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ISTANBUL PREHISTORIC SURVEY IN 2007 SEASON

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ABSTRACT

In the chairmanship of Asst. Prof. Dr. Şengül Aydingün from Kocaeli University, after getting the permission from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey in 2007, a scientific team begun a survey to gather more information about the prehistoric periods of Istanbul/Turkey. The first survey point was the Küçükçekmece Lake environment. Küçükçekmece lake is situated 20 km West of the Bosphorus, İstanbul. To the North there are small rivers feeding the lake. The two most important ones are Sazlıdere and Eskinoz. The banks of these rivers near the lake had to be the most probable settlement places. The West Bank of Küçükçekmece Lake remains within the boundaries of the town of Avcılar-Firuzkoy. Our investigations brought us very important findings concerning pottery and stone tools. These were similar to the Low and Upper Paleolithic stone tools and Neolithic pottery as yet unseen anywhere near Küçükçekmece. The vases were poorly fired, hand made from black clay containing different minerals. The lack of straw in their texture made us think that these pieces might belong to a time even previous to the beginning of agriculture. The second survey point was Silivri-Danamandıra village. We found there a cave including chalcolithic pottery and some rock carvings with a man and some graffitis at the mouth of the cave.

Istanbul Prehistoric Survey began in the summer of 2007 with a team from Kocaeli University in Turkey under Asst. Prof. Dr. Şengül Aydingün. Survey covered two main zones in European side of Istanbul. One of the zones was Küçükçekmece-Avcılar and the other was Silivri (Map 1).

Starting point was Lake of Küçükçekmece basin. One of the main reasons in choosing this site was that the area had been geographically very favorable to all kinds of human settlements. And a couple of kilometers to north there was the Yarımburgaz cave, known for its records of human settlements for many hundred thousands of years. The aim was to find further evidence of early human existence. There should have been some prehistoric settlements waiting for discovery and unknown till today.

Küçükçekmece Lake is situated 20 km west of Bosphorus. Although it is called a lake today but it is actually a lagoon. The lake is rather shallow with depths changing

from 5 to 20 m. Until the historic times the lake was a bay. The sand, filling the mouth, it became a lagoon. Despite this and other geological changes its shores offered perfect conditions for human settlements.

During the geological times when Marmara Sea was land locked and the sea level was much lower than today, there were deep valleys of rivers in the place of Küçükçekmece Lake. When the last glacial period ended the increasing sea level all around the globe forced itself through Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The waters filled Marmara and the sea levels increased by 90-120 m. Thus previous deep valleys became rias or drown estuaries.

At the north there are small rivers feeding the lake. The two most important ones are Sazlıdere and Eskinoz. The banks of these rivers which are closest to the lake had to be the most probable settlement places.

The existence of such a convenient place so near to a favorable geographical area as Küçükçekmece Lake, moved us to search for possible prehistoric settlements around the shores. In the other past surveys the search for prehistoric villages resulted in without finding any evidence. Our survey was arguably the most extensive one ever carried on this region. And we were very lucky thanks to the extraordinary drought of the summer 2007.

The West Bank of Küçükçekmece Lake remains within the boundaries of the town Avcılar. Our investigations brought us very important findings for the scientific world. In Avcılar's Firuzkoy district, 100 m up from where Eskinoz River meets the lake, local villagers, in order to irrigate their vegetable gardens, had dig two water wells. The removed earth was containing pottery fragments unseen yet in anywhere near Küçükçekmece. They were hand made from grey-black mud containing different minerals and they were poorly fired. The lack of straw in their texture made us think that these pieces might belong to a time predating agriculture. Further analyses of the walls of the wells showed that they were coming from a cultural level at the depth of 4 m. The upper most layer of 1,5 m is rather mixed and originates from land slides. There, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine amphora, marble columns' parts and glass parts were found.

The second irrigation well is approximately 80 m at the north of the first one. It is much wider than the first and in it, the same layers are more clearly observed. The lowest layer of the second well is formed by a 2-2,5 m of rough sand. In some places there are small pebbles and sea fossils. The layer above this level formed by a 50-60 cm, grey colored sandy clay material. The bottom of this layer has a 20 cm wide zone of ostrea. This ostrea zone is partial. Above the ostrea zone it is possible to find smaller sea shells. Most probably the grey clay from this layer was used for pottery. The best proof of this is the abundance of the hand made, grey and blackish, poorly fired pieces of ceramics.

The grey color of the clay makes us think of a marshy environment. Higher, there is another 50 cm deep layer with a color of beige and light brown, sandy clay stones. There are small sea shells in that level too. The upper most layer is about 1,25 m

agricultural soil. In its bottom side there is a yellow colored clay which contains human artifacts.

Some of the flint stone tools and naviform cores recovered from these two diggings and the other side of the Eşkinöz river were examined and categorized by Prof. Dr. Mehmet Ozdogan and Prof. Dr. Nur Balkan Atlı from Istanbul University's Prehistory Department. Ozdogan dated these artifacts to the end of Pre-Pottery Neolithic B and these are the first ever finds from that period in Istanbul, Thrace and Europe. (Figs 1-2)

As a part of our survey, Mr. Caglar Yalciner carried out a series of Archaeogeophysic GPR researches in Küçükçekmece Lake's basin. The data he gathered indicates a high probability of a prehistoric settlement in a wide area around these two water wells. These findings are very important to the identification of the missing settlement nearby Yarimburgaz Cave which was searched for such a long time.

A thorough evaluation of the GPR data gives the picture of settlement traces in Küçükçekmece Lake's West Bank, called Avcılar- Firuzkoy. The site is the result of the silt coming from Eskinöz River filling the lake. The village must have been covered with landslides. In all the GPR profiles a cultural layer of 50 cm thickness is apparent. Further detailed research gave us a distinct zone of 300 by 70 m with such a layer.

The GPR profiles obtained from that area were compared and the differences in the thickness of the cultural layer are the likely places for prehistoric settlements.

As the result of all these measurements, the layer containing organic materials and clay was concluded as the cultural layer. In the Küçükçekmece Lake's basin since the Pre Pottery Neolithic Period the major construction materials were wood and plant stem. It is normal to think that in places where the layer is thicker some remains of such buildings can be found.

According to the Geologist Prof. Dr Sukru Ersoy from Yıldız Technical University and Associate Prof. Dr Timur Ustaomer from Istanbul University, the existence of ostrea just above the water level shows the effects of the sea. Our observations showed us that our pottery is coming from a mud layer just above the ostrea. Above them there is a layer with pebbles from rivers sediments. These pebbles are generally in the form of cherty, flint, agate and chalcedony. Sometimes they are rounded pebbles from silica gels or rounded volcanic pebbles. According to these findings this point coincides with the Eskinöz River's ancient bed and a bending point in the ancient course. It seems that the river have shifted its course by at least 15-20 m. It is understood that the sea had once filled the river valley and later had retreated back to leave it to the river.

The opposite bank of the river is on a peninsula which came into existence later. In the west side of this peninsula many stone tools were recovered. These tools can be weights, grinding and cutting tools which were similar to those coming from the Paleolithic Period of Yarimburgaz Cave. These findings may show us that the dwellers of Yarimburgaz were visiting lake's shore for hunting which is only six km from the cave. Here they might have been hunting, skinning the animals, treating the skin

and sharpening their bone tools. In short, this area might have been a big workshop. This is our assumption which we will try to prove in the coming years, as our survey continues.

The second survey zone was Silivri region situated at the most western part of Istanbul. First we visited Selimpasa Höyük which is privately owned. We found some grey and hand made potteries at lower edge of the höyük. They look like the grey Minoan potteries (Fig. 3).

Further North, Danamandıra was very interesting village in the forest of Istranca, upper part of Silivri. Villagers from Danamandıra pointed us a cave named as Aylapınari (Fig. 4). This cave was neither in the Cultural Heritage list nor Speologist's records of Turkey. There were some graffiti's with carving in front of the cave mouth. One of them looks like a man with triangular head and very simple body. The other looks like a labyrinth and some hands. But all of them were covered with moss. We found some late Neolithic and Chalcolithic potteries inside the cave (Fig. 5). The same villagers took us to some architectural remains near this cave. We saw a number of lower type tumuli and rock cut architectural remains. One of them looked like a rectangular massive rock cut fountain with four steps on the top. And there were some building remains around.

This area is vastly spread near Danamandıra village in the forest. It looks like a huge ancient settlement in the forest.

As in the case of Aylapınari cave, this place was not in the official records either. A Phd. Candidate from Thrace University Şahin Yıldırım who has studied "The Tracia Tumuli" said that Danamandıra's tumuli are very common in the Iron Age period of Turkey's Thrace.

The last location of our survey was Yaylacık village of Silivri region. Yaylacık is closest village to Danamandıra. It has the same geography. Therefore we were able to find another cave (Fig. 6) including some early pottery fragments.

Our survey proved us that much further investigation is needed for Istanbul's environs, which will be carried out by our team in the coming years.

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Map. 1: Survey areas.

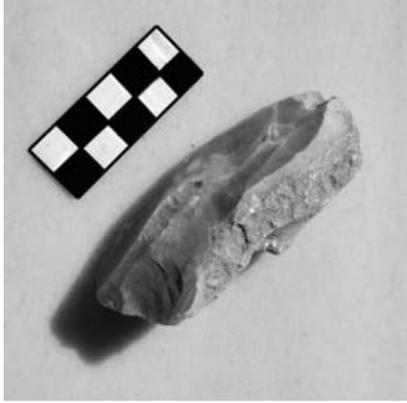


Fig. 1: Naviform core.



Fig. 2: Naviform core and blades.

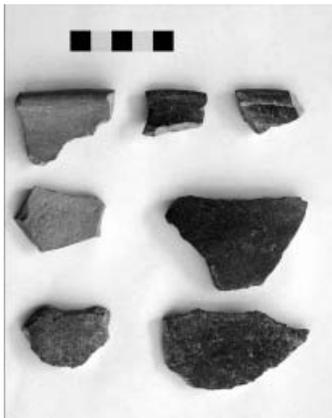


Fig. 3: Selimpasa.



Fig. 4: Cave.

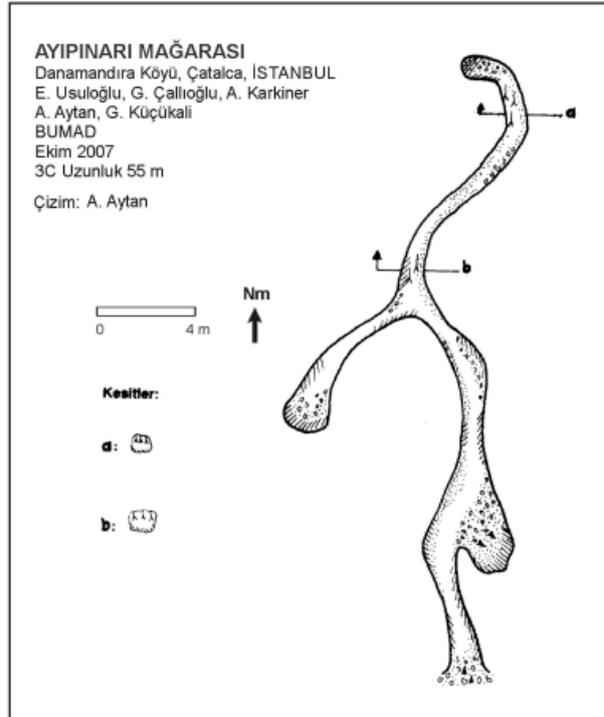


Fig. 5: Plan of Aylapinari Cave.

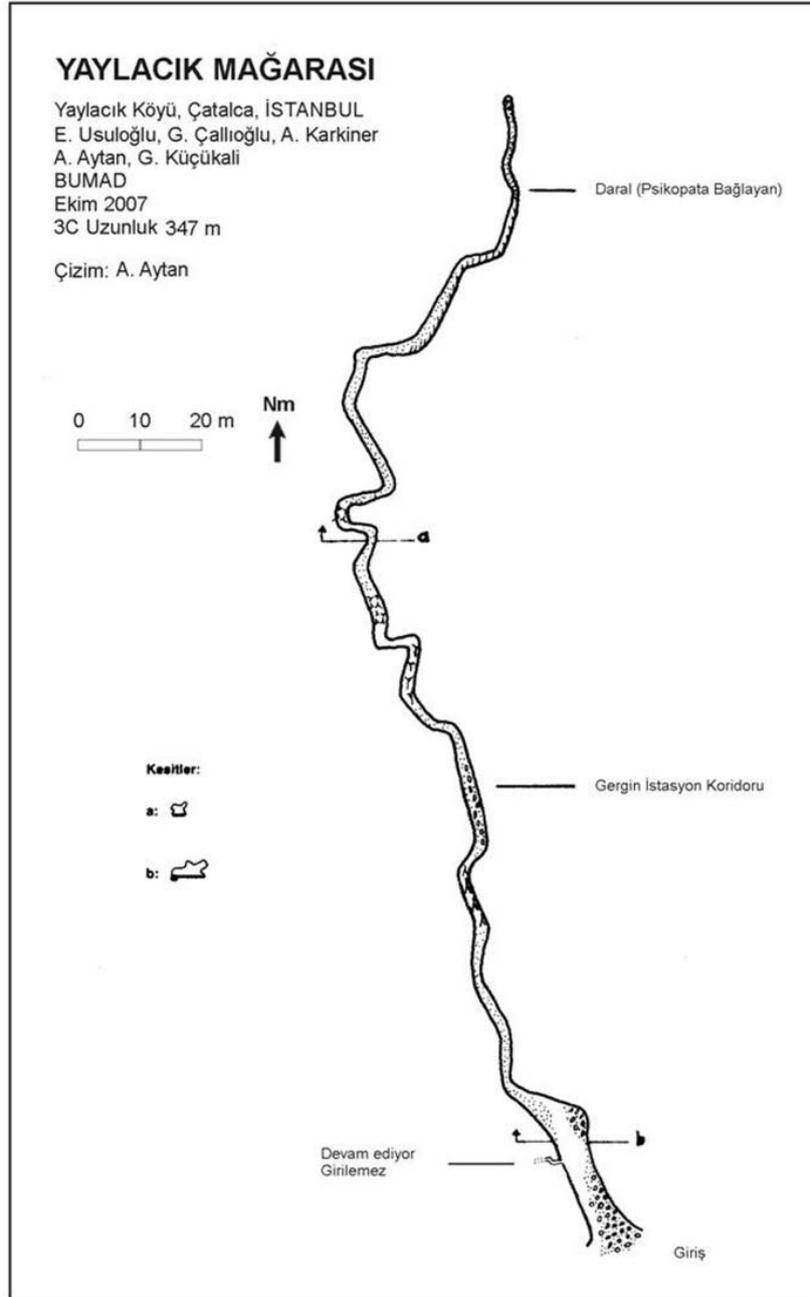


Fig. 6: Plan of Yaylacık Cave.