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ITA (Istanbul Prehistoric Survey) Researches in 2008

Sengül Aydingun and Emre Guldogan

Department of Archaeology, Kocaeli University, Kocaeli, Turkey
Department of Archaeology, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey

The ‘Istanbul Prehistoric Survey’ (ITA) unit’s archaeological studies at Istanbul, with an international science team, has revealed evidence of prehistoric times. The archaeological importance of Yarımburgaz Cave in prehistoric times is known. In 2007, some clues were found of a PPNB Neolithic settlement on the Avcilar Firuzkoy coast of Lake Küçükçekmece (see the previous contribution in this volume). Well-arranged stone rows on the peninsula’s edge, and reaching into the lake, singled out this area for studies in 2008.

The team also started new researches at the Selimpasa Mound, Central Silivri, Alipaşa, Küçük Sinekli, Büyük Sinekli, Danamandra, Sayalar, Fenerköy and Çilingoz. This season revealed new data, especially near the Lake Küçükçekmece area. We found chipped stones, ground stones, pottery samples and regular stone groups near Lake Küçükçekmece’s coast. We believe that these areas are very important for Istanbul’s cultural history. Further excavations in these areas will take place in future seasons.

At the time the Marmara Sea was a closed basin, the area near Istanbul where Lake Küçükçekmece occurs, included deep river valleys. When the last period of glaciation ended sea level increased and the sea water that separates Istanbul and the Canakkale Bosphorus filled the Marmara basin to a depth of between 90-120m. As a consequence of this sea influx the old valley edges were choked and a ‘ria’ system appeared (Map 1).

The south side of Lake Küçükçekmece is on the Avcilar boundaries. The investigations done here provided very interesting information, especially about the prehistory of Istanbul. At a point 100m up from where the River Eskinoz and the lake are connected at Avcilar Firuzkoy, local farmers dug two wells and uncovered ceramic finds that have never been seen before at Küçükçekmece. These included hand-thrown items made of a black-mud paste and crudely-fired ware (Fig. 1). Some beige-coloured ceramic pieces come from a cultural layer at a sea level between -4 and -3.50m.

Well 2, which was opened about 80m north of Well 1, is wider and deeper and presents a clearer picture (Fig. 2). Well 2 has at its lowest level (2.25m) a coarse sand, thin pebble, fossiliferous horizontal layer, grey and yellow. The level above is 0.5-0.6m thick, grey sandy clay and stones. The grey in this level is indicative of marshy conditions. The base of this level contains a zone of Ostrea shells that reaches 0.2m (Fig. 3). This zone is sometimes inconstant and lens-shaped. Among the grey level on the Ostrea zone, there are much smaller shells. Probably these clays were used for the ceramics. The best examples are the hand-thrown, black-grey, lightly fired, primitive ceramic pieces that are thought to have come from this level.

The highest level is made up of about 0.1-0.25m-thick vegetable soil. At its base it meets yellow clay levels. In these, there are cultural layers. According to the investigations done by geologists Şükru Ersoy and Timur Ustaomer in both of the wells where the ceramics were found, just above the lowest water level (-2.20m), the existence of Ostreas (sea mussels) shows the formation of the sea. Our observations show that the ceramics come from the muddy sand additive area just above the Ostreas. Much higher there is a layer full of pebbles from stream sediments. Pebbles are generally silica gels occurring from circular pebbles, such as silex, agate and chalcedony. There are also circular pebbles formed of volcanic lava. Some of these pebbles are milky quartz pebbles. According to these conclusions, this point equates to the parts of the old riverbed terrace. It is 15-20m higher than the present river base. In this area, it is understood that at one time the sea filled the valley then drew back, so the area was under the influence of the stream. The flint tools and naviform seeds on the lake’s peninsula, and the soil thrown out from these openings (Fig. 4), are expressed as the first encountered foreign materials in the area by Mehmet Ozdogan and are dated as PPN B Pre-Pots and Pans B.

As a conclusion of the various scientific data from the Küçükçekmece river basin, it is understood that in this area there was probably a village in prehistoric times. As a result of GPR, the sloping area created by the filling of Lake Küçükçekmece at Avcilar-Firuzkoy by the River Eskinoz gives an appearance of a former bay. This small bay might have been filled with landslides. As mentioned above, the two wells dug in this area have indicated a cultural level about 0.50m deep in all of the profiles. In the measurement area (300x100m), this 300x70m-size cultural layer can be seen (Figs. 5, 6). When the defined layers are compared, by considering the variations in depth, the probable areas where ancient settlement ruins might occur become more evident. As a result of all the measurements, the layer which is defined as being of clays and organic content can be defined as an occupation layer. By estimating that there were wooden and vegetable structural features used here since Neolithic times, it is possible that structures existed where the thicknesses occur. The location of the area at that time, the water and productive soil, all point to suitable conditions for agriculture – as remains the case today.

When the area where the ceramics and tools come from is examined from a geographical perspective, it can be understood that the area consisted of the small bay connected to the river and lake, providing a very favourable
human environment. The opposite side of the river offers a peninsula that formed later. On the south of this peninsula many meat cleavers, weights and stone tools were found, which were very similar to the lithic industries of Yarımburgaz’s Palaeolithic times. This situation, therefore, makes us think that the people living in Yarımburgaz might have hunted around the Kuçukçekmece area. It is possible that on the peninsula, which is 6km south of the cave near Firuzkoy, the Palaeolithic inhabitants prepared the meat from the animals they hunted. Taking all the evidence into account, and with more researches planned, we think that we will be able to ascertain whether the above area is a Palaeolithic workshop or not. This location has also revealed naviform seeds (dated as PPNB). These seeds are very important because they are found here for the first time in European geography.

Bibliography


Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6