

Christopher Lillington-Martin: Pilot Field-Walking Survey near Ambar & Dara, SE Turkey

I visited Turkey so as to examine sites related to the study of the history and archaeology the Eastern Roman Empire with special reference to the battle of Dara, AD 530. Dr Tony Pollard, Director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology, University of Glasgow and I concentrated on the site of Dara and the battlefield to the south of the site. We also visited related sites in the landscape towards Ammodios, such as Ambar, to appreciate the Persian perspective and to appreciate the tactics used by both armies at the battle of Dara, AD 530 (which were influenced by the contours which seem to have led to a channelling of the Persian army into a somewhat restricted area). We also examined the terrain (e.g. southern foothills of the Tur Abdin and their relationship to this northern edge of the Syrian plain) and visited Nisibis and Mor Gabriel, Midyat.

UK to Istanbul, Ankara and Mardin: After arriving at Istanbul and crossing the Bosphorus by ferry we caught the sleeper train to Ankara. On arrival at Ankara we visited the BIAA and Dr Vedat Toprak, Geology Department, Middle East Technical University. We then flew to Mardin and visited Archbishop Saliba Ozmen, Deyrul Zafaran monastery, and his secretary, Yuhan, before transferring to the Artuklu Kervansaray Hotel, Mardin.

Mardin to Dara: We visited Mr Yusuf Aydin, Director of Mardin Museum, with Yuhan as interpreter to discuss our visit to Dara, Ambar and the battlefield area. Mr Aydin agreed that, in principal, he would support a future archaeological permit application to survey the battlefield south of Dara.

Baptismal pool in the headman of Dara's yard



We confirmed our Diyarbakir Museum appointment from Mardin Museum, and travelled to Dara where we explored the village landscape with Yuhan as interpreter. The headman of Dara met and hosted us. From his son, we learned the river had not flowed south out of Dara since 1990 but that no irrigation was required for the fields to the south (where the battle of Dara was fought in AD 530). The pebble river bed shows up as a pale line on satellite imagery. The crop cycle now consists of ploughing and sowing cereal crop seed in December and harvesting the crop in July. We were also told that no more building can take place within Dara to protect the site. There are also plans for a “Partial transfer of the village to a new settlement area”¹. We witnessed the work Prof. Ahunbay was directing to remove soil² from the floor of the underground cistern, excavate at the great cistern and expose underground arches on a site in between.

1

http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:DNwgCEhU8AQJ:www.gap.gov.tr/English/Kultur/kulpp.html+dara+oguz&hl=en&lr=lang_en (accessed December 2005)

² cf. British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara: Travel Grant Report, *Bulletin of British Byzantine Studies* 29 (2003) 42.

Dara to Mardin: We explored the battlefield landscape south of Dara and east of Ambar villages in the company of the headman's son. We started from Dara and followed the ancient road (now a track with archaeological remains scattered along it) south east.

The Ancient Road to Dara



Then we crossed the fields to the low hills on the east of the plain. From there one can appreciate the battlefield fully. We found an approximately 100m long dip which crossed a field boundary diagonally.

Eastern end of battlefield with the field boundary dip in mid ground.



Close up of the dip crossing the field boundary diagonally for at least 100 metres.



This requires further investigation but may conceivably be remains of part of the defensive trench dug by the Romans in AD 530. We also saw the Christian building at Ambar overlooking the sight and the road from Nisibis.

Remains of sixth century Christian building, Ambar, with battlefield to east in background.



We travelled back to visit Yuhan, Deyrul Zafaran monastery, and then transferred to the Erdoba Hotel, Mardin.

Mardin to Nusaybin (Nisibis) and Midyat: From the Mardin-Nisibis road south of Dara the battle landscape can be appreciated from the Persian perspective. The river still flows into Nisibis from the Tur Abdin to the north. At Nisibis we visited Mor Jacob where we could begin to appreciate the use of Syrian church architecture. We travelled on to Midyat and then to Mor Gabriel monastery where we stayed and attended a dawn service where we could fully understand how Syrian church architecture is used in services. This experience allowed us to make sense of the Christian architecture at Ambar and Mor Jacob, Nisibis.

Midyat to Mardin and Diyarbakir (Amida): We travelled through what had, in the sixth century, been Sassanian landscapes between Midyat and Mardin. From there we went north to Amida and visited its famous city walls.

Diyarbakir to Ankara, Istanbul and UK: We met Dr Nevin Soyukaya, Diyarbakir Museum Director, to discuss the potential for a future archaeological permit application to survey the battlefield south of Dara

about which she was positive. We then flew to Ankara and met Hugh Elton at the BIAA who arranged a meeting with Dr Macit Tekinalp who is considering a battlefield survey for Manzikert. Then we caught the sleeper train to Istanbul. On arrival we visited the great cistern and Hagia Sofia before flying back to the UK.

Special thanks are due to the BIAA and the Open University for part funding the visit. I would also like to acknowledge the support I have received from Dr Janet Huskinson (The Open University) and Dr Tony Pollard (University of Glasgow); assistance with satellite imagery from Dr Mark Matney (NASA Johnson Space Center); support from Mr Yusuf Aydin, Director of Mardin Museum and Dr Nevin Soyukaya, Director of Diyarbakir Museum and the villagers of Dara-Oguz and Ambar who were most helpful.

Any enquiries about the proposed project to survey the battlefield, or related subjects, may be emailed to: chrism@hotmail.com

B. Croke & J. Crow, 'Procopius on Dara,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 73 (1983) 143-59.

C. Lillington-Martin and T. Pollard, 'Ancient and Modern: Combining eyewitness and other accounts with satellite imaging and field reconnaissance to locate the battle of Dara AD 530', *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 2 (2006) (in press).

C. Lillington-Martin, 'Archaeological & Literary Evidence for a Battle near Dara, AD 530', *British Archaeological Reports* (2006) (in press).

C. Lillington-Martin, 'British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara: Travel Grant Report', *Bulletin of British Byzantine Studies* 29 (2003) 41-3.

T.A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, volumes I-IV (1987-1990) Pindar Press.

L.M. Whitby, 'Procopius' Description of Dara,' in ed. P. Freeman & D. Kennedy, *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* 1986, vol. 2, 737-83.

E. Zannini, 'Introduzione all'Archeologia Bizantina', 1994, 1998.