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Archaeological Findings of Thracian / Phrygian Tribes' Crossing of Bosphorus (ITA) İstanbul Prehistoric Research Project

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Abstract

Ancient historians had reported that around 1200 BC Thracian / Phrygian tribes came from Balkans and passed to Anatolia from both Dardanelles and Bosphorus. While the material evidences for the Dardanelles' passage were well documented, the ones for Bosphorus were missing. In the archaeological surveys we carried out since 2007 on the western side of İstanbul we reached many traces of Thracian / Phrygian style, thus giving us the possibility to conclude that the crossing of Bosphorus by these tribes did actually happened as written by the ancient historians.

Keywords

Iron Age, Thracian, Phrygian, Migration, İstanbul Bosphorus

Towards the end of 13th century BC, when Near East was enjoying a degree of civilization and a level of international cooperation between the great kingdoms, which couldn't be matched in the following millennium. Few could suspect that all that greatness will collapse soon in a spectacular way. But at the turn of the 13'th century, with the exception of Egyptian cities, all major towns had been destroyed, the great Mycenaean and Hittites kingdoms had ceased to exist, writing of Linear B and Hittites cuneiforms had stopped to be used, Eastern side of Mediterranean entered a period labeled as 'Dark Ages' by the historians. And everything happened in a matter of a few decades. The civilized world all but stopped.

The reasons of this collapse were complex but not so difficult to understand for a scientist of the 21st century. In short, all the glittering civilization of the Late Bronze Age was based on the agricultural surplus, which was at the mercy of the smallest climatic changes. Beginning from the 16th century BC, there was a drying which was felt in most parts of the Near East, especially in Anatolia and most probably in mainland Greece too . The great kingdoms of the 13th century BC reached a point where there was not enough food to feed all the people of the Near East. They resorted to military actions to fill their own gap. But this worsened their political situation by increasing the tensions. At the end of 13th and the beginning of the 12th century BC was also marked by a series of huge earthquakes. Probably the North Anatolian Fault Line was active and the Near East was experiencing one of its periodic Earthquake Storms ([Map 1](#)).

The collapse of the 1200 BC was worst experienced in Near East, but it was also felt in a much wider area; Right after the collapse, the kingdoms of Egypt and Mesopotamia entered a long phase of slow decay. Further in the East, kingdoms of Central Asia tried to build huge irrigation projects and were not able to finish them, as a result, all the settlements in Central Asia were left and people turned to transhumance. Great migratory movements were recorded in all Europe, Caucasus Area and further east. It was a prehistoric time for Europe and there were nobody to write what they experienced in a mortuary temple's walls. According to the Kimmig, those migrations started from Pannonia Basin in Central Europe and reached as far as Ireland and Scandinavia. In the Northern Italy a vibrant civilization of the Terramare culture vanished from a population of 100,000 to their last citizen.



Pannonia basin was at the North West of Balkans which was neighboring Near East. It is safe to assume that people from these areas were sufficiently in contact with each other, so that, migrating masses of Pannonia Basin were aware that mainland Greece and Anatolia were in the grip of a severe drought. Thus, the majority avoided these lands but still there was a small flow of people. It was not like a huge migration wave or a big invading army but like individual families coming one after the other in a slow pace. They were responsible neither for the collapse of Mycenaean Kingdoms nor the Hittites. These kingdoms collapsed first for other reasons as explained above and later people came slowly to fill the vacuum created.

Ancient writers such as Herodotus, Homeros and Strabon had reported that Thracians coming from Balkans crossed to Anatolia both from Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The evidence for their Dardanelles' crossing was already well established from Troas region's Troia excavations and from Gallipoli Maydos Kilisetepe excavations which was recently begun. But those for Bosphorus was missing.

ITA Project

In the summer of 2007 we started a prehistoric survey program in the western side of Istanbul. Named as ITA Project. Istanbul is situated in fantastic geography, with a very friendly climate to settle and good fauna to feed the people throughout the history. Also it was a crossing point not only East to West but also South to North. We expected from the start that we will find a great wealth of information about the region's prehistory. During our surveys we found as much as we expected and some of our findings were addressing directly to the period of 1200 BC. About 50 km west to Bosphorus, on the North West of regional towns Catalca and Silivri we ended up with many material signs of Thracians/Phrygians existence.

The caves of Incegiz, partly natural but mostly carved on the face of a valley, was dated previously to early Christian periods. They had all the signs to be dated as such but also contained a few details, such as the specially carved steps to assign them to a much earlier period, to the Phrygians. The caves were on the side of a flat plateau with a huge necropolis, which was visited since twenty years by treasure hunters. Just 100 meters to the North West there is a rock cut pit. Its entrance is 2 x 2 meters and grows in regular, pyramidal fashion to 6,5 x 6,5 meters in its base 8,60 meters below (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2-a and -b). The treasure hunters had the courtesy of making an extensive excavation inside and putting all what they unearthed near the rim of the pit. Unwillingly they had created an upside down mound, with its oldest levels just on the top. It was like a supermarket for archaeologists. We collected typical handmade, burnished, barbarian ware with special finger incised decorations which is well known from Balkans and further north since the Neolithic times (Figs. 3, 4, 5). The shape of the pit was showing all the characteristics of the Early Thracian/Phrygian tradition, so do the terra cotta pieces we found. For dating purposes, some grey wares were very typical and they were dating to the Troia VIIb1. One of another interesting pottery was a grey minoan (Fig. 6). Some metal slag was together of them (Fig. 7).

On the opposite side of the deep valley system, 500 meters from the pit, there are a number of new quarries mixed with very ancient ones. A 90 degree angled rock cut corner showing again Thracian/Phrygian characteristics of shrines with two niches cut to the rock face just 20 meters to the north. Also a number of channels cut on the rock's surface may show either an unfinished quarry work or slaughtering channels (Fig. 8).

On the road to the rock cut pit there were huge rock slabs standing by the road. They looked very much like the megaliths which are very common further west, near the town of Edirne. If they are indeed the megaliths they will be the most eastern point where these structures ever encountered (Fig. 9).

Going further west, but still roughly in the same area we found another shrine well preserved inside a dense forest on the hill. Two walls cut from the rocks form a 90 degree angle east side of the hill and



there was a rectangular niche in one of the walls. It reminds the tradition of the female deity (Kybele) (Fig.10-a and -b). Not much further, three steps cut on the rocks show another open cult place.

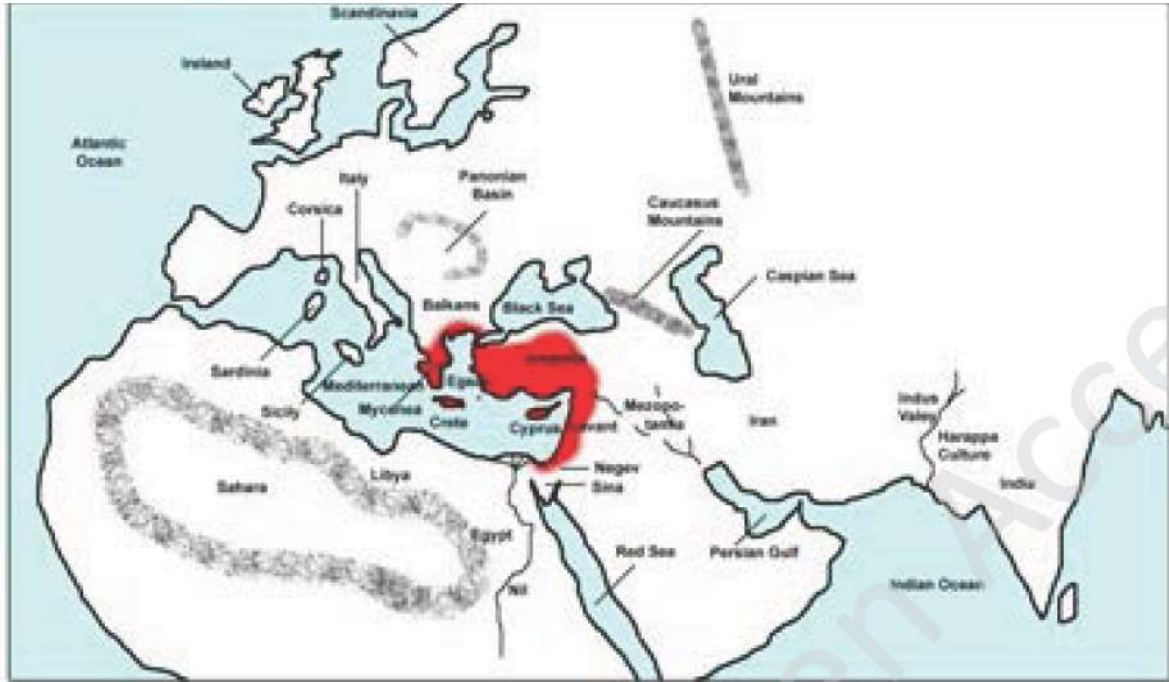
The forest had other precious monuments of Thracian/Phrygian style. A pyramidal rock cut altar. Pithos shaped rock cut pits, used probably as grave or storage facility. Two natural caves (Yaylacık and Aylapınarı caves) having a wealth of Iron Age sherds and in Aylapınarı two rock incised pictures. The area has also many tumuli which can be dated to the Early Iron age .

During our surveys we encountered also in Küçükçekmece Lake Basin area two pieces of the Barbarian ceramics produced from the local material but with the characteristic decorations (Fig.11).

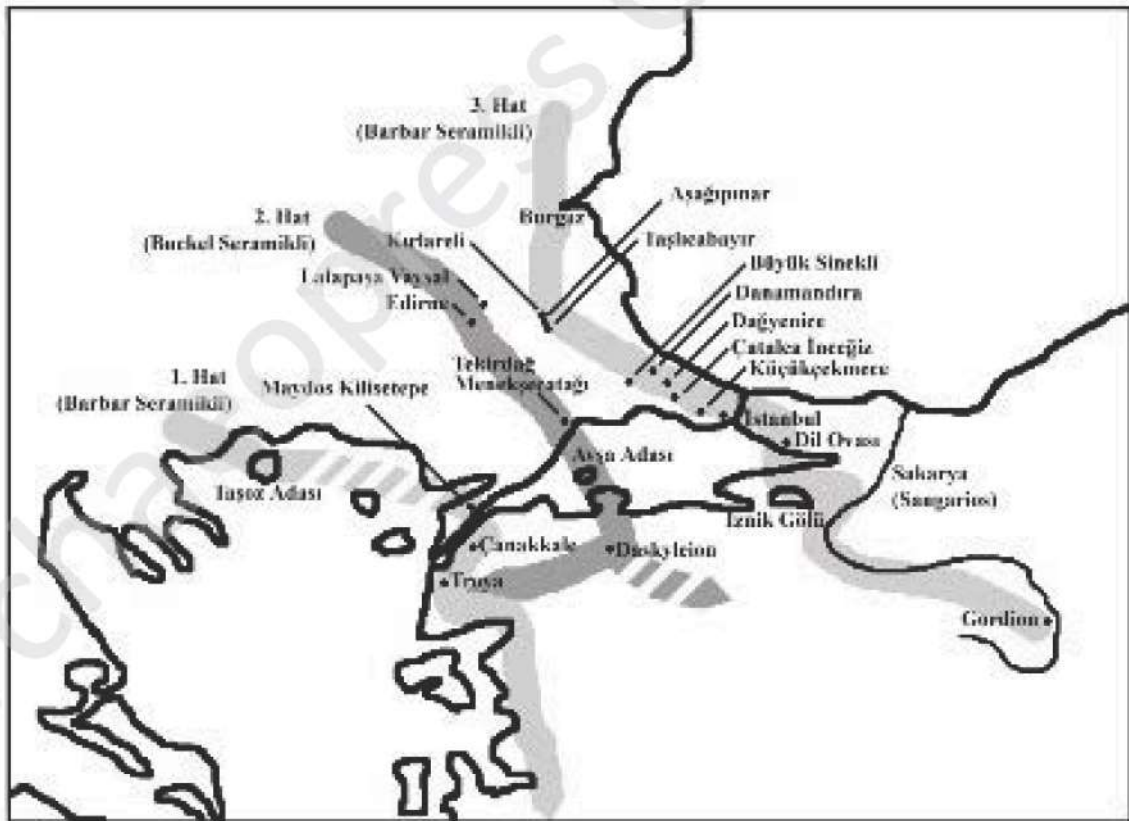
We conclude that based on our findings, a northern migration road for the Thracian/Phrygian origin does actually exist as written by the ancient historians. The road can be described as entering the Anatolian realm from Burgaz of today's Bulgaria, coming into Turkey from Kırklareli, Aşağıpınar and Taşlıcabayır, then entering Istanbul's area from the villages of Büyük Sinekli, Danamandıra, Dağyenice, Çatalca İnceğiz, Küçükçekmece and continuing on the Asiatic Side by Dilovası (Map 2).

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MAP 1



MAP 2

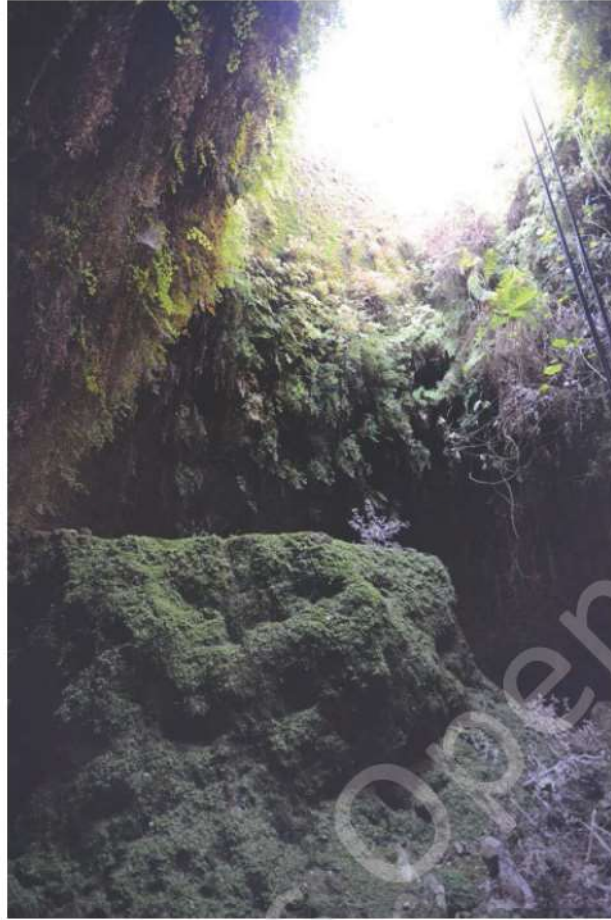


FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2-A



FIGURE 2-B



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10-A



FIGURE 10-B



FIGURE 11