

Chiese nella regione occidentale del Mar Nero e valutazione del loro potenziale turistico

Churches in the Western Black Sea Region and Evaluation of Their Tourism Potential

C'è un numero considerevole di edifici religiosi nella regione occidentale del Mar Nero in Turchia ereditata dal periodo romano. Oggi alcuni di questi edifici sono stati devastati, alcuni parzialmente distrutti, alcuni abbandonati, e alcuni hanno perso la loro autenticità a causa di attività di restauro o della trasformazione in moschee. A Safranbolu, Ereğli, Amasra, Bartın, Sinop e Bolu le rovine di queste chiese sono ancora visibili. La regione occidentale del Mar Nero, costituita da due mete di turismo culturale, Safranbolu e Kastamonu, è una zona turistica con attraenti destinazioni d'uso di turismo culturale, religioso, rurale ed è raggiunta da 5 milioni di visitatori ogni anno. Questo studio si propone di individuare le chiese e cappelle nella regione occidentale del Mar Nero, determinarne la loro situazione attuale, per valutare il loro potenziale turistico nel contesto culturale, del patrimonio, del turismo religioso, prendendo in considerazione il riutilizzo di edifici religiosi ed il loro adattamento.

There is a considerable number of religious buildings in the Western Black Sea region in Turkey inherited from the Roman period. Today some of these buildings have been devastated, some partially destroyed, some abandoned, and some have lost their authenticity because of restoration activities or conversion into mosques. In Safranbolu, Ereğli, Amasra, Bartın, Sinop, and Bolu the ruins of these churches can still be seen. The Western Black Sea region, consisting of two cultural tourism destinations, Safranbolu and Kastamonu, is a touristic area with attractive cultural, religious, and rural tourism destinations visited by 5 million visitors annually. This study aims to identify the churches and chapels in the Western Black Sea region, to determine their current situation, to evaluate their tourism potential in the context of cultural/heritage/religious tourism, and to consider the reuse of religious buildings while adapting them.



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Parole chiave: **Chiese; Turismo religioso; Turismo culturale; Riutilizzo delle chiese; Regione occidentale del Mar Nero**

Keywords: **Churches; Religious Tourism; Cultural Tourism; Reuse of Churches; Western Black Sea Region**

I. Introduction

The Western Black Sea region, which occupies an area of 40,000 km² in the north of Turkey, comprises the provinces of Bolu, Bartın, Düzce, Kastamonu, Karabük, Sinop, and Zonguldak. The archeology of the region has not been adequately researched. However, recent excavations have led to important findings about the history of the region. Although settlements in the region date to ancient times, it is possible to speak about the existence of an important Christian population (Acar, 2006) and consequent religious buildings, such as churches and chapels, during the Ottoman period. With the migration of the Anatolian Greeks after the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, which was signed on 30 January 1923 (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014), the churches used by the Christian population became idle or were transformed for various purposes. Recently, an important number of surface surveys and excavations have been conducted to reveal the archeological characteristics of the region.

This study has two primary aims. Firstly, we intend to determine the current situation of the churches in the Black Sea region, to identify the churches, most of which are partially destroyed and are buried under the ground, so that they may be used for further studies. Consequently, the study provides information about the history and

architectural characteristics of the churches in the region and their current situation. Secondly, we aim to determine the tourism potential, the potential use of these churches in the Black Sea region for cultural tourism, heritage tourism, and religious tourism, and also to pinpoint them on a map.

In order to collect data, we used the existing literature on the churches and chapels in the region, old photographs of the cities, data on the archeological excavations, and our findings from a field survey.

II. Current Situation of the Churches in the Black Sea Region

Bolu, Seben District, Çeltikdere Village Church: The church¹ located in the Çeltikdere village of the Seben district of Bolu province was used as the village mosque until 1952. The church, which dates to the middle Byzantine period, was constructed sometime between 842 and 1204 A.D. (Bolu 1998 Yılığ, 1998: 632) (Fig. 1a, Fig.1b).

The edifice was 9x13m large and architecturally structured in the east-west direction. The apse, which extended outwards in the shape of a semicircle, has three round-arched rectangular window apertures. On the sides of the church, there is a single window aperture with a similar shape. The revetment system of the church, which was constructed in brick and stone using an alternate system, has not survived today. Currently, only the

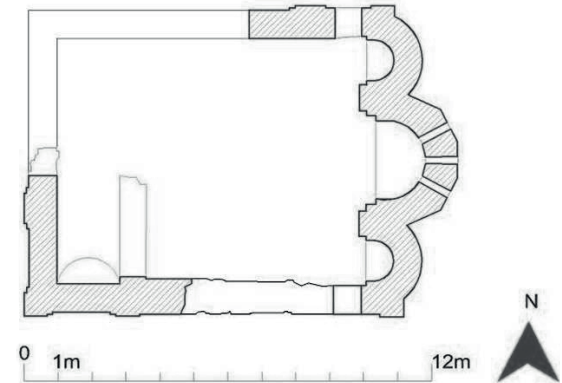


Fig.1a The plan of Bolu Seben Church by Ertan Ertürk, 2016

Fig. 1b Bolu Seben Church

walls of the church remain and there is no trace of wall paintings.

Bolu, Gerede Province, Inn with Church: The Inn with Church, which is located in the Kitirler neighborhood of the Gerede district of Bolu province, constitutes an example of the inner-city inns of the Ottoman period. The Inn with Church takes its name from the chapel² inside the Inn. The chapel (Bolu 1998 Yıllığı, 1998: 185) inside the inn indicates the Christian population who engaged in commercial activities in the region.

Bolu, Central District Churches: Five churches, which are located on the Yedigöller Arasta site of the Bolu central district, were constructed on sloping land close to each other. Buildings nos. 3 and 4 are in the forestry area and currently are in ruins. The size of churches nos. 1, 2, and 5 are 6x10m, 6x14m, and 2.30x4m, respectively (Bolu 1998 Yıllığı, 1998: 55).

Zonguldak, Çaycuma District, Tios Ancient City Religious Buildings: Archeological excavations of the Tios ancient site, which is in Filyos in the Çaycuma district of Zonguldak province, have been conducted since 2006.³ During the excavations, a rectangular basilica architecturally structured in the east-west direction, which has a single nave, was revealed on the Acropolis Hill. There is a parecclesion adjacent to the southern wall of the church. Since there are no written sources or epitaphs about the date of the building,

considering similar architectural buildings the edifice dates to the ninth century (Gür, 2015: 178). Other than the Tios Acropolis Church, another church, which is near the Ateştuğla Factory but has not been revealed so far, has also been noted (Gökoğlu, 1952: 25, 129, 139, 169-170; Gür, 2015: 164-165).

Zonguldak, Ereğli District, Cehennemagzı Cave Church: The Cave Church, which is located in the Ereğli district of Zonguldak province, was carved into the rocks for religious purposes during the period of early Christianity. The mosaics with geometric shapes at the base of the cave are still visible. Architectural plastic materials that have been found in the region are displayed in the Cave Church (Fig. 2).

Zonguldak, Ereğli District, Orhanlar Neighborhood Church: The remains of this church,⁴ which is located in Orhanlar street of the Orhanlar neighborhood of the Ereğli district of Zonguldak province, are currently overgrown. The church, which dates to the 18th century according to official records, needs to be cleaned so that the exact date of construction can be determined.

Zonguldak, Kozlu Church: The church,⁵ which was in the Kozlu district of Zonguldak province, was recorded and then demolished by a decision of the Conservation Board, since the church posed a threat to the school nearby. The photos of the church, which was owned by Kozlu Municipality, show that it was built on a single site, running from east to west,

with a gabled roof and central wooden dome. The church lost its unique characteristics due to various modifications over time, which ended with the demolition of the edifice. *Karabük, Yenice District, Çeltik Village Churches:* Churches A⁶ and B, which are located in the Kocamuratlar neighborhood of Çeltik village in the Yenice district of Karabük province, are currently underground. Although some parts of the walls may be seen, the churches should be cleaned and excavations should be started. Church C, which is within the borders of the Oruç Tepe Forests in Yenice district, is also underground, with some of the walls above ground. There are signs of illegal excavations conducted in the area (Fig. 3).

Karabük, Safranbolu District, Hagios Stephanos Church: The church is located in the Kıranköy neighborhood of Safranbolu district, which was a place where the non-Muslim population used to live before the population exchange between Turkey and Greece in 1923. The church forms a unique historical site together with the parish house, İskalyon School, İnas School (see Gür and Soykan, 2015), and the Greek houses nearby. According to its construction epitaph, the church was restored in 1872. It remained idle after the departure of the non-Muslim Greeks in 1923, and in 1956 the church was converted to a mosque by constructing a pulpit and mihrab. Currently, the church is

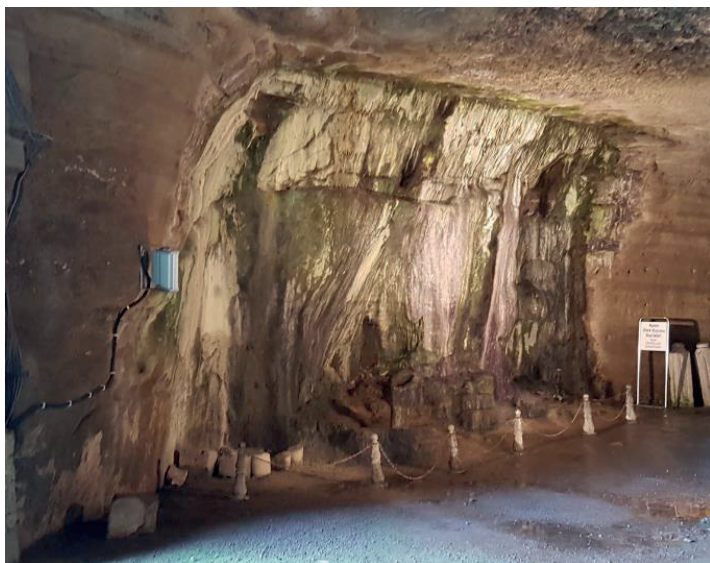


Fig.2 Zonguldak, Karadeniz Ereğli Cehennemâğızı Cave Church, Apse.

Fig.3 Church at Karabük, Yenice, Çeltik Village Kocamuratlar Neighborhood, A.

known as the Safranbolu Ulu Mosque (Fig. 4). *Karabük, Safranbolu District, Yazıköy Church*: This church, which is located in the Yazıköy village of the Safranbolu district of Karabük province, was built on one single site, architecturally structured in the east-west direction, with a dome from inside and hipped from outside. A twin-apse niche is located on the eastern side of the edifice. There is a narthex at the west end. The church, which is owned by a private foundation, has been modified at various times. Due to the modifications, especially those made inside the church, the edifice lost its unique architectural characteristics. Today, the church is used as prayer room and a place for teaching the Quran by the villagers (Fig. 5). There is a parsonage across from the church.

Karabük, Eskipazar District, Hadrianoupolis Ancient City Churches: The excavations⁷ conducted in the ancient Byzantine city of Hadrianoupolis, which is located in the Eskipazar district of Karabük province, revealed two churches. Churches A and B run in the east-west direction and are on a basilica plan. Both churches have apses extending outwards and a narthex (Fig. 6). The excavations revealed unique floor mosaics (see Keles et al., 2012).

Bartın, Hagios Nikolaos Church: The church, located in the central district of Bartın province, was used as power plant for a period of time. Used as a cultural center since 2000, the church was originally built by the Greeks



Fig.4 Karabük, Safranbolu Hagios Stephanos Church.



Fig.5 Karabük, Safranbolu Yazıköy Church

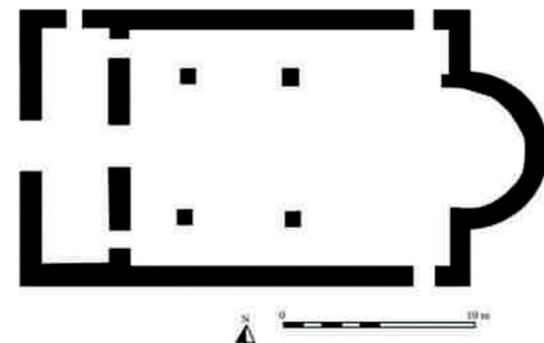
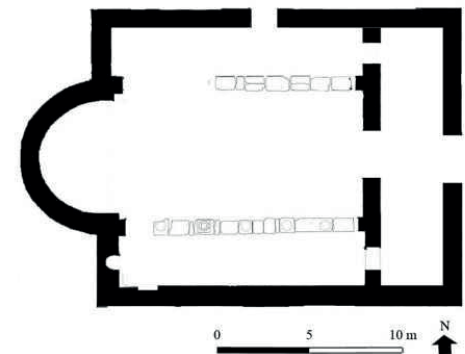


Fig.6a Eskipazar Hadrianoupolis Church A (By E. Çelikbaş)

Fig.6b Eskipazar Hadrianoupolis Church B (By E. Çelikbaş)

of the Ottoman Empire in 1868, but lost its unique characteristics after the population exchange (Fig. 7).

Bartın, Amasra District, Old Church (Fatih Mosque): This single-naved church,⁸ which is in the Kaleiçi (Zindan) neighborhood of the Amasra district of Bartın province, was constructed in stone and brick. The church, which probably dates to the 9th or 10th century, was converted into a mosque after the capture of Amasra by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror in 1490 (Eyice, 1951: 469-496; Eyice, 1995: 242; Verim, 2015: 59). With the modifications, the edifice lost its original revetment system and a minaret and pulpit were added to the building (Fig. 8).

Bartın, Amasra District Small Church: This chapel,⁹ known as the “small church,” which is located in Kuledibi Street in Amasra, is rectangular and made of stone and bricks. The apse extends outwards in the shape of a semicircle. There are three round-arched rectangular window apertures (Fig. 9). The chapel, which was converted into a prayer room in the 15th century, was closed to religious services in 1930. The chapel is under legal protection and currently is used by the Amasra Museum as a Culture and Art Center.

Sinop, Balatlar Church: Excavations in the Sinop Balatlar Church started in 2010.¹⁰ The church, which is in the Ada neighborhood of Sinop province, was used by the non-Muslim inhabitants during the Ottoman period. A



Fig.7 Culture Center building that was converted from the Bartın Hagios Nikolaos Church.

monastery and church were built on the same site during the Eastern Roman Empire in the 6th or 7th centuries (Köroğlu, 2011: 523–524; Bryer and Winfield, 1985: 78–88). From the 17th century to the first quarter of the 20th century, this edifice on a cross plan was used as a church. The epitaph found in one of the rooms shows that the name of the church was Balatlar (Günözü, 2015: 98).

III. Churches as Cultural, Heritage, and Religious Tourism Attractions and Their Reuse

Churches are central features of Turkish rural and urban landscapes. There were a large number of religious buildings in Turkey, especially belong to the Orthodox community. By 1924, when the Greek Orthodox population in Turkey had to move to Greece in accordance with the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations of 1923, which stipulated the compulsory exchange of Turkish Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians between Turkey and Greece, many church buildings in urban and rural areas became idle and redundant.

In order to prevent the further deterioration or even the demolition of these church buildings, it is essential that these edifices be reserved for a function in any form and that they be adapted for reuse. There are several examples of the reuse of churches for either cultural and residential or touristic



Fig.8 Amasra Fatih Mosque that was converted from the Old Church



Fig.9 Amasra Chapel, Eastern Front

purposes. To illustrate, in the USA, Canada, Spain, and Germany, given that churches have lost their religious importance because of the demographic and cultural shifts in their respective societies and given that congregations have shrunk in these societies, church edifices have started to accommodate city libraries, museums, cultural centers, residences, offices, restaurants, bookstores, and innovation centers. Furthermore, they offer a variety of cultural opportunities to their communities and serve as places for local residents and visitors for leisure-time activities (Lueg, 2011; Choi, 2010; Ahn, 2007). For instance, the *İskalyon School*, which was a secondary school in Safranbolu for the *Rum*, Greeks of Turkish nationality of the Ottoman Empire, functioned within the social complex of the Hagios Stephanos Church to host some recreational events, such as concerts, poetry performances, conferences, and the like. Hagios Nikolaos Church in Bartın and the Small Church in Amasra have been used for cultural activities such as painting exhibitions.

It is important to take into consideration the original “sacred” values of church buildings and therefore, in the context of common Turkish understanding, converting them into mosques is plausible. The conversion of the Hagia Sofia into a mosque is a noteworthy example of this understanding, and emphasizes the importance of preserving old buildings. In accordance with this understanding, Hagios

Stephanos Church (Ulu Mosque) in Safranbolu and Old Church (Fatih Mosque) in Amasra were converted into mosques.

The adaptive reuse projects (converting them into mosques) restore the architectural unity of the church building, so the exterior and interior structures mostly remain the same while essential additions, such as a mihrap, minaret, and minbar, are installed. The Turkish authorities adapted the function of the buildings generally as a mosque under the Ottomans and later as museums, cultural centers, art centers, and the like under the Turkish Republic. While the modifications and new usages of the church buildings could be perceived to contradict the churches’ values, the novel functions conferred on these buildings are essential to maintain for the survival of the edifices themselves.

Historical churches are generally important sites for cultural and religious tourists. Religious buildings are important cultural resources that attract millions of tourists. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2014), between 300 and 330 million tourists annually visit the world’s religious sites, which made up 27% of total tourist arrivals in 2012.

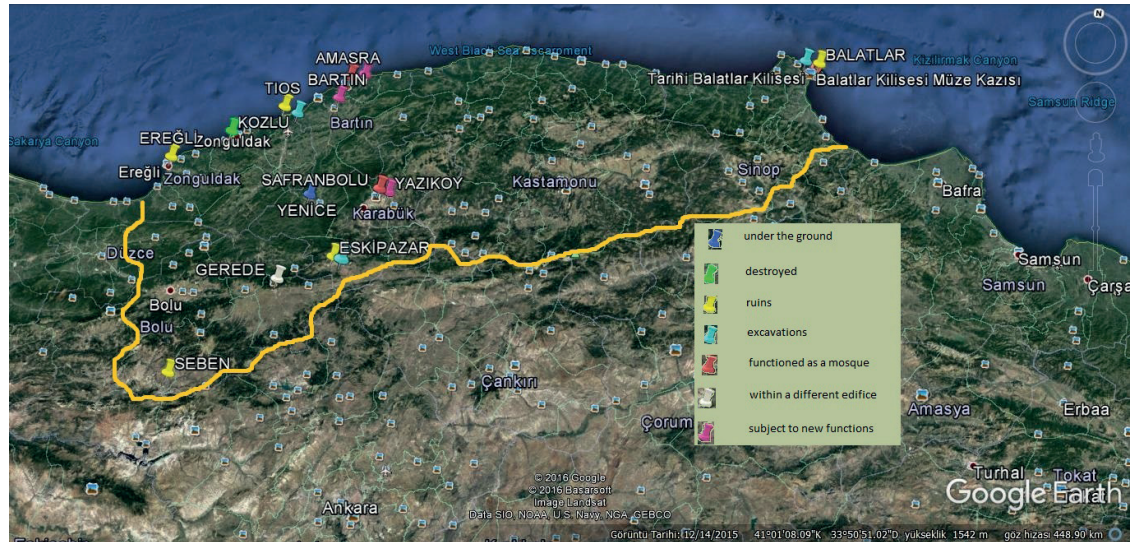
As an integral part of Anatolian culture, religious buildings, such as churches, monasteries, chapels, mosques, and synagogues, are the main tourist attractions in the region. According to the statistics on the Hagia Sophia Museum in 2014, 3,574,000 people visited St.

Sophia either for cultural or religious purposes (Hagia Sophia Museum Statistics, 2015). Over 1 million people visit the House of the Virgin Mary (it was believed that the Virgin Mary spent her last days in Ephesus, Izmir and died there) every year (Türker, 2013). St. Nicholas (Santa Claus) Church, a religious site for Orthodox Christians, was visited by 531,000 people in 2014 (Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Antalya, 2015). The Basilica of St. John attracted 325.000 tourists in 2014 (Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Izmir, 2015). Likewise, Hagios Stephanos Church in Safranbolu is visited by the grandchildren of Greeks (*Rum* in Turkish) who moved to Greece in the context of the compulsory exchange of Turkish Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians.

Religious buildings are generally registered on the Cultural and Natural Properties List of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism for their architectural and historical importance, and they are under the protection of law and regulations. Most of the churches in the Western Black Sea region, approximately 16, are registered on Turkey’s inventory of cultural heritage. Churches in the Black Sea region are cultural resources that have the potential to improve the tourism activities in the area (Fig. 10).

Today, the region hosts 5 million visitors annually. There are three popular destinations there. Safranbolu, a UNESCO World Heritage

Site and a cultural tourism destination, hosts 750,000 tourists annually, of whom 250,000 are overnight visitors and 500,000 are excursionists (Safranbolu Tourism Information Office, 2016). Kastamonu is a cultural and religious tourism destination with 455,000 arrivals (Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Kastamonu, 2016). Amasra is a charming historical town popular because of its fish restaurants. The town hosts 500,000 tourists annually (Directorate of Culture and Tourism of Bartın, 2016). Reuse of these churches for cultural, religious, or heritage tourism would create new tourist attractions. This would boost the tourism industry, and increase the number of domestic and international visitors arriving in the region.



Conclusion and recommendations

The present study, with the chief aim of determining the current status of the churches and chapels in the Western Black Sea region used by the local Christians, demonstrates that some of these religious edifices are partially destroyed and are buried underground to a certain degree, some are totally ruined, and some have been converted into mosques. Some of them have lost their original structure given the various restorations over time, and due to additions made while converting them into mosques.

The churches that remain are used for other functions, such as mosque, Quran teaching,

Fig.10 Churches in the Western Black Sea region

art house, or culture center. Although restorations for the adaptive reuse of buildings and modifications led the structures to lose their original architectural characteristics, they helped preserve their historical, architectural, and cultural values.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has taken these edifices under legal protection through official registration. The number of excavations related to these edifices has increased tremendously in recent years. In Tios (Zonguldak), in Balat Church (Sinop), and in Hadrianoupolis (Karabük), excavations have continued until today. Excavations should start in Yenice to unearth the church buildings. When the excavations in Tios Akropolis Church, Hadrianapolis Ancient city, and Sinop Balatlar Church come to an end, the area could be available for tourist visits.

In order to reuse the churches for touristic purposes, some improvements are needed:

- To illustrate, it is essential that the churches in Ereğli and Seben be restored and open for tourist visits.
- Yazıköy village church should be open to tourists, so the *muhtar*, the local authority of the village, could make arrangements for tourist visitations. Yazıköy has an old history, with Greeks living in the village for 800-900 years (Soykan and Gür, 2015). At the beginning of the 1900s there were 3,647 Greeks living in Safranbolu, including Yazıköy village (Yazıcıoğlu and Al,

1982). The village also has other touristic attractions such as canyons.

- The chapel in Amasra and Hagia Nicholas Church in Bartın should also be available for tourism and, specifically for these two sites, recreational activities could be organized for local, domestic, and international visitors.
- For the restoration and reuse of the churches in the Western Black Sea region, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and local authorities, including the municipalities, Directorate of Culture and Tourism of the provinces, district governors, and non-governmental organizations, should develop adaptive reuse projects and find financial funds for the restoration, such as EU, US, and UN funds, since these edifices and their like are considered to be the common cultural heritage of all humanity.

The Turkish state has made tremendous endeavors in the name of preservation and restoration of these buildings, and there are thousands of cultural assets in Anatolia waiting for restoration. Therefore, Turkish funds are not enough for the entirety of the restoration projects. It is noteworthy to mention that even if the churches are abandoned in Turkey, the public has a tendency to preserve them as community symbols.

It is evident from our research that there are many more churches in the area than those

covered by the present study. However, in order to improve our findings, it is essential that more comprehensive research be undertaken through a multidisciplinary approach.

This research was supported by Scientific Research Projects Coordination Unit of Karabük University. Project Number: KBÜ-BAP-16/2-YD-032.)

Notes:

1. The church was registered and put under legal protection by the High Council of Immoveable Cultural and Natural Property with decision No. 1961, dated 06.03.1986
2. The chapel was registered and put under legal protection by the Ankara Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board with decision No. 6783, dated 12.05.2000
3. Tios excavations continued under Karadeniz Ereğli Museum Director Ahmet Mercan between 2006 and 2007, under Prof. Dr. Sümer Atasoy between 2008 and 2013, and, since 2014, under Assistant Prof. Dr. Şahin Yıldırım as scientific adviser
4. The church, which is located in the Orhanlar Neighborhood, Orhanlar Street, 145th block, 3rd plot, 27th and 28th layouts, was registered by the Ankara Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board with decision No. 3441, dated 2-3/07/1987. The church is privately owned
5. Zonguldak-Kozlu Church was located in the Merkez Neighborhood, Yılmaz Birinci Street, 25th block, 3rd layout
6. The church remains, which are found in Yenice Çeltik Village, 338th block, 57th and 58th layouts, was registered by the Karabük Regional Council for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage with decision No. 2971, dated 01.04.2016. The building is the only registered church in the region. The whole area of 338th block, 58th layout was declared as a grade one archeological site, whereas some of the areas found in the 57th layout were declared as a grade 3 archeological site
7. Excavations in the region started in 2003
8. The church was registered by the Superior Council for Immoveable Antiquities and Monuments with decision No. A-15, dated 11.09.1976
9. The chapel was registered by the High Council of Immoveable Cultural and Natural Property with decision No. 1098, dated

01.06.1985

10. Excavations, sponsored by the European Union, have been directed by Prof. Dr. Gülgün Köroğlu since 2010. The church was registered by the Superior Council for Immovable Antiquities and Monuments with decision No. A-293, dated 14.01.1977

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