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**Güllüdere and Kızılçukur:  
Rose Valley and Red Valley in Cappadocia**

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**Cappadocia: immediate continuity. Visiting  
Rose Valley, Red Valley and their surroundings**

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### **Finding your way**

The ways through the valleys are informal. There is little cartographic material available for guidance. Several signage systems are in place, each presumably aiming to improve guidance and each presumably aiming to direct people to the authors' preferred features. Local initiative ensures that the visitor will easily find the Grape Church (*Üzümlü Kilise*) but also the small, informal café next to it. The paths follow the folds of the tuff surface and the dry stream beds; one is hardly ever hindered by border markings, fences, or walls. Here and there steps are carved into the sloped rock face in order to ease ascent or descent. One valley is separated from the other by short routes across an exposed plateau. With no pavement or other material protecting the soft surfaces, the network of paths is fluid, forked and freely adapted to use by walkers, horses, mountain bikes, motorcycles and – *horribile dictu* – quad treks.

### **Outside inside**

The relationship of churches, monasteries and dwellings to their gardens is immediate. Not only are they made from the same material, they share an uninterrupted surface. There are no joints. The interiors are not architectural but essentially sculptural spaces; they are fractal extensions, an endodermic topography. Rock face and ground are continuous. The soil is loose and soft, like ground soap-flakes. It seems as if the sand and the chipped rock had freshly fallen off the folded, curvy sides of the valley. The gardens are cultivated in the loose rock material that has eroded from the rock facades – or, one might imagine, even in the material excavated from the interiors.

### **Youthful skin**

There are no sharp edges here. While the valleys possess an archaic atmosphere, the surfaces are not immutable. In spite of their vast geological time scale, they seem fluid and fresh; not weathered and tainted by wear and time but continuously young and in dynamic motion.

### **Reconfiguration**

Depending on the location within the very diverse geological strata, the loss of substance on the rock face through natural erosion can be measured in millimetres or even centimetres – annually. A landscape whose surface material seems to be in a continuous change of state. The constant deterioration and reconfiguration is visible in the stunning rock formations but also in the stupefying cracks that are splitting entire surfaces in some churches. The inside of extensive, complex living quarters is exposed after they have lost their 'facade,' the thin layer of rock between interior and exterior.



### **Morphosis**

A hole made to be a niche for a candle.

The niche may become a shelf, which may later become a stall, a shelter or a lookout. The shelter may become a barn, a refectory, a church. The church may become a living quarter, a stall, even a large dovecote. Excavated further, it may become a cistern. Or hotel rooms. Or a restored church? A never-ending improvisation. Once the chisel is put to use, the original form will never return.

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### **Spatial notation**

The vegetative structure of the plateau is mainly characterized by sparse tufts of silverberry or widely spaced groves of fruit trees. In the valleys, clusters and free groves of poplars are ubiquitous. Expansive and fastigate treetops intermingle. The strong vertical marks contrast – and underline – the undulating horizontals of the topography. It is as if the poplars served as notation points in the linear sequences of the valley space.

### **Wild West**

In many respects, the lands of Cappadocia are an easy prey for unhindered exploitation. The effects of the tourist economy are eroding traditional agriculture. The 'instagrammable' scenic landscape backdrop is mainly accessed from the air. Nevşehir-Kapadokya and Kayseri Erkilet international airports were both opened in 1998 and receive floods of tourists for rapid visits. Some two hundred hot air balloon starts per day occur in Göreme. While individually light and with no permanently necessary structural interventions, the balloons require starting grounds and space for landings, which are quite often haphazard and damage crops. And, the continuous, often borderless topography seems to promise a 'Wild West' style freedom that is realized by the uninhibited exploitation of ranch-style horse riding, quad tours and cross terrain safaris. This kind of ranging on unmarked paths, or free style, unbound, inevitably wears down the soil, causes rock surface abrasion, and destroys vegetation. Barren and open soil takes the place of fields and groves.

### **Gardening**

In the valleys, the vegetation is generally ample and sumptuous. Within this harsh, barren geological system lying a thousand metres above sea level, the vegetation is wonderfully luxuriant. Perambulating the valleys, one perceives a continuous garden, full of flowers and fruits. The existence of a diverse variety of fruit trees, vines and berries bears witness to a (formerly) industrious garden culture. However, the plantations are in various states of topicality – from wildly overgrown to actual productive states. All the gardens are of a rather small dimension, at the level of subsistence agriculture. For the visitor, the borders of individual properties are not apparent. Rarely bound by fences or walls, the hiker literally wanders through the fields. Constructions have a fleeting, improvised character. And while nothing seems worth stealing, some fences have been set up between paths and gardens.

### **Dispersion**

The agriculture consists of many individual plantings amidst a varied, ruderal vegetation. Pasolini writes, "there are plenty of fruit trees [...]. Alone with their shadow."<sup>1</sup> Every planting is an attempt; a singular effort. Can we imagine that each individual plant is given a name?

### **Symbiosis**

The appreciation of pigeons must have equalled the profoundness of the human desire to fly. Constructed at the most dizzying heights and often lovingly adorned, the innumerable dovecotes substantiate life in the valleys. Barely a soil, the raw mineral material fresh off the rocks is not fertile enough to sustain agriculture. We learned from Ibrahim that it is not the surface but each individual plant that must be fertilized. A shovel of pigeon dung on each side of the roots: placed deep enough to be in the immediate reach of the roots, and far enough from the surface not to be washed out and carried off.



### **Makeshift**

While the cavernous architectures and rock formations are voluminous and massive, constructions in the open consist of light interventions; collaged, patched-up, makeshift structures. In the light of public exposure, with hardly any social surveillance, whatever is built has as slight a monetary value as possible. Except for the architectures carved from the rock, nothing seems to be conceived for permanence. But then, even the rock architecture has been obviously reshaped, extended, re-functionalized, or abandoned. We find here a building culture that is not driven by programming and grand gestures but rather one of common sense and pastoral smartness; a way of construction that is 'carving,' forming inventively from what is given. When planning the development of heritage sites should we not draw upon a creative, inventive architectural vocabulary to improve safeguarding and protection? A careful adaptation of architecture that would lightly, and sensibly access this fluid cultural heritage. Rather than theme parks or structures with a museum-like appearance and fixed programmes, we should adopt sensitive measures that would activate and protect the current fragile fabric, thereby echoing the fluidity and inventiveness of the valleys.

### **Cooking**

Given the renowned hospitable and culinary character of Turkish and Anatolian culture, one might imagine that fostering a locally sustainable and creative gastronomy would establish a stable bridge between tourism and the sensitive landscape. Reactivating and furthering autochthonous food production and processing might simultaneously help to recultivate and maintain a careful relationship with the landscape. What a 'feast' for the guests and the hosting landscape alike!

### **Representation**

The complexes of troglodyte churches, monasteries, and dwellings that have been awarded world heritage status are anything but a world hidden away in stone. While the function, expanse and splendour of these constructions are often not at once apparent to the outside, the connection between interior and exterior is immediate. Living in dark, cavernous, inner spaces is not conceivable without a bright, open exterior. Both are inextricably linked as one. Maria Andaloro pointed out that the frequent use of simple triangular forms in some of the church paintings might not just be a geometric decorative element but might also recall the ubiquitous cone shapes of the landscape. If so, the drawings at St Barbara Church (*Azize Barbara Kilisesi*) in Göreme could also be read as a representation of life in the very specific, overarching landscape of Cappadocia.

### **Gentleness**

A former monastery. The caretakers, an older couple, maintain the place in a way that might serve as a metaphor of sensibility. In the entrance courtyard, under a shady walnut tree, the bare earth is kept impeccably clean. The sensitive surface of the exposed ground is swept with simple brooms crafted from mugwort weed from the fields around. A small gesture, certainly achieved with great physical effort and strain, and a bowed back. A careful, tender treatment. And while we do not ask for stand-ins who would populate a fabricated nostalgia for a premodern paradise, the ground thus prepared urges unto us a deep respect for this place and people. It's a place where we happily rested and lingered on.

### **Moonlight**

We met Crazy Ali in his former antique shop in Ortahisar. He is more a poet than a salesman and he read some of his poems to us. He told us that long ago he worked as a tourist guide in Cappadocia. He claimed to have been the first to conceive walks through Rose Valley and Red Valley, presenting their beauty in the tours he guided. His favourite excursions were those done in the light of the full moon. Like any true poet, he valued silence and made that a requirement on the walks – and punished disturbance by aborting the tour.

When we left his shop, I thanked him for his poems – and his silence.