. Vail) clan, settled in the region and the Upper Tigris Basin started to be called Diyar-ı Bekr (Land of Bekr). Hasankeyf was listed as one of the four major towns of this region by historical sources at the time.

The period in which Hasankeyf reached its peak and gained its true identity is, without a doubt, between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries when it was ruled by the Artuqids and Ayyubids . The 130-year reign of the Artuqids (between 1102-1232) had a strong influence in the region, in both political and socio-cultural senses. The bridge built by the Artuqids in Hasankeyf, along with many other architectural works, stands as the most magnificent example of the medieval period.



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Among the Artuqid Beks, each of whom had their own unique characters; one of the most interesting is certainly Fahreddin Kara Arslan (1144-1167). According to historical sources, he was loved by his people, even by his non-Muslim subjects for whom his tolerance is reflected in the coins minted on his behalf. He was especially interested in science and had his own library, helping to get many books copied. Usâme b. Munkiz, an important poet, author and diplomat of the period, points out in his work, *Kitâb el-İ'tibâr*, that he visited this Bek in Hasankeyf and joined him on a hunting trip and noted that the area has an unique natural life. Today, Hasankeyf is still important on a global level for hosting endemic and endangered species.

It is another Hasankeyf Artuqid ruler, Nâsireddin Mahmud who assigned the engineering genius of the time, Ebû'l-'Îz el-Cezerî, as the head of engineering at his palace and ordered his works, invaluable in terms of Islamic science and technology, to be written.



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The Artuqid era, in which Hasankeyf became a capital and one of the most important cities of the region, ended in 1232. It was immediately followed by the period of Hasankeyf Ayyubids which would make the city more developed in almost every aspect. Although Hasankeyf Ayyubids managed to bypass the Mongolian threat with clever political moves, they could not avoid the negative effects of the chaos in the region during the time of İlhanlı Governors. Yet, from the beginning of fourteenth century the Ayyubid rulers of Hasankeyf had been busy with the reconstruction of the city and removed all the negative traces of the Mongols. Later the Ak Koyunlu and Kara Koyunlu Turks, who were influential in the area, struggled for years to conquer this strategic city. After extended effort, the Ak Koyunlu Turks conquered Hasankeyf in 1462 and ruled it for 20 years. Their legacy to Hasankeyf is the Zeynel Beg Tomb, which is unique in Anatolia, standing like an amulet on the neck of the town.

The Ayyubids who ruled the town for about two and a half centuries built several mosques, *imarets*, madrasas, palaces, inns, hammams etc. Most of the buildings that still stand in Hasankeyf today belong to this period.

The town hosted many important works throughout the ages. The first among those are the mosques and mosque complexes and the Hasankeyf Bridge. The Sultan Suleyman Mosque and its complex, built for the Ayyubid ruler Suleyman, also hosts his grave. The Koç Mosque, known for the peculiarity of the motifs on its mihrab, unique in Turkey, is matched in terms of masonry style only by the Divrigi Grand Mosque in Anatolia. Another important building is the mausoleum and dervish lodge of Imam Abdullah, who





is believed to have descended from Prophet Mohammad's line. The Hasankeyf bridge, remarkable for its architecture, engineering and art, is famous not only for its Central Asian Uyghur painting style ornaments and its balanced engineering (despite its 'asymmetrical' style ), but also for its use as both accommodation and passage.

Excavations in the Tigris Valley, including Hasankeyf, are ongoing and new findings continue to emerge. For example, excavations held in 2004-2005 around Zeynel Tomb revealed a large mosque complex, and later a second Madrasa within the complex belonging to the Artuqid period.

Hasankeyf is important not only for its architecture but also for the people who hailed from the town within a large range of fields from religious sciences to medicine and engineering, and from tasavvuf (Islamic mysticism) to architecture. Among the most famous scholars of Hasankeyf are Hanefi judge Alaeddin Muhammed b. Ali el-Haskefi' and Ebû'l İz b. İsmail b. Rezzaz el-Cezerî', the founder of cybernetics (robotics). The work of the great Islamic scholar and engineer Cezerî's on 'The use of mechanic movements in engineering' is exhibited in various museums in Europe.

Hasankeyf, surviving several uprisings, invasions and wars, escaping the Mongolian invasion, resisting neglect and chaos during the Ilhanli Governors' period and consequently managing to heal all its wounds, is now facing annihilation by the Ilisu Dam Project. It is not only Hasankeyf that will be flooded by the dam but also our architectural and cultural tradition - our history and identity. It is not possible to relocate the legacy that made Hasankeyf the birthplace of civilization. If these monuments and cultural artifacts are moved to a new location, they will lose their true value and meaning.



© El-Cezerî (Topkapı Palace)

History is not only about the past, but also about the future. Every mosque, madrasa, imaret, palace, inn, hammam, inscription, gravestone and brick in Hasankeyf is part of our identity. Loyalty to our past and the respect we show for our common heritage will determine the quality of the future we will build.

\*Summary of 'Hasankeyf: The Capital of Civilizations' by Associate Professor Adnan Çevik, 2012.

