

Western Anatolia–Hittite Relations in the light of an Early Hittite Seal from the Excavations at Aşağıseyit Höyük

[AŞAĞISEYİT HÖYÜK KAZILARINDA BULUNAN BİR ERKEN HİTİT DÖNEMİ
MÜHRÜ BAĞLAMINDA BATI ANADOLU-HİTİT İLİŞKİLERİ]

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ÖZET

Aşağıseyit Höyük yerleşiminde 2021 yılında başlayan kazı çalışmalarında incelenen dönemlerden biri Geç Tunç Çağı'dır. 2024 yılında höyüğün Geç Tunç Çağı tabakalarının erken evresinde bulunan bir damga mühür, Hitit-Batı Anadolu ilişkilerine katkı sunan yeni bir buluntu olmuştur. Batı Anadolu'da Orta Tunç Çağı ve Geç Tunç Çağı tabakaları içeren yerleşimlerde Aşağıseyit Höyük mühürü ile benzer nitelikte yuvarlak başlı, ip delikli, konik kulplu, daire biçimli baskı alanına sahip üzerinde ağırlıklı olarak geometrik bezemelerin yer aldığı damga mühürler bilinmektedir. Aşağıseyit mühürünün Batı Anadolu'daki diğer çağdaş yerleşimlerden ayrılan en önemli noktası mühür üzerinde betimlenen çift sıra merdiven şeridi çerçeve bandıyla içinde 8 yaprağı enine çizgilerle bölünmüş ortası çukur bir rozettir. Söz konusu bezemenin birebir ve yakın benzerlerinden çok sayıda örnek Boğazköy kazılarında bulunmuştur. Bu durum Geç Tunç Çağı'nın başladığı yıllarda Batı Anadolu'daki yerel krallıklarla Hititler arasındaki ilişkinin kapsamı ve niteliğinin tartışılmasına katkı sağlayacak yeni bir unsur olarak ele alınmalıdır. Hitit Krallığı'nın, kuruluş yıllarından itibaren Batı Anadolu topraklarına yönelik çeşitli gerekçelerle askeri seferler düzenlediği bilinmektedir. İç Batı Anadolu'da yürütülen kazı çalışmalarında bulunan hilal biçimli ağırlıklar, boğa eklentileri ve bazı seramik tipleri Aşağıseyit mühürü ile birlikte değerlendirildiğinde iki bölge arasında şu an çerçevesini açık bir biçimde çizemediğimiz etkileşim ve iletişimin bir yansıması olarak karşımız çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Aşağıseyit Höyük, damga mühür, Geç Tunç Çağı, Hitit, Batı Anadolu .

ABSTRACT

Excavations at Aşağıseyit Höyük, launched in 2021, have included the investigation of the Late Bronze Age levels. In 2024, a stamp seal discovered in the early phase of the Late Bronze Age layers of the mound has emerged as a new find contributing to our understanding of Hittite-Western Anatolian relations. Stamp seals of similar character- featuring a rounded head with a perforated conical handle, a circular sealing surface, and predominantly geometric decoration- are known from settlements in Western Anatolia containing Middle and Late Bronze Age levels. The most distinctive feature that differentiates the Aşağıseyit seal from its contemporaries in other Western Anatolian sites is the depiction of a double-rowed stepped band forming a frame around a rosette with eight petals divided by transverse lines and a central depression. Numerous close parallels of this decorative motif have been uncovered at Boğazköy. This suggests that, already in the initial centuries of the Late Bronze Age, the scope and character of the relations between the Hittites and the local kingdoms of Western Anatolia should be reconsidered in light of this evidence. It is well known that the Hittite Kingdom, from its formative years onward, conducted

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military campaigns into Western Anatolian territories for various reasons. Considered alongside crescent-shaped weights, bull figurine attachments, and specific ceramic types unearthed in Inner Western Anatolia, the Aşağıseyit seal can be viewed as tangible evidence of interaction and communication between the two regions—an exchange whose precise contours remain to be fully defined.

Keywords

Aşağıseyit Höyük; stamp seal; Late Bronze Age; Hittites; Western Anatolia

Introduction

The Late Bronze Age process in Western Anatolia has been primarily reconstructed from secondary sources due to the scarcity of written records in the region. Most of the available information is derived from Hittite texts, which provide only limited insight into the socio-economic structure of the area. Hittite inscriptions predominantly focus on the military achievements of the kings, making them insufficient for determining the characteristics of the known Arzawa lands in Western Anatolia. Consequently, archaeological excavation data have become indispensable for understanding the nature of these regions.

Excavations at Beycesultan,¹ Aphrodisias,² and Laodikeia-Asopos Tepesi,³ along with systematic survey projects⁴ in Inner Western Anatolia, have been instrumental not only in outlining the main features of local cultures during the Late Bronze Age but also in shedding light on the nature of interregional networks. In this context, recent archaeological projects at Aşağıseyit Höyük,⁵

Kaymakçı⁶ and Tavşanlı Höyük⁷ are of particular importance for defining the material culture and socio-economic structure of the Arzawa lands and their constituent polities over time.

Notably, the Early Hittite Period seal uncovered at Aşağıseyit Höyük (henceforth the Aşağıseyit Seal) during the 2024 excavation season represents a new finding that contributes to understanding the cultural elements of Inner Western Anatolian settlements and their interregional interactions. In this study, the Early Hittite Period seal from Aşağıseyit Höyük is evaluated within its stratigraphic and chronological context, and its relationship with contemporary seals is examined to discuss its significance within the broader historical processes of the region. Aşağıseyit Höyük is located approximately 1.5 km southeast of Aşağıseyit Village, within the boundaries of the Çal district in Denizli Province. The settlement occupies a natural valley that connects the plains of Çivril and Baklan in the Upper Menderes Basin to the Çal Basin via the Seyitler pass, situated at the edge of this valley.⁸ The mound is situated on a naturally elevated hill extending from northwest to southeast, at an altitude of 828 m above sea level. The main cone of the mound, which lies only 120 m from the Büyük Menderes River, covers an area of approximately 6 hectares. The location of the settlement is of strategic importance in both military and economic terms.

Settlement Evolution and Stratigraphy

In addition to the excavations conducted by our team at Aşağıseyit Höyük between 2021 and 2024, surface surveys have identified

1 Lloyd and Mellaart 1955: 39; Lloyd and Mellaart 1956: 101; Lloyd and Mellaart 1957: 27; Lloyd et al. 1959: 35; Lloyd 1960: 31; Lloyd and Mellaart 1962: 1; Lloyd and Mellaart 1965:1; Lloyd 1972: 1; Mellaart and Murray 1995:1; Abay and Dedeoğlu 2009: 53; Abay and Dedeoğlu 2012:303.

2 Kadish 1969: 49; Erim 1970: 87; Kadish 1971: 121; Erim 1972: 55; Erim 1973: 63; Erim 1976: 25; Marchese 1976: 393; Marchese 1978: 15; Joukowsky 1986: 1; Joukowsky 199: 9; Joukowsky 1993: 309.

3 Şimşek 2009: 409; Şimşek 2010: 101; Şimşek 2011: 447; Konakçı 2014: 1.

4 Mellaart 1954: 175; Lloyd and Mellaart 1955: 75-80; French 1969: 1; Mellaart and Murray 1955: 101-111; Tül 1986: 719; Abay and Dedeoğlu 2005: 41; Abay and Dedeoğlu 2007: 277; Abay 2008: 1; Dedeoğlu 2008: 587; Dedeoğlu 2009: 241; Abay et al. 2020: 108; Konakçı 2020: 15–33.

5 Konakçı et al. 202: 65.

6 Roosevelt et al. 2018: 645.

7 Fidan et al. 2023: 245.

8 Ceylan 1998: 135.

nine distinct occupational phases.⁹ As part of the paleo-geographical studies at the site, coring investigations revealed that the cultural deposit of the mound has an average thickness of approximately 8 meters.¹⁰ Excavations at Aşağıseyit Höyük have so far exposed layers dating to the Roman, Hellenistic, Late Bronze Age, and Early Bronze II periods.

The Late Bronze Age layers containing the Early Hittite Period seal, which forms the focus of this study, were examined within a total area of 500 m² across four architectural phases. Carbon samples taken from the 2nd¹¹ and 4th phases¹² of the Late Bronze Age layer at Aşağıseyit Höyük have provided dates for occupation between 1634 and 1236 BCE.

The data dating to the first phase (Level IV-1) of the Late Bronze Age have been preserved only in a limited area due to disturbances caused by Hellenistic-period modifications. The layer contains mudbrick walls and a plastered floor. Artifacts found on the floor, along with fragments of storage jars located in the eastern part of the area, indicate that the space functioned as a domestic dwelling. The data belonging to the second phase of the Late Bronze Age consist of two parallel north–south walls and another wall extending in an east–west direction. In these walls, constructed with small foundation stones, the mudbrick walls are largely destroyed. The narrow area between the walls is interpreted as a possible alley, while the row of stones extending westward from the southern end of the wall has been identified as part of a drainage system. However, a refuse pit located at the northern part of the stone row has partially disturbed this phase. In the third phase, a row of walls measuring 3.5 meters in length in the north–south direction was identified, along with a parallel stone pavement on the interior side of this wall row. The mudbrick wall in this layer has been interpreted as part of a rectangular room; although a significant portion is destroyed, five courses of the wall remain preserved. In the

fourth phase, walls belonging to one room and a second room were documented. In this phase, smaller foundation stones were used compared to earlier phases, and small domestic structures predominate. Within the same layer, in addition to dark-faced ceramic groups, crescent-shaped weights and the Aşağıseyit seal—the focus of this study—were discovered. The seal was uncovered on the exterior part of a structure dating to the early phase of the Late Bronze Age. (Fig. 3-4).

Early Hittite Seal from Aşağıseyit Höyük

During the 2024 archaeological excavations at Aşağıseyit Höyük, a round-headed seal made of an indeterminate type of stone was discovered. The seal measures 2.6 cm in height, with a circular base diameter of 2.1 cm. It features a conical handle with a perforation for stringing and a circular base forming the impression area. On the impression surface, a ring has been engraved, interpreted as a herringbone, ladder band, or rope pattern. Within this ring, there is a rosette with eight petals, divided by transverse lines, and a concave center. Although it is not possible to provide a definitive interpretation of the motif based on the current data, the symbol is considered to represent a royal emblem, believed to be the emblem of Arinna.¹³

Round-headed seals with perforated, conical handles and circular impression areas began to be used during the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period and continued to be produced until the 16th century BCE.¹⁴

Similar round-headed seals with perforated, conical handles and circular bases, like the Aşağıseyit seal, are also known from Western Anatolian settlements such as Seyitömer Höyük,¹⁵ Beycesultan,¹⁶ Liman Tepe¹⁷ and Kusura.¹⁸ In particular, a seal from Beycesultan, featuring a rounded handle, conical body, and circular impression surface, is typologically similar to the Aşağıseyit seal; however, it differs in that its impression surface bears a griffin

9 Konakçı 2020: 15-33; Abay et al. 2020: 107.

10 The geoarchaeological studies at Aşağıseyit Höyük are being conducted by a team led by Prof. Dr. Ertuğ Öner from the Department of Geography at Ege University.

11 Tübitak 2358-MÖ 1436-1546.

12 Tübitak 1968-MÖ 1498-1621, Tübitak 1967-MÖ 1506-1634, Tübitak 2359-MÖ 1496-1617.

13 Michaux- Colombot 2008: 331.

14 Özkan 2022: 82; Beran 1967: 50- 81; Boehmer and Güterbock 1987: Fig 1- 7-14, Fig. 2: 16.

15 Bilgen 2015: 115, Fig.130, 132-133.

16 Mellaart and Murray 1955: 183, Fig .O33.

17 Aykurt 2024: 64, Fig. 32:7, 9.

18 Lamb 1936: Fig 12-16.

within a circular frame.¹⁹ Recent excavations at Beycesultan have led to a reassessment of the site's chronology, dating layer 5b (the new designation for the former second layer) to the 17th century BCE.²⁰ This demonstrates that the two seals, which are closely related in form, are also chronologically proximate.

The most distinctive feature of the Aşağıseyit Höyük seal, compared to its contemporaries in Western Anatolia, is that an identical seal has been found in the Early Hittite layers at Boğazköy,²¹ the capital of the Hittite Kingdom. There are additional seals from the same layers in Boğazköy that are almost identical to the Aşağıseyit seal. In addition to the exact matches, numerous other examples from Boğazköy display minor variations in details such as the number of petals or wreath characteristics. Thomas Beran classified this type of seal as “Geometrically Decorated Seals” and included them under “Group 2” in his typological categorization.²²

In addition to Boğazköy, a seal exhibiting an exact correspondence in all details with the Aşağıseyit seal was also discovered on the 7th layer of Maşat Höyük, which is known for its Hittite-origin architectural elements and small finds²³. This seal has been evaluated as an example representing the late phase of the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period.²⁴ Another closely related example, possessing a similar seal typology and decorative content but distinguished by a motif with seven branches, is kept at the Tokat Museum.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Excavations at Aşağıseyit Höyük have revealed Late Bronze Age strata dating to the 17th–12th centuries BCE. The Early Hittite Period stamp seal uncovered in 2024 exhibits notable typological correspondences with seals from contemporary settlements in Western Anatolia. Its geometric ornamentation—comprising a double-rowed ladder-patterned frame enclosing

a central recessed rosette—closely parallels comparable examples from Boğazköy, strongly indicating the existence of communication networks and interaction between Inner Western Anatolia and the Hittite core regions during this period. Furthermore, the substantial number of analogous seals recovered at Boğazköy suggests a potential official or administrative function, although current evidence is insufficient to definitively substantiate this interpretation.

As is well known, the territories of Western Anatolia were among the regions over which the Hittite Kingdom sought to establish control shortly after its foundation. The first Hittite king thought to have engaged with the Arzawa Lands—the term used to refer to the Western Anatolian region—is Labarna²⁵, as evidenced in the opening section of the treaty with Alaksandu, the king of Wilusa, dating to the period of Muwatalli II. The text states that as a result of Labarna's campaigns, he defeated the Arzawa Lands and subjugated them.²⁶ Labarna is mentioned again in the Telipinu Edict, which recounts that he conquered many countries and extended his realm's borders to the sea.²⁷ From these sources, it is apparent that although Arzawa did not achieve lasting success during this process, it was a polity capable of waging war against the Hittites. The first Hittite king to explicitly mention Arzawa is Hattusili I,²⁸ who directed his attention to the Arzawa Lands²⁹ following his campaigns in northern Syria. Although Hattusili I does not provide detailed information regarding his campaign against Arzawa, his reference to the herds of cattle and sheep obtained from the region indicates that the campaign was successfully completed.³⁰ Limited information on Arzawa is available during the reign of Hattusili's successor, Mursili I, from which it is inferred that campaigns were conducted in the Arzawa Lands and that he spent

19 Mellaart and Murray 1955: 183, Fig.O33.

20 Abay 2025: 97; Abay and Dedeoğlu 2007: 303.

21 Boehmer and Güterbock 1987: Fig. 2- 16; Beran 1967, Fig. 2: 22.

22 Beran 1967: 8-50, Fig. 2: 22.

23 Özgüç 1982: 45-46, Fig. 57, 9 a-b.

24 Özgüç 1982: 46, Fig. 57: 9 a-b; Divarçı 2019: 62-392, Fig. 3.115, Fig. 3.28- Tip 1a.

25 Ceram 1956: 119; Macqueen 2003: 5; Beal 2003: 13-15-24; Bryce 1998b: 69; Kinal 1953: 33.

26 Götze 1936: 53; Kinal 1953: 25-33; Klengel 1999: 37; Latacz 2004: 78.

27 Garstang and Gurney 1959: 63; Bryce 1998b: 68; Gurney, Çev. Arpaçay 2001: 29.

28 Sommer and Falkenstein 1978: 17; Bryce 1986:3; Bryce 1998b: 79.

29 Bryce 1998b: 75.

30 Ünal 2033: 5; Bryce 1986: 60; Bryce 1998: 72; Bryce 1998: 79; Yakar 2007: 287.

the winter there.³¹ Hittite texts further indicate that expeditions to Arzawa were undertaken repeatedly from the reign of Ammuna to that of Suppiluliuma II.³²

The primary aim of the Hittite Kingdom's military campaigns into the Arzawa region was to subordinate the local kingdoms and preempt potential attacks from these territories. Beyond the acquisition of spoils, these expeditions also sought to channel trade toward the Hittite core and to regulate Mycenaean commercial activities. Written sources attest that the Hittite state endeavored to assert its dominance over Western Anatolia immediately after its establishment. Moreover, the connections established between the Hittite state and the smaller Luwian polities in the west, as documented in various textual sources, are corroborated by archaeological evidence, which provides tangible confirmation of these interactions.

Indeed, the newly discovered seal from Aşağıseyit Höyük can be regarded as an archaeological reflection of this historical process. In addition to this seal, other finds from the site—including deepened-rim bowls, bull attachments, and crescent-shaped weights, parallels of which are known from other Inner Western Anatolian settlements—should be considered tangible evidence of cultural interaction or connections between Central and Western Anatolia. The location of the mound, situated between the Aegean and Central Anatolia, further supports the presence of such cultural traits. Moreover, the existence of more than seventy Late Bronze Age settlements in the region increases the likelihood of uncovering similar artifacts in future excavations.

In conclusion, the finds from Aşağıseyit Höyük demonstrate that the cultural and political orientations of Inner Western Anatolian settlements, such as Beycesultan, were more closely aligned with Central Anatolia than with the Aegean world. The seal thus provides new archaeological evidence contributing to ongoing discussions concerning the Hittite Kingdom's authority and sphere of influence in Western Anatolia.

31 Ünal 2003: 8-9.

32 Özkan 2016: 405.

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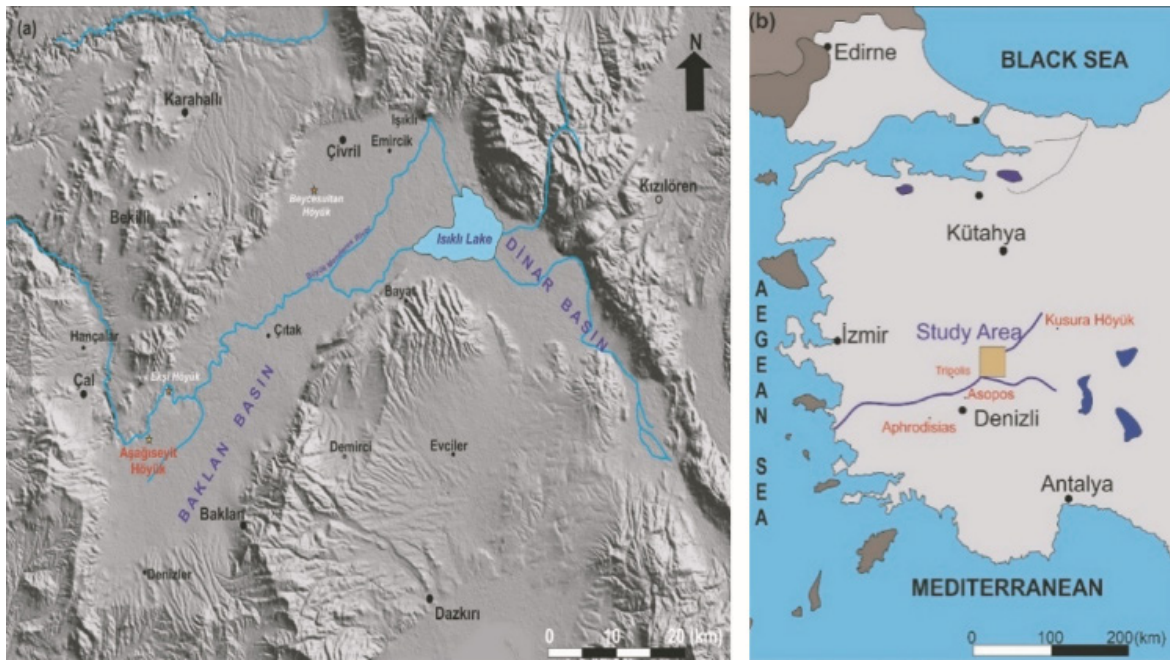


Fig. 1. Location of the Aşağıseyit Höyük

Layer I	Roman Period (5th c. CE)
Layer II	Hellenistic Period
1	
2	
Layer III	Iron Age (8th–6th c. BCE)
Layer IV	Late Bronze Age
1	
2	
3	
4	
Layer V	Middle Bronze Age
Layer VI	Early Bronze Age III
Layer VII	Early Bronze Age II
1	
2	
3	
4	
Layer VIII	Early Bronze Age I
Layer IX	Late Chalcolithic Period

Fig. 2. Stratigraphy of the Aşağıseyit Höyük



Fig. 3. Plan of the Late Bronze Age Structures at Aşağıseyit Höyük and the Provenience of the Aşağıseyit Seal



Fig. 4. Late Bronze Age layers of Aşağıseyit Höyük and the Provenience of the Aşağıseyit Seal



Fig. 5. Drawing and Photograph of the Aşağıseyit Seal