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Book Review

Review of Mount Ağrı - Bozkurt Kurgan Cemetery Excavation Book

**Ağrı Dağı - Bozkurt Kurgan Mezarlığı Kazısı: Mezarlık, Höyük, Kaleler ve Geç Kalkolitik Dönemden Urartu Krallığı'na Doğubayazıt Ovası (Aynur Özfirat).
İstanbul: Ege Publications, 2022. 183 pages. ISBN 9786258056402.**

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The book, which is bilingual in Turkish and English, consists of six chapters with a presentation, a short introduction to the work done on Mount Ararat, a foreword and acknowledgements. The book deals with the results of the excavations and surveys carried out between 2007 and 2013 in Bozkurt Village, which is located on the Iğdır Plain-Aras Valley Pass at the northern end of Doğubayazıt Plain. Although many archaeological excavations and surveys have been carried out in the Eastern Anatolia Region, these studies mostly focus on Middle Iron Age (Urartian) archaeology (Çifçi 2017: 23-24; Çifçi 2020: 17-18; Çifçi 2022). Hence, archaeological excavations and surveys in Mount Ararat and its surrounding areas provide us with a unique opportunity to study various periods from Chalcolithic to the Middle Iron Ages.

Archaeological studies in Doğubayazıt and its surrounding areas begin with the Karakoyunlu-Bulakbaşı (Iğdır) excavations at the end of the 19th century and then continued with the Melikli-Kültepe, Iğdır and Kertenkele-Gökçekaynak citadel and cemetery excavations.¹ However, these excavations were either published only as brief reports or not at all. In addition, our knowledge of the Kurgan culture is mostly based on limited data obtained from surveys – apart from the short-term studies carried out in Kars Küçükçatma and Erzurum Köprüköy at the beginning of the 20th century and at Çıldır (Köroğlu 2000). Hence, archaeological results from the Bozkurt Kurgan Cemetery excavation are important in terms of understanding the settlement areas outside the Lake Van Basin and the cultural phases of various periods – in this case, Kurgan Culture.

The geography of the region is given in the first chapter, after a brief introduction to the archaeological studies on Mount Ararat and its surrounding (pp. 2-13) areas. However, the geographical features of the region, such as the physical, climate, hydrology and vegetation, are described in the sixth chapter under the name of “Geographical structure and Holocene Paleogeography of the South-western Foothills of the Büyük Ağrı Mountain” (pp. 125-138). It would have been more appropriate to include this section as the first chapter in which the features of the region such as physical geography and climate are explained.

The second part of the book is concerned with general information about the Eastern Anatolian Kurgan culture (pp. 19-24). The archaeological materials that presented in the relevant section of this book clearly show that the kurgan type burial tradition maintained its importance as a common burial type in the region from the second half of the 3rd millennium BC to the beginning of the first millennium BC.

The third chapter of the book (pp. 29-84) presents the Bozkurt Kurgan cemetery, which spreads over a wide area at the northwest end of the Doğubayazıt Plain, along with the excavation finds, as well as the recorded data obtained during the surface surveys carried

1 See the selected bibliography section of the work in question on pages 119-123.

out in the region. In this section, after a short introduction, information about the excavation areas, photographs, finds and drawings of these burial areas as well as finds are given in squares, close to full pages. In this part of the book, the figure numbers are given as a list until the introduction in continuations with the first two chapters, but then in the rest of this part, the figure sequences and footer information are not given. In the fourth chapter, written by the same author, the figure numbers and footer information are given again, from where the third chapter introduction left off. However, it is seen that this order does not continue again in the 5th and 6th chapters of the book. These last two chapters in the book have a separate picture sequence number within themselves.

In total 32 Kurgan graves were excavated in the area called Cemetery 1. 11 of these graves are dated to the Middle Bronze Age, and three of them to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age. But, there is no data on the dating of the remaining burials. In addition to these kurgan burials, a chamber grave (OM1) dated to the Urartian period (p. 82-84) was also unearthed in the same area.

The plans and remains for the Bozkurt Fortress I (Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, pp. 75-76) and Hasan Bey-Bardaklı Fortress (Early Iron Age, pp. 77-78) are briefly discussed in this part of the book. There are images of these two sites as well. However, interestingly, the pottery remains, which form the basis of their dating, were not included. Another structure emphasized in this section is the Bozkurt Outpost-Road Station (Fortress II) (pp. 79-81). Remains of a small square planned structure, known as Fortress II (Kale II), measuring 40 x 30 m, were evaluated as an Urartian outpost/road station. This approach is based on the idea that sites such as Norşuntepe and Zülümtepe, which are stated to be on a highway claimed to exist between the centre of the Urartu Kingdom and the provinces of Elazığ-Bingöl in the west, are accommodation or road stations (Sevin 1989; Çifçi and Gökce 2021). However, since no archaeological excavations have been carried out in such structures until now, it is hard to make a definite judgment about the purpose of such construction. In addition, the visuals – photographs and drawings – and the location descriptions presented in the study indicate that Fortress I and Fortress II could be a single structure rather than two as proposed.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the evaluation of the results of the archaeological excavations and surveys carried out in the Bozkurt Village of Doğubayazıt. The mound, fortresses and kurgan cemeteries found in the ruins of Bozkurt Village, were presented as a “settlement complex”. Although these ruins in Bozkurt Village are categorized into different structure types with different names, it is a right approach to evaluate these building groups as a whole. The evaluations in this section are arranged chronologically, based on the studies carried out in the region. In this context, firstly, the results of the excavations in the Melecami mound are given. The Kurgan cemetery (Cemetery 1) was extensively studied and did not contain an architectural layer, since it was spread over the area where the mound was located

(pp. 91-92). However, despite the absence of architectural layers, the settlement area is dated to the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age based on the ceramic remains found among the excavated kurgan tombs on the mound. Although there are no remains of the Middle Bronze Age in the region, kurgans representing this period have been excavated in Cemetery 1.

In this section, the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age periods were defined as the “Pre-Urartian period” and the three kurgan tombs excavated in Cemetery 1, along with the Bozkurt Fortress I and Cemetery 2, which were examined during the survey, are dated to this period. It is unusual to define this period as the “Pre-Urartian period” which is generally presented as the Early Iron Age in the relevant Turkish literature. Once again away from the common usage of term “grooved” types of pottery of the Early Iron Age the study refers to it as “Nairi-grooved ware”.

The sixth and last part of the book is devoted to the examination of human and animal bones found in the Bozkurt Kurgan excavation. Human or animal bone remains were found in 10 excavated kurgans. Seven of these skeletons belong to an adult, a child and a newborn baby.

The Eastern Anatolia Region is mostly known for Urartian studies. Hence, the Bozkurt Kurgan and the excavations carried out in the Murat Tepe mound (Özdemir and Kılıç 2021) in the Solhan district of Bingöl province in recent years, provide new data apart from the core region of the Urartian Kingdom. The study in question is an important work in terms of getting to know the kurgan culture, which is known for its surveys in limited areas in Turkey, but stands out with the studies carried out in the South Caucasus and Northwest Iran, and to evaluate the results together. Although there is no list of abbreviations and indexes in the book, the chapters in it are supported with visuals such as many maps, drawings and photographs. In addition, in the last part of the book, there are plenty of pictures of the excavation. As a result, despite some shortcomings, the book will make significant contributions to the development of Eastern Anatolian regional archaeology as a whole.

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