

## On the age of the colony of the Bald Ibis, *Geronticus eremita*, at Birecik, Turkey

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The colony of the Bald Ibis (*Geronticus eremita* L.) at Birecik on the Euphrates in south-eastern Turkey was first recorded in the scientific literature by DANFORD (1880) in 1879. KUMERLOEVE (1962) has attempted to establish the age of this colony by using the reports of travellers who visited Birecik in earlier times. After perusing a good number of sources as far back as the 16th century, KUMERLOEVE found the earliest record in a report by the engineer JOSEF CERNIK, who stayed at Birecik in 1873. He concluded that the colony was founded before 1873 and after 1840, as the traveller AINSWORTH did not report the Bald Ibis in that year, although he often mentioned other animals and plants.

However, this is not the case. In 1839, WILLIAM FRANCIS AINSWORTH came to Birecik on June 16th (AINSWORTH 1842). In his description of the town, he writes "its rocky shelves [are] studded with green ibises...". As the Bald Ibis is the only ibis or ibis-like species in the Middle East with glimmering green feathers, and no other species lives on the lime walls at Birecik, AINSWORTH's observation undoubtedly refers to the Bald Ibis. Furthermore, AINSWORTH also recorded the Bald Ibis at Yaylak ("Yailash") in the Euphrates valley, about 70 km above Birecik. On 13.6.1839 he wrote in his journal: "... and in the evening [I] shot a beautiful green ibis."

It is hard to understand how KUMERLOEVE overlooked these observations, especially as he included AINSWORTH's book in his list of references. Travellers who visited Birecik after AINSWORTH were less interested in natural history. For example, the future Field Marshall HELMUTH V. MOLTKE did not mention the Bald Ibis in Birecik, although he stayed there for several months (v. MOLTKE 1981). But this was not due to the absence of the Bald Ibis, as KUMERLOEVE assumes, but to the less detailed account written by v. MOLTKE: AINSWORTH met v. MOLTKE on the battlefields of Nizip (in the neighbourhood of Birecik) in June 1839 and stayed at his camp for a while.

AINSWORTH's observation shows that the Bald Ibis colony at Birecik has existed for at least 150 years. KUMERLOEVE's (1962) hypothesis that the Bald Ibises of Syria (AHARONI 1929 knew of five colonies in about 1910, and for the location of these see HIRSCH 1980) migrated to Birecik because of persecution there seems rather improbable. The colony at Ar-Raqqa in Syria,

about 150 km from Birecik, was thus in existence at the same time.

It cannot be ruled out that there was another colony in the Yaylak area. Smaller breeding grounds were known on the Euphrates between Birecik and Halfeti until recent times (cf. e.g. HIRSCH 1980).

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