

# Sille

## History

The oldest residential area in Sille which is 8 km away to Konya is in Sizma Tumulus in the north. Ruins belonging to 8th-7th centuries B.C. from Phrygian civilization has been found here in some excavations. Sille was called Sylata or Sylla in ancient times, had also some population in Roman period, according to the stone works of the ancient architecture of the city. Probably during this period, it was a wayside station near Konya over the King Road coming from Ephesus to the east. In the same century, Saint Paul had to visit Sille on his way to Konya.

In the 4th century A.D. Ephesus had lost its importance, the capital of Byzantine, Istanbul had gained importance. Konya which is over the road from Istanbul to Jerusalem, had kept its importance and become a wayside station for the pilgrims of Jerusalem. According to the epigraph of the Aya Elenia Church, the structure was built by Helene, the mother of Constantine the Great in this period. Helene who was the first Christian aristocrat, during her life, had tried to find the holy cross of Jesus, visited Jerusalem many times and built many churches on her way. Aya Elenia Church points us clearly that Sille was over this route.

In historical bibliographies of Byzantium period, we can not read the name of Sille. It was attacked by Arabs between 7th and 10th centuries A.D. like many other cities. Because of the Kevele Castle which is a vital strategic point, the city had become a clear target in this period and had been attacked at various times. After the Arab raids had stopped, the city had become an important religious center. The many cave churches and Ak Monastery shows us this importance very clearly.

Sille had gained an incredible importance after 1071, when Seljuks captured Konya and made it the capital city. Turkish hegemony in Konya had caused the emigration of some non-muslims to places out of the city. Probably many of the emigrants, in this period, had gone to Sille which is very close to Konya.

Sultan Kilic Arslan I, in 3 July 1097, had evacuated the town and moved the people to mountains, because of the attacks of 1st Crusader's attack to Konya. Crusaders had arrived to the region and after a while they had occupied Konya and Sille.

According to the resources of the time, we can learn that many Greeks had returned to İstanbul with Byzantium Army, after the attack to Konya by Alexios I between 1116-1118. So the non-muslim population had become a little less after this.

In 1146, Byzantine's Emperor Manuel had sieged Konya after he defeated Sultan Mesud of Seljuk in Philomelion (Aksehir); then he fought against Seljuks again in front of Kevele Castle. Ioannes Kinnamos specifies that Byzantine Army had burned down the suburbs of Konya.

Besides wars, the population had suffered a lot because of natural disasters. Plague outbreak which happened in Konya in 1153 was one of these disasters.

In 1226, Sultan Alaeddin Keykubat I, had transferred a group of Christian Pechenek Turk citizens to Konya, Sille while returning from his campaign to Armenia. Konya and its districts was captured by Karamanogullari Sultanate after Anatolian Seljuks. And after the war between Karamanogullari and Ottomans around Kevele Castle, the region had become Ottoman land.

Sille was a town of Konya District during the periods of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, Beyazid II., Yavuz Sultan Selim, Suleyman the Magnificent and Murad III. After 17th century, Sille's administrative situation was not clearly determined. The main means of existence were wheat, barley and animal husbandry and the Muslim population had increased in time. Charles Texier who visited the region in the second half of 19th century states that there are summer houses of Armenians and Greeks in the region. According to the records of the Treasury and Land Registry of the beginning of 20th century, the 56 percent of the population of Sille were Muslim, while the 44 percent of the population were non-muslim...

Bela Horvath who visited Konya in 1913, states that there were summer houses with private churches owned by Greeks in the region and there were around sixty churches in the town. After the exchange of populations in 1923, Christian population of Sille had migrated to Greece.

Sille was connected to Selcuklu District with its two neighborhoods in 1989. In 1995, the southern region where there are churches, monastery and graveyards was declared as prior archeological protected area and the main residential area was declared as urban protected area by the Association of the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage of Konya.

Today, Sille is an important cultural and tourism center of Konya.

## **Traditions**

Sille is one of the unique centers which has great cultural assets since the earlier periods of history. In addition to the cultural assets it have, we must also mention about its traditions. Turkish Islamic cultural assets are in one hand and on the other hand there was Christian Orthodox culture especially before the population exchange in 1923. Many scientists were interested in Sille since 19th century. Before 1923, non muslim citizens of Konya were spending their weekends in Sille and were visiting the churches and monasteries of Sille during saints' holidays.

In every 28 of September, in Saint Chariton Feast they visit Ak Monastery. Also in 24 of November Saint Philip Feast and in 15 of August Virgin Mary Feast are some of the holidays celebrated in Sille. Many places like Ak Monastery were being visited not only by Christians but also by Muslims with full of respect. Ak Monastery was completely repaired during Seljuk period and the names of Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II and Seljuk Sultan Mesud were written together in an epigraph of Ak Monastery. After a miraculous event, Rumi had started to spend one day in a year in the masjid of Ak Monastery and after that all Chelebis have started to send olive oil every year to the monastery. This climate of friendship between Mevlevi dervishes and monks of the monastery had continued until the

monastery have abandoned. Non muslims of Sille were speaking a different type of Greek language which has many Turkish and local words in use. The tales of Sille which were recorded by 19th century historians, are reflecting the richness of the traditions of Sille.

Sille's people are strictly connected to Turkish Islamic cultural assets. They are still having the same old spirit of traditions, in spite of the bad effects of modern times. Sille people are trying to keep their culture alive, during weddings, soldier farewells or greetings, "Geregi" ceremonies (harvest time), monthly meetings or in Sille day events every September's last week. They introduce their culture to visitors and guests. That's why people are still preferring to perform tarawih prayer during Ramadan in old Mezaryaka (Kayabasi) Mosque or in Karatas Mosque.

Sille's food culture is also important. It has the characteristic of the rich Konya's kitchen but also it has original features too. Especially wedding meals, common dinners called "Halfene" and special events called "Ince manca" are some of the special times when you can have delicious foods of Sille. Sille's meals are mostly consisted of meat. Some of the delicious meals are yoghurt (dolga), okra soup, water or milk flan, dolma or sarma, noodle pilaf, ply, dry fish (gavinna), trotter, gaygana, calla, sweet pastry, baklava and dry fruit or vegetables called "Kak"...Music in Sille is an important part of the cultural assets. Zither, lute and stringed instrument are in use in the region. The traditional songs are still being performed by musicians.

Sille had raised many scientists and thinker in the past and many cultural and scientific events are still being organized in this lovely town.

## **Handcrafts**

Sille is unique with its history, architecture and traditions, but also spectacular handicrafts are being produced here. Clothes of rich people, world-famous rugs and carpets, jug factories, stone work and chandlers are all proving the richness of Sille in handicrafts. Today, generally identification and exhibition process is being done in Sille and also Selcuklu Municipality is making great effort for keeping handicrafts alive. Metin Sozen Town Factory, a mutual project of Konya Metropolitan Municipality and Cekul Foundation,

is a unique place where the artisans are being raised and stone work is being perpetuated. Besides, SELMEK's Turkish Islamic arts and handicrafts courses, rug and carpet factories and handicrafts shops in Sille's center are all being organized by Selcuklu Municipality and making great contribution for keeping the handicrafts alive.

### **Jug production**

Jug and clay had been produced since the prehistoric periods in Konya and its districts. Local materials are being used with special technics and decorating compositions until present days. Sille have an important role in this production process. Nearly two hundred artisans were being raised in Sille in last 70 years and Sille has become an important jug production and marketing area in the region. Masters of Sille are working not only in Sille but also they travel around the region and making contributions to the production in several local factories.

Jar, jug, flower pot, tile, brick and tandoor are some of the products manufactured in the factories called Karhane (profit house). The most important of a few Karhanes in the region is in the complex of Kiriakon (Hizir Ilyas) Church. Only one artisan is going on manufacturing jugs in Sille and the unique earthenwares with their original forms and decorations are waiting for their visitors.

### **Clothing and Accsesories**

In museums of Konya and Sille, in special collections and in marriage outfits of Sille's people, all of the clothing and accessories are being protected carefully. The clothes have the characteristics of local Anatolian clothes but they are still original and different than others with their rich and unique embroideries. Clothes differ in use, some of them are for daily life and some of them are only for special events. The functionality and aesthetic are both preferred in these clothes and accessories. Daily clothes for women are more elegant and useful.

Cotton prints and "lefkayit or shetari" clothes has a distinctive feature in their patterns. Clothes for special events for women are very smart and have a lot of accessories.

Some of these clothes are, sarka which worn by bride members of the groom's family in fridays; cubba which worn by new brides in thursdays; etekce and gun fur which worn by brides in Saturdays' daytime, ferace or frengi which worn by engaged girls, miklama which worn in Saturdays' night and cicekli (blooming) which worn by young brides... The clothes differ in person or event. Some of the accessories are fez, silk tulle called "cevre", bands for fezs, wigs, golden belts, neckbands, zibba dress over baggy trousers, fistan (gaytan), shoes with rug motifs called galosh...

Men's clothes are also have some accessories like keffiyeh, jerkin (on shoulder), shirt (on backside), belt, gun rack, baggy trousers, socks and shoes... The best examples of these clothes are being exhibited in Ak (Haci Ali Aga) Baths' exhibition hall.

### **Rug and Carpet textile industry**

Rug and Carpet textile industry is an important branch of Turkish handicrafts. Konya is one of the most important centers of this art in Anatolia. Sille's rug and carpets have its own colors and motifs and an important part of worldly-famous Konya's rug and carpet textile industry.

Travellers who visited Sille in 19th century, had also visited rug and carpet factories. They described the beauty of rugs in Sille's mosques. Today, rug and carpet production is still going on by the supports of Selcuklu Municipality with courses and special events, however it is less than the production in 19th century.

A plant called cehri is being used for coloring the carpets. This thorny plant which has fruits outside green, inside yellow; are being grown in Sille and being sold both in Turkey and abroad. The main colors in carpets are red, dark and light green, beige, light blue, black and yellow. Besides the carpets on the ground, prayer rugs, wall rugs and saddle blankets are also being produced in Sille. Clew is being used in slip knot, while cotton is being used in warp knot. Single, three or five hub motifs are being preferred according to the size of the carpet.

Mevlana's Lodge and Selimiye Mosque's illustrations are usually being used in Sille's wall rug's motifs with other traditional Turkish motifs. These spectacular handicrafts are being exhibited in museums of Konya and also in Sille Cultural Center (Ak Baths).