

## ANATOLIAN PALEOLITHIC CIVILIZATIONS: RESEARCH'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT, PERCEPTIONS AND METHODS

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The Paleolithic represents the longest period in mankind's history: in Turkey, it spans from 900.000 to 12.000 BP. During that time, the environment underwent drastic changes: major glaciations and interglaciations took place with the consequent remodeling of the landscape. People lived in different kinds of sites: open air sites near to water sources (lakes or rivers), alongside the sea coast, in caves, etc. This deeply influenced the impact on the sites from changes in the natural environment and consequently, the conditions under which we discover them today. Of all the different activities carried out by Paleolithic men, only a very limited amount of evidence has survived the ages. Contrary to more recent- Neolithic or Bronze age- remains, Paleolithic "in situ" sites rarely show at the surface: no "höyük" mounds, no walls, no architectural feature show above the ground level. Paleolithic "in situ" open air sites generally lie several meters below the surface, but they can also be visible in places where natural or man made trenches cut through quaternary alluvial deposits. Even in the case of a cave, nothing from the outside- or from the inside at first glance- may suggest whether the place has been occupied or not during the Paleolithic. This means that surface surveys are arduous, time consuming, and not always successful. The physical characteristics of the artefacts (bone, stone, shell) also mean that new survey methods, such as electromagnetic ones, for example, cannot be applied to the discovery of Paleolithic sites. Sites are thus difficult to discover and this seems to have been an important barrier to research and public interest in the Paleolithic.

In Turkey, it can be said that an interest in Paleolithic research started much later than outstanding classical archaeology did. Because of this quite recent academic status, Paleolithic studies did not easily find their place in the University: They were sometimes taught as a part of a physical anthropology course, sometimes in the framework of classical archaeology or even geology.

These different, but unfortunately compartmentalized, approaches did not help achieve the scientific exchanges essential to the global understanding of complicated hypotheses such as the ones characteristic of Paleolithic studies. Thus, teachers in prehistory have not been trained to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to Paleolithic sites. Rather, they rather concentrate on their own specialty and are often tempted to have a dogmatic and unique point of view rather than an open and broad perspective. Few foreign teachers have collaborated to enlarge this view and until very recently no Turkish Paleolithic scholars have done any graduate studies abroad, as it is the case for a good number of classical archaeologists. For prehistory, major relevance was given to the occasional findings themselves rather than to the application of a rigorous field methodology: until now, no handbook concerning theory and methods applied to the Paleolithic of Anatolia seems to have been edited and broadly diffused. Not only among the general public but also among intellectuals, Paleolithic prehistory is still largely unknown. Even high school students do not have a clear idea about it and thus, have no concrete perspective concerning the choice of Paleolithic archaeology as a university career.

Another unfortunate fact that can be pointed out is that Paleolithic research in Turkey has concentrated on a very few geographical areas and little effort (including financial) has been made in order to discover new sites, to fulfil the almost empty map of Anatolian Paleolithic settlements.

Turkish scholars have essentially drawn their knowledge from French publications, particularly those by F. Bordes, dating to the 1950's. They have been deeply influenced by the "fossile directeur" theory which means that the chronological attribution of an industry found in an archaeological layer--or even of a whole settlement--relies on a few artifacts, sometimes a single one, which are considered by the prehistorian as typical of a particular period. Up to the present day, the determination of a site's chronological position is normally based on this principle and there is a surprising lack of radiometric dating can be noticed.

Paleolithic research started in Turkey at the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century when E. Pittard and E. Passemard, mainly involved in geological research in Syria, discovered some handaxes in the terraces of the Euphrates river. Alerted by this, M. Atasayan carried out, in 1939, some surveys in the fields near the city of Gaziantep, where she lived, while Ş.A. Kansu explored the surroundings of Ankara. In both cases, a few artifacts were collected but no data were recorded concerning the

exact place where the artifacts were found and no systematic research was carried out after these first punctual discoveries.

In 1945 a decisive step for the development of Turkish Paleolithic was the consequence of the interest K. Kökten showed for prehistory. In spite of difficult conditions, he tenaciously explored Turkey in search of Paleolithic remains and discovered new sites. He published a great number of papers which, unfortunately, because of the language barrier, were not accessible to foreign colleagues, thus impeding dialogue. He had the great merit of drawing the first quite accurate localization map of his findings; until now, the same map, published in 1952, is still the most complete reference for Paleolithic site distributions in Turkey.

Other major figures of Turkish Paleolithic are M. Şenyürek and E. Bostancı who worked mainly in Paleolithic caves discovered in the Hatay region by German geologists in the early 1950's. Both authors have in common a particular interest for enlarging the lithic artifact's interpretative frame mainly through the comparison of their findings with results from neighboring countries like Lebanon, Jordan or Syria. They also made a special effort to translate some of their articles into English.

For almost 20 years, these authors concentrated in excavation at particular sites like Tıkalı, Merdivenli, Karain or Öküzini, without extending the program to the exploration of the general environmental context of the particular sites.

In the mid- 1970's, the construction of the Keban dam (on the Euphrates) gave to Paleolithic specialists the opportunity to explore new regions; while the surveys brought to light the existence of a number of Neolithic mounds, just a few Paleolithic artifacts were collected: river terraces were poorly represented in that upriver part of the survey area and open air "in situ" sites absent.

Since the beginning of the 1980's, a systematic interdisciplinary approach was applied for the first time in Turkey with the aim of understanding Paleolithic sites in their geomorphologic environment. This was a large scale program covering the provinces of Gaziantep and Hatay (Euphrates, Orontes and the Mediterranean coast). During these expeditions, geomorphologically "in situ" as well as archaeologically "in situ" sites were discovered; after a 30 year hiatus, new sites were emerging in the Paleolithic landscape.

At about the same time, in 1985, the excavations at K. Kökten's site of Karain (Antalya) began again after a few years break; recently, the team enlarged the excavations to the nearby site of Oküzini.

In 1988, a new excavations also started at the cave site of Yarımburgaz (near Istanbul) where K. Kökten had undertaken some soundings in the early 1960's.

These field researches were too limited to contribute significantly to a better understanding of Paleolithic in Turkey as a whole but they allowed at least the development of coherent working hypotheses. The most important steps are still to come. In order to achieve the development of Paleolithic studies in the future, the training of skilled and open minded young prehistorians is a prerequisite. This means that a considerable effort has to be made to "communicate" some knowledge about the Paleolithic, each time in appropriate language, to elementary school children, high school pupils, museum curators, university students, specialists and the general public. The significance of Paleolithic studies has first of all to be widely understood and appreciated and this is not possible without political and financial support.

In order to allow prehistorians to work more efficiently, some of the administrative rules and regulations should be adapted to the specific field and techniques of Paleolithic prehistorians. In fact, these are not the same as those pertinent for classical archaeologists.

The richness of Turkish Paleolithic remains as well as the strategic geographical position of the sites justify the claim that more attention be given to this period. The discipline is nowadays mature enough to no longer be in the hands of a few specialists and a greater number of people should bring their skills and intellects to it. A broad appreciation of Paleolithic prehistory among the Turkish public can also play a major role in opening new horizons for the discipline.

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