

Watery grave for ancient Turkish town of Hasankeyf

September 20 2019, by Bulent Kilic



A man prays in the new Hasankeyf cemetery where bodies have been moved to from the old one on the banks of the Tigris

In a graveyard beside the doomed town of Hasankeyf, workers are exhuming bodies, carrying them to a new resting place away from the

waters that will soon submerge this ancient site.

Here on the banks of the Tigris in southeastern Turkey, the residents of Hasankeyf, a town with 12,000 years of history, are waiting for the waters to come.

A new dam upstream is already operational. In the next few months, the town and nearly 200 villages in this valley will be gone.

Fatih, who did not give his full name, watches as workers carry away the bones of his brother, killed in an accident more than 20 years ago. It is like a second funeral, he says.

In the background is Hasankeyf's ancient citadel, one of the few monuments high enough to survive the rising waters, but is now fronted by a huge, white stone wall to protect it.

For 73-year-old Mehmet, the endless construction work around these old monuments is like watching the funeral of an old friend.

He is busy cultivating the figs and grapes in his garden that he has tended since he was a child. This is the last time—by April, they will be underwater.

A new Hasankeyf has been built nearby, with some of the old town's monuments relocated there and brand-new homes for its 3,000 inhabitants.



Workers carry a coffin from the old cemetery



A new Hasankeyf has been built nearby



Hacire Yalcin (C) walks with her sister and her sister-in-law (R) in the old cemetery as they search for one of their relatives' graves which will be moved

But many find it hard to let go.

"This year, officials told us not to sow seeds because the [water](#) was coming, but we did it anyway. We will sow right up to the end," said Meseha, 62, in the nearby village of Cavuslu.

Some parts of the valley have already become a lake.

That is forcing local fishermen, used to working the flowing waters of the Tigris, to adapt to still waters.

Halil Ertan, 48, isn't impressed by the new types of fish he finds in the lake—fatter and less tasty, he says.

Back at the graveyard, 12-year-old Yunus is looking for the grave of his little brother who died at birth in 2016.

But when he finds it, the officials tell him the family has not done the necessary paperwork for the grave to be moved. It will be submerged with everything else that is left behind.

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