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Eastern Thrace: the Contact Zone Between Anatolia and the Balkans

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Abstract and Keywords

This article presents a conspectus on the prehistory of northwestern Turkey, mainly focusing on the role played by eastern Thrace at the intersection of Anatolia, the Aegean, and the Balkans. It considers the question of whether Thrace was a bridge or a barrier between the east and the west, while acknowledging that there are substantial lacunae in our knowledge on every issue noted herein. Accordingly, what is reported here should not be considered conclusive, but as more of a general overview. There are major problems in assessing the evidence from northwestern Turkey and the region known as eastern Thrace, first because it constitutes the buffer zone between distinct cultural entities: Anatolia, the Aegean, Balkan, and Pontic regions. Moreover, it acts as the narrow bottleneck to any sort of supraregional interaction, inevitably merging distinct cultures.

Keywords: prehistory, northwestern Turkey, Aegean, buffer zone

The interaction between Anatolian cultures and those of the Balkans is one of the most controversial topics in Anatolian prehistory, having been heavily debated for more than half a century. The main reason this subject has given rise to so much debate lies in the fact that the results are consequential for defining the formative history of Europe in general. More significantly, the discussion on the interaction between Anatolian and Balkan cultures is relevant to answering the question of whether the roots of European culture are to be found in the east. Additionally, along with factual matters, the debate has its political concerns. Nevertheless, the diversity between the Near Eastern and southeastern European schools of archaeology, uneven distribution of research in both regions, and lack of research in the contact zone between these regions have all hampered the development of a coherent picture. Still, it would be fair to note that the issues involved have been made to seem more complicated than they actually are. In this respect it is rather significant that the scholars working in Europe have been more concerned with defining the interaction between Anatolian and southeast European cultures than those working in Turkey. In the archaeological literature of Turkey, either

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descriptive or interpretive references to southeast European (p. 658) cultures are extremely rare (Esin 1979, 1981; French 1967; Kansu 1963; Mellaart 1960) and have been mainly noted in relation to the origin of Hittites and Phrygians. The lack of interest in the events that took place in the western periphery of Anatolia inevitably resulted in a lack of research in the region around the Sea of Marmara, the main contact zone between Anatolia and the Balkans. Thus, until about two decades ago, the discussions remained on a hypothetical level because concrete evidence was lacking. In the past two decades or so, there has been a considerable inflow of data from the northwestern parts of Turkey. This has provided, for the first time, concrete evidence on the interaction between the prehistoric cultures of Anatolia and the Balkans. Even more significantly, it has stimulated an interest among archaeologists working in Anatolia in the prehistory of southeastern Europe. This chapter presents a conspectus on the current state of the field and recent work.

Like the archaeology of the Near East and most of the Aegean, the archaeology of the Anatolian peninsula has gone through several recognizable stages since the early years of research, developing as more information became available (for an overview see Matthews, chapter 3 in this volume). The relative order of the cultural sequence, at least in its basics, had been set almost a century ago, and through time, hundreds of excavations coupled with the availability of new methods of research helped further elaborate the general picture. On the other hand, in southeastern Europe—even in the heartlands of the Balkans where hundreds of archaeological excavations have taken place—the relative sequence is far from being consistent, having no coherency either in the geographic distribution or in the definition of cultural entities. Accordingly, it is not possible to consider the development of archaeology in the Balkans as steady or coherent; on the contrary, it has evolved by fluctuating from one extreme theory to another, having had to go through revolutionary changes with the implementation of radioactive dating. In addition, considering the lack of concrete data from the contact zone between Anatolia and the Balkans, it was evident that the cultural interpretations were more speculative than they were factual.

As noted, the process of thinking about the relation between Near Eastern–Anatolian prehistoric cultures with those of the Balkan–southeast European cultures has gone through a number of contradictory stages. The history of research in the contact zone between Anatolia and the Balkans, as well as various aspects of the changing trends, has been extensively discussed in a number of publications (M. Özdoğan 1997, 2005, 2007, 2008a). Therefore, only major standpoints that have had consequences for our mode of thinking will be noted.

During the earlier years of research, there was a consensus that the beginning of sedentary life, food-producing economies, and the process of urbanization in southeastern Europe, as in western parts of Anatolia and the Aegean, had all been derived from the Near East through colonization. This diffusionist model, as best formulated by Gordon Childe, assumed that Near Eastern communities were able to begin colonizing the west only after attaining a certain (p. 659) cultural level. Thus a chronological baseline of 3400

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B.C.E. was set for the beginning of sedentary life in western Anatolia and the Aegean; anything further west was evidently younger. With this view, Troy, in a critical strategic location, was considered to be a bridgehead for the Near Eastern expansion, and the Vinça culture was taken as its offshoot. Childe's diffusionist model (Childe 1951) was soon extended and applied to the point of designating equivalent cultural stages for the Aegean, based on the Near Eastern sequence. In particular, Milojević (1960) and Theodoridis (1958, 1973) based on their work in Thessaly, designated the initial cultural stage as Aceramic, which was then followed by various Neolithic ceramic cultures. However, because they kept to the short chronology, the assigned duration of the cultural stages was considerably reduced, still sustaining the correlation between Troy and the Vinça culture. One of the consequences of this approach was the rapid increase in the number of prehistoric excavations in the Balkan peninsula, while research in western Turkey came to a standstill. This unequal distribution in research inevitably led to certain biases, which, coupled with political concerns, laid the basis for certain controversies that have continued up to the present.

The implementation of ^{14}C dates almost totally revolutionized the archaeological framework of southeast European prehistory, first by revealing that the previously assumed dates of the Balkan cultures were too recent. ^{14}C dates revealed that prehistoric levels are to be dated up to 3,000 years earlier than previously presumed, consequently invalidating the equation of Troy with Vinça. Revising the dates of the Balkan cultures by several thousand years, while keeping Anatolian dates of sites such as Alişar constant (M. Özdoğan 1996) led to the total collapse of all previous assumptions, including the diffusionist expansion model of Childe. This was soon replaced by an antidiffusionistic model, rejecting all impact originating from Anatolia and the Near East on the formation of European cultures, and, at the same time, propagating an autochthonous model for the emergence of prehistoric cultures in southeastern Europe, best exemplified in the phrase "ex balcanae lux." The antidiffusionistic model, after dominating the academic scene for about thirty years, has now been set aside, giving way to the return of the argument for Anatolian and Near Eastern origins for early European cultures. The commencement of new excavations in the western parts of Turkey, as well as developments in biogenetic studies (Bentley, Chikhi, and Price 2003) and paleolinguistics, has been instrumental in this change in thinking (Harris 2003; Pinhasi 2003; Renfrew 2002; Richards 2003; Richards et al. 2002; Zvelebil 2002, 2005). It is also interesting to note that while research in Turkey gained a new pace, work on the prehistory of the Balkans came to a standstill. At present, various new models have been suggested, ranging from waves of advance to moving frontiers to leapfrog movements to maritime expansion to infiltration to transfer of commodities and/or know how to other modes of expansion (Ammermann and Cavalli-Sforza 1984; Asouti 2007; Efe 2000; Nikolov 2002; Perlès 2005; Richards 2003; Runnels 2003; Sherratt 2004).

(p. 660) **An Assessment of the Recent Excavations**

Even though the area with which we are concerned covers the northwestern parts of Turkey, mainly eastern Thrace, which constitutes the main contact zone of southeastern Europe with Anatolia, it is necessary to have a supraregional overview to develop an understanding of the role played by this contact zone. There have been a number of recent volumes with extensive coverage on the Neolithic of Greece (Perlès 2001; Runnels 2001), Bulgaria (Bailey 2000; Nikolov 2003), and Turkey (M. Özdoğan and Başgelen 2007; Schoop 2005), as well as on the Bronze Age (Bailey and Panajotov 1995; Erkanal 2008; Nikolova 1996, 1999; Sagona and Zimansky 2009), revealing both detailed descriptions of the recently excavated sites with bibliographic references as well as a general assessment of the evidence, so I will specify and verify their significance instead of repeating this information. As noted previously, there have been no recent excavations in Greece and in the Aegean of prime concern for our understanding of the contact zone; thus, the conventional sequences of Thessaly and Macedonia continue to be the basis of the chronological framework, although more recent details are now available (Reingruber 2008; Wijnen 1982, 1993). Furthermore, the long-standing debate over the presence of an Aceramic period in Thessaly seems to be finally resolved since the presence of pottery sherds has been fully confirmed (Reingruber 2005). Recent work at Makri (Efstratiou 2006) has been more informative on the cultural landscape than on the cultural sequence. Likewise, in Bulgaria, the basic framework is still largely dependent on the Karanovo-Varna-Ezero sequence, with numerous excavations, mostly small scale, elaborating various details. It is worth noting the extensive work carried out at Drama (Lichardus 2000), Koprivets (Boyadzhiev 2006), Kovacevo (Lichardus-Itten et al. 2006), and Yablokovo (Leshtakov 2004, 2007), because they have provided ample evidence on the presence of a monochrome phase predating the painted pottery horizon of Karanovo I. Also worth noting is the work carried out at Derviş Ocak (Leshtakov 1997) that has revealed a Chalcolithic assemblage of the Pre-Cucuteni phase similar to what had been recovered previously in eastern Thrace. Concerning the Bronze Age in Bulgaria, the recovery of a rich Bronze Age cemetery at Dubene (Hristov 2005) is of interest in signifying the interface between the steppe and Anatolian metallurgical complexes. A group of imported Anatolian vessels recovered in a pit at Galabavo (Leshtakov 2002), though a limited assemblage, is worth considering, as it recalls the finds recovered at Kanlıgeçit in Eastern Thrace.

In spite of the stagnancy in prehistoric research in southeastern Europe, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of excavations covering the entire span of prehistory in Turkey during the past two decades. First, excavations at Ilıpınar in the İznik region, Aşağı Pınar in eastern Thrace, and Ulucak near İzmir have provided the basis for establishing the framework for the sequence from the early Neolithic up to the Middle Chalcolithic period, while also revealing extensive information on critical issues such as site formation, cultural assemblage, and (p. 661) subsistence patterns (see Roodenberg, chapter 44 in this volume). Second, large numbers of other Neolithic excavations, including Hoca Çeşme, Yarımburgaz, Toptepe, and Yenikapı in eastern

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Thrace; Pendik, Barçın, and Aktopraklık in the eastern Marmara region; and Gürpınar, Yeşilova, Ege Gübre, Çukuriçi Höyük, Araplar, Çine Tepecik, and Heybeli Dedecik in western Anatolia have provided ample data on regional variants of the Neolithic cultures along the contact zone between Anatolia and southeastern Europe. In this respect, it is also worth noting excavations such as Çatal Höyük, Tepecik Çiftlik, Köşk Höyük, and Gelveri further east in central Anatolia, and Bademağacı in the Lake District that have revealed valuable new data from the core area of primary Neolithisation concerning the roots of the westward-moving Neolithic assemblages (see Özbaşaran, chapter 5, and Hodder, chapter 43 in this volume).

Troy still stands as the key site in understanding the Bronze Age cultures of northwestern Turkey. Recently resumed excavations at the site, while upgrading our knowledge through implementation of new technologies, have also drawn a new picture of second millennium B.C.E. state formation (see Jablonka, chapter 32 in this volume). Additionally, a number of recent large-scale excavations in western Anatolia, more specifically at sites such as Beşiktepe, Hacılartepi, Seyitömer, Küllüoba, Bademağacı, Yenibademli, Limantepe, and Baklatepe, have all revealed ample new data on the process of urbanization particular to the western sections of Anatolia and the Aegean (Çevik 2007; M. Özdoğan 2006). Among the later sites of the Bronze Age, the recovery of Minoan and Mycenaean horizons at Miletus, Ephesos, and Panaztepe has revived the discussion on the second millennium B.C.E. historical geography of western Anatolia (Latacz 2002), but at the same time has triggered a new debate on the ethnocultural identity of Troy (Hawkins and Easton 1996; Korfmann 1998; and Bryce, chapter 15 in this volume).

During the past two decades or so, there have also been significant achievements in understanding changes in the natural environment, especially its impact on cultural events (Wagner, Pernicka, and Uerpmann 2003; Yanko-Hombach et al. 2007), the most notable of which have derived from the salvage excavations at Yenikapı within the urban area of İstanbul (Kızıltan 2007). Here, the recovery of Neolithic habitation deposits at 9.5 m below the present level of the Sea of Marmara have, for the first time, provided concrete data on much debated issues, such as the transformation of the Marmara basin from a lacustrine environment to marine conditions. Likewise, due to the excellent preservation of organic material at Yenikapı, it has been possible to recover wooden artifacts, containers as well as plants and trees, thereby drawing an unprecedented picture of the natural habitat (Algan et al. 2007, 2009).

At present there is an overflow of new information from all over western Turkey to such a degree that it is no longer possible to work with the customary generalizations. The recent evidence is forcing the limits of our conventional knowledge, necessitating not only a new setup of the cultural sequence but also the development of new definitions. However, it is evident that for a proper assessment some time is necessary for these new data to sink in.

Cultural Sequence: an Overview

The Neolithic Period

It is now evident that the Neolithic way of life was introduced to the northwest after being fully developed elsewhere. This conclusion brings up two essential questions: were there Mesolithic communities in the region when the Neolithic communities arrived, and if there were, what was the mode of interaction among these two culturally distinct groups? In the present state of our knowledge, the evidence for Mesolithic habitation is mainly confined to the coastal areas, especially along the littoral areas of the Black Sea. A number of Mesolithic sites, known as the Ağaçlı group (Gatsov and Özdoğan 1994), are distinguished by a micro-blade industry akin to the so-called Epi-Gravette complexes of the circum-Pontic region. Besides the coastal strip along the Black Sea, sites of this group have also been recorded, though more sporadically, along the Sea of Marmara and northern Aegean. As no Mesolithic sites have yet been recovered from the inland areas, it seems possible to surmise that the Mesolithic communities were dependent on marine resources, though it should also be noted that the Mesolithic coastlines were much farther away than the present ones due to low sea levels of that time. Here, it is worth noting that both the present Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea, being cut off from the Aegean, were still in lacustrine conditions much lower than open seas.

The time of initial introduction of Neolithic communities in northwestern Turkey is rather difficult to determine with any precision at present, though there are some rather vague indications that the initial dispersal of a Neolithic way of life from the core areas in the east might have begun earlier than previously believed. The presence of the final stages of a Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN) stage are indicated by sites such as Çalca and Muslu Çeşme (M. Özdoğan and Gatsov 1998). All of these sites have revealed a lithic assemblage that is notably different from the Mesolithic Ağaçlı industry. Because no pottery has been recovered at those sites, it seems plausible to consider them indicators of the earliest Neolithic expansion taking place prior to the introduction of pottery. Furthermore, the recovery of a naviform core and associated blades at Küçük Çekmece, west of İstanbul (Aydıngün 2009), also seems to support this observation. Nevertheless, it also seems evident that the initial movement of the Neolithic way of life into the northwest was rather thin and sporadic; how far west into the Balkans it reached is, at present, not clear.

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Figure 29.1 . Major Neolithic assemblages of eastern Thrace. (a) Early monochrome pottery of the eastern Marmara region from Fikirtepe Classic Phase; bowls and an incised decorated rectangular vessel. (b) Early monochrome pottery of the eastern Marmara region from Hoca Çeşme Phase III-IV; red or black burnished wares. (c) Eastern Thrace pottery of Karanovo I-II stage from Aşağı Pınar layer 6. (d) Eastern Marmara region Yarımburgaz layer 4 pottery assemblage with incised, excised, impressed decoration.

There is more reliable evidence on the establishment of Pottery Neolithic communities, which introduced basic components of the Neolithic package, such as village life and architecture, pottery, ground and polished stones, cultivated cereals, and domestic animals (figure 29.1). Actually the presence of this early pottery horizon has been known since the 1950s as the Fikirtepe culture through the excavations at Fikirtepe and Pendik (M. Özdoğan 1983). However, its chronological position within the Early Neolithic

(French 1967; Mellaart 1955; M. Özdoğan 1983) to Late (p. 663) Chalcolithic (Bittel 1970) periods was disputed. Recent work at sites such as Ilıpınar, Barçın, Menteşe and Aktopraklık, all located in the southeastern parts of the Marmara region, have now firmly defined the chronological position of the Fikirtepe culture in the second half of the 7th millennium B.C.E. The earliest available radiocarbon date for the Fikirtepe culture thus far, 6400 cal B.C.E., comes from Menteşe (Roodenberg et al. 2003). Given that Menteşe does not represent the earliest Fikirtepe Phase, it is possible to surmise a date around 6500-6600 B.C.E. for the beginning of this culture. Likewise, excavations such as Bademağacı, Ulucak, and Yeşilova in western Anatolia indicate that the dispersal of the Pottery Neolithic from its core area in central Anatolia had taken place by the beginning of the seventh millennium B.C.E. The latest dates for the Fikirtepe culture are around 5900 B.C.E., indicating that it was of long duration. Through this span of time, the Fikirtepe culture developed gradually, with no indication of a break or a clear distinctive line among its evolutionary stages. The earlier phases of the culture, also known as the (p. 664) Archaic Fikirtepe stage, are easily recognizable with pottery featuring a monochrome dark brownish to black surface that is highly burnished and consists mainly of hole-mouth profiled jars with heavy flat lugs placed horizontally.

During the next stage, known as Classical Fikirtepe, though most of the early elements continue, there is a gradual increase of red burnished wares with S-curved profiles and incised decoration. Rectangular vessels, the so-called cult tables, are common in both phases. Prestige items are rather rare and confined to bone spoons and belt hooks. The

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most particular feature of the Fikirtepe group is the lithic industry, mainly consisting of flint with a random usage of obsidian from undetermined sources. The lithic industry is characterized by fine bullet cores and pressure-flaked bladelets along with end, keeled, and round scrapers. Backed blades and geometric microliths are also present in lesser amounts. The lithic assemblage of the Fikirtepe culture differs notably from both the preceding Ağaçlı group, which shows an absence of pressure flaking and bullet cores (Gatsov 2005), and from the later Neolithic cultures, which lack micro-blades and are characterized by large blades (Gatsov 2009).

Assuming that the Fikirtepe culture represents the first wave of endemic movement of Neolithic communities into the contact zone between Anatolia and southeastern Europe, its interaction with local Mesolithic communities is of prime interest. In regions such as southern Marmara, where no Mesolithic sites are known, the earliest Fikirtepe habitation layers reveal the use of mudbrick architecture and buildings with rectangular plans, whereas in the region around İstanbul, where the most intensive sites of the Mesolithic Ağaçlı group existed, Fikirtepe settlements are comprised entirely of round or ovoid huts made of wattle and daub. It is highly significant that while the pottery, bone, and lithic assemblages are identical in both regions, those having rectangular mudbrick architecture are strictly dependent on farming, with very little evidence for hunting, whereas those with round wattle and daub houses have a mixed subsistence pattern, with extensive indications of hunting, fishing, and mollusk collecting along with some domestic animals. Likewise, grinding stones, and other ground and polished stone artifacts, though present, are rather scarce in the latter region. Yet another significant difference is in the burial customs; the former, as recovered at Ilıpınar and Aktopraklık, have extramural cemeteries (Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2008), whereas all the sites around İstanbul, including Fikirtepe and Pendik, have intramural burials below the floors of the huts. It seems possible to surmise that sites along the southern Marmara represent immigrant farmers, bringing with them a new way of life, with those around İstanbul involving the merging of local Mesolithic communities with the newcomers, either by living together or more possibly voluntarily adapting certain aspects of the Neolithic package, resulting in a mixed subsistence pattern but at the same time continuing their main mode of living. How far west into the Balkans the Fikirtepe culture expanded is not clear; the recovery of two sites with a Fikirtepe type of pottery in the Dardanelles indicates that there was at least a westerly expansion along the southern coast of Marmara. In Thrace, only a handful of typical early Fikirtepe sherds are known. Thus it is possible to assume that after encountering the local (p. 665) Mesolithic communities in the region of the Bosphorus, the pace of expansion either stopped or slowed down.

The immediate successor of the Fikirtepe culture is the Yarımburgaz 4 culture, initially recorded at the cave of Yarımburgaz in İstanbul, but now attested at a number of habitation sites, including Ilıpınar, Yenikapı, Demircihöyük, and Aktopraklık. The Yarımburgaz culture, basically covering the same region as Fikirtepe, is easily distinguished by its elaborately decorated vessels depicting complex textile-like designs. Regarding the Yarımburgaz 4 culture, the ongoing excavations at Yenikapı in İstanbul—which have revealed a number of extramural cremation burials, some in pots, others in

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cremation pits, together with well-preserved wooden artifacts and vessels—are significant. Among the wooden artifacts, a tray, a spear, two bows, and a harpoon-like object are considered the earliest examples of such items. The practice of cremation, the earliest known in Turkey and the Near East, is of interest, as a few cremation burials have also been reported from some contemporary sites in the Balkans (Bacvarov 2004). The Yarımburgaz culture continues more or less in the same region until about 5600 B.C.E., during which time a linear pattern of decoration on ceramics developed.

As has been briefly noted above, the primary introduction of Neolithic elements into Thrace could have taken place as early as the final stages of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. It also seems possible that this primary expansion of the Neolithic model continued up to the early stages of the Pottery Neolithic, though this expansion appears to have been very random. However, following this initial stage, there is a clear distinction between the events that took place in the southern and eastern Marmara regions and those occurring in Thrace, indicating a virtual borderline somewhere between sixty and eighty kilometers west of İstanbul. In Thrace, the earliest secure evidence of Neolithic habitation is in the so-called monochrome phase, as recovered at Hoca Çeşme Phase IV dating to 6400 cal B.C.E. and Aşağı Pınar Layer 8. The pottery of this stage is extremely fine, jet black or red colored, lustrously burnished, and is reminiscent of the so-called Dark Faced Monochrome Wares of central Anatolia. The composition of the cultural assemblage is notably different from that of the Fikirtepe and Yarımburgaz cultures. The difference is evident in the types of pottery vessels but more significantly in the lithic assemblage. Sites in Thrace totally lack micro-blades, bullet cores, and the pressure flaking technique. In fact, lithic material is rather scarce, with the only detectable artifacts being large blades. Pottery decoration is also rare and confined to shallow fluting, light incision, and applied motifs. Some of the applied designs are conspicuously similar to those of Köşk Höyük and Tepecik Çiftlik further east in the core area of Neolithisation (see Özbaşaran, chapter 5 in this volume). The settlements are rather small, consisting mainly of round buildings with wooden post structures. At least at Hoca Çeşme, the settlement is encircled by a massive stone wall, reinforced with a palisade.

At present, it is not possible to define the trajectory of the monochrome culture before reaching Thrace, though it clearly signifies an endemic movement. The location of Hoca Çeşme on the Aegean littoral, and the recovery of similar assemblages in the region of İzmir, strongly suggest a maritime route following the Aegean coast. (p. 666) Further to the west, in Bulgaria, there are at least four sites, Koprivets, Krainitsii, the Polyanitsa plateau, and Yablokovo, where a pre-Karanovo I monochrome phase has been noted (Todorova 2003), implying that this wave of migration extended up to the Danube around 6200 cal B.C.E. if not earlier. However, it is also evident that it was not a dense movement.

To sum up the section on the Neolithisation process, it is evident that it was a much more complex and multifaceted event than considered previously. First, it was not an instantaneous event. On the contrary, it extended through a very long period of time,

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spanning a millennium, taking place in different waves of expansion, each one with its own trajectory and pace. Second, it is also evident that each wave had its own selection of the Neolithic package. Finally, and probably more significant, is the fact that different modes of Neolithisation such as endemic movement, colonization, acculturation, adaptation, and transfer of technologies and commodities, took place simultaneously. Thus in retrospect, all previous hypotheses on the expansion of the Neolithic way of life, regardless of the controversies, seem to have a measure of legitimacy.

The Transition from the Neolithic to the Early Chalcolithic

The dividing line between the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic that has been set for the Near Eastern cultural sequence has no validity either in western Anatolia or in southeastern Europe, where there is an apparent continuum from the Late Neolithic up to the end of the Early Chalcolithic marked by the extensive presence of painted pottery (see Schoop, chapter 7 in this volume, for extensive discussion on the Chalcolithic in this region). During this period a new, much more intensive endemic movement from central Anatolia to the west took place, filling in the previously uninhabited regions from western Anatolia up to the Danube. From the Lake District in Turkey up to the Danube, over a thousand sites, all using highly burnished painted pottery, seem to have suddenly emerged (M. Özdoğan 2008a). These have been grouped under different cultural names, such as Hacilar, Sesklo, Karanovo I-II, Kremikovci, Gradesnitsa, Starcevo, Körös, and Cris, primarily according to differences in the stylistic composition of the painted decoration in the pottery assemblage. In a general overview, ignoring for the moment the presence of certain differences, they share common elements that are too specific to be considered coincidental. Among these are the extensive presence of steatopygic female figurines, decorated cult tables, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels, stamp seals or the so-called pintaderas, festooned bone objects, bone spoons and spatulas, ear studs, marble or clay bracelets, and other objects. Almost all settlements of this stage display elements of typical farming villages composed of either agglomerated or closely placed massive rectangular structures. In regions closer to the core area, such as western Anatolia, the Aegean, and mainland Greece including Macedonia, the structures in the earliest layers are of mudbrick, occasionally with inner-buttressed walls. It is also worth noting that domed ovens, extensive storage facilities, and especially clay bins are among the markers of this stage.

(p. 667) The rather sudden appearance of so many habitation sites in this extensive geography, and the similarities in their material assemblage, indicate that the movement was rather dense, organized, and rapid. It is also worth noting that farther away from the core region, in the Balkans and in Thrace, some of the typical features become less prominent or stand as remnants of social memory. In this respect, the mudbrick gives way to wooden posts reinforced with wattle and daub, while the ratio and quality of fine painted wares drops, suggesting increased presence of local communities.

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What triggered this massive wave of advance is not easy to discern; until recently it was assumed that overexploitation of the habitat by PPNB communities had resulted in an environmental disaster, initiating a massive migratory movement from the core regions (Rollefson and Rollefson 1990). However, there is now growing evidence that this turmoil might have resulted from a climatic event called the “8.2 or the Labrador climatic event,” caused by a sudden overflow of the largest glacial lake of Agassiz, which drained catastrophically into the ocean due to the collapse of the Labrador ice barrier. This event, which took place about 6200 B.C.E., had major consequences on the ecological system, lasting for about 300 years. It is also postulated that during this period, the Balkans, Anatolian peninsula, and eastern Mediterranean lived through unstable climatic conditions mainly marked by climatic oscillations, disturbing the hydromorphological conditions, with years of drought broken occasionally by heavy floods, as marked by increased swamps in central Anatolia and extensive colluvial deposits in the Levant. The fact that the time of Neolithic expansion coincides with this climatic event (Alley and Ágústsdóttir 2005; Berger and Guillaine 2008; Roberts and Rosen 2009) is highly suggestive of an environmental impact that triggered mass movement from the core areas to the west. More evidence is needed to discern whether such movement was initiated solely by changing environmental conditions or whether it also involved some sort of a social turbulence.

In Thrace this stage is best represented at Aşağı Pınar in Layers 7 and 6, which reveal identical assemblages to Karanovo I and II, respectively, and indicate close ties between the two regions. At present Hoca Çeşme, where similar cultural layers have been noted in Phases III-II, is the only site of this culture located along the Aegean coast. On the other hand, understanding the relation between Thrace and the eastern Marmara region during this period is rather difficult. Chronologically, the Karanovo I-II horizon is contemporary with the Yarımburgaz 4 culture. However, at Aşağı Pınar, the easternmost known site of this culture, there is no single find reminiscent of the Yarımburgaz culture, nor is there any evidence around the Bosphorus for any painted ceramics of Karanovo type. The causes of such a strict borderline are unclear.

The Middle Chalcolithic Period



Figure 29.2 . Middle Chalcolithic pottery assemblage of eastern Thrace. (a) Toptepe assemblage of southern Marmara; pottery recovered in the building of layer 5 at Toptepe, depicting typical features of Toptepe culture with dull burnished micaceous slip, light incised decoration, and carinated forms. (b) Eastern Thrace, Yarımburgaz layer 2-3 assemblage, local white-filled incised wares, together with Toptepe-like vessel. (c) Northern parts of eastern Thrace, pottery assemblage of Aşağı Pınar layers 5-3, depicting a mixture of Karanovo III-IV and Toptepe styles. The anthropomorphic vessel on the right with human figures in relief is from layer 3.

An overall assessment for the Middle Chalcolithic period suggests that by 5600-5500 cal B.C.E., there is a marked change, both in cultural structures and in the (p. 668) material evidence (also see Schoop, chapter 7, and Düring, chapter 36 in this volume, for discussion), throughout the entire region covered by the previous painted pottery cultures. The last architectural layer of the previous stage is, at most sites, heavily burned, with some sites being deserted. Numerous new settlements appear, even in environmental zones consisting of high plateaus, which were not

previously preferred. This suggests an increase in population. By this new stage, with the exception of some large plains such as the Konya Plain and Thessaly, red painted pottery gives way to dark colored, incised, or grooved decorated pottery. The new pottery assemblage (figure 29.2) now comprises more complex forms with tall-necked jars and sharply carinated shapes with heavy handles. Even though in the Balkans a number of local names have been attributed to this new cultural formation, it is more conveniently addressed as the Vinča culture. Where and how this culture originated is one of the most debated problems of Balkan history (p. 669) (M. Özdoğan 1993; Srejović and Tasić 1990). Some claim it developed locally in Anatolia and then dispersed to southeastern Europe (Efe 1990), whereas others have argued, to the contrary, for an origin in western Thrace (Nikolov 2004). Yet another theory suggests that it was introduced as an invasion from another region (Mellaart 1960). Nevertheless, it is not presently possible to discern an acceptable solution to this problem.

Regardless, at all three sites in the Marmara region (Aşağı Pınar Layer 5/6, Aktopraklık, and Ilıpınar V) where this transition could be detected, the heavily burned architectural layer of the preceding period, which consisted of rectangular houses, of either mudbrick or wattle and daub, was replaced by a layer with oval hut-like structures containing semi-sunken floors (see Roodenberg, chapter 44 in this volume). Even though this evidence is highly suggestive of an intrusion or invasion by an alien group, the pottery associated

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with these pit dwellings reflects an amalgamation of the early and late traditions, indicating that at least some of the craftsmen remained in this period. However, by 5350 cal B.C.E., with the completion of the so-called process of Vinçazation, components of the previous culture disappear completely. This period is represented at Aşağı Pınar in Layers 5–2 (Parzinger and Schwarzberg 2005), and at Yarımburgaz 1, and Hoca Çeşme Phase I (Bertram and Karul 2005). At these sites, the cultural profile is almost totally identical with that of the Veselinovo phase of Bulgaria; the steatopygous female figurines of the Neolithic period are now replaced by cylindrically shaped standing figures with small breasts. Throughout this stage, there are a number of distinct, locally developing traditions, among which the Toptepe group, named after the type site on the northern coastline of the Sea of Marmara (M. Özdoğan, Miyake, and Özbaşaran-Dede 1991) and related to the Paradimi group in Greece, seems to have expanded along the northern coastline of the Aegean.

In the later stages of this period, western and central Anatolia and the Balkans, once denominated as the “Balkano-Anatolian Culture Complex” (Garašanin 1997, 2000), seems to have split by the turn of the fifth to the fourth millennium B.C.E., with each area developing independently. Thus, the Sea of Marmara by the end of the Vinça Period becomes a cultural barrier separating southeastern Europe from Anatolia.

Late Chalcolithic Period

The fourth millennium B.C.E. is a period when important developments took place both in the Near East and in southeastern Europe, the former going through a rapid process of urban revolution and state formation, and the latter developing a very complex sophisticated culture known as the Cucuteni-Gumelnitsa group. In northern Bulgaria this epoch is highlighted by the rich cemetery finds of Varna and Durankulak, which now have secure dates extending down to 4200 cal B.C.E. (Pernicka et al. 1997). Although similarities between the Varna culture and that of İkiztepe on the central coastal region of the Black Sea strongly imply close ties between the northern Balkans and central Anatolia, the lack of similar evidence (p. 670) from the western parts of the Anatolian peninsula suggests a maritime connection through the coastal areas of the Black Sea rather than by way of a land route. The cultural formation further to the south of the Cucuteni-Gumelnitsa culture is known as the Karanovo VI-Gumelnitsa-Kocadermen culture in Bulgaria. This corresponds to the period when most of the mounds in Bulgaria increased in height. The only exception to this is the Meriç (Maritsa-Evros) basin near the present political border with Turkey. Nevertheless, Karanovo VI-Gumelnitsa sites are extremely rare in Greece and Turkish Thrace; when they do occur, they are extremely small, with no indication of any complexity. Likewise, the stratigraphic sequence at Aşağı Pınar terminates with the early stages of the Karanovo V period, which is marked by incised-grooved decorated wares of the so-called Maritsa culture.

Pottery typical of early Gumelnitsa type is known in eastern Thrace only from pits at Kanlıgeçit and Toptepe. Furthermore, surface survey of the region also indicates a lack of sites from the Gumelnitsa horizon. On the other hand, a very distinctive pottery, known as

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the Kocatepe group in eastern Thrace, can be dated to this period. The Kocatepe group primarily consists of cylindrical pot stands with elaborate curvilinear and/or linear motifs (M. Özdoğan 2004:figs. 1-2) reminiscent of the Pre-Cucuteni group of Moldavia. The scarcity of sites containing this distinctive pottery is noteworthy. It has been recorded at only a few sites scattered throughout eastern Thrace, all of which are either small, one-period, flat sites or large deep pits and are best known from Kanlıgeçit, Helvacı Şaban, and Kocatepe (M. Özdoğan 2004). Outside of Turkish Thrace, this pottery is known only from Derviş Ocak in Bulgaria (Leshtakov 1997), which is located in close proximity to the Turkish border with Bulgaria. It is also of significance that during the entire span of the fourth millennium B.C.E., there are no other sites or any material related to the Late Chalcolithic cultures that had emerged on the Anatolian side of the Sea of Marmara. This clearly indicates that the Marmara region became a cultural boundary for the expanding urban cultures of Anatolia during this period. It seems justifiable to consider that in this period Thrace was a buffer zone between two developing cultural centers, Tripolye-Cucuteni in the northern Balkans and the proto-urban Anatolian-Near Eastern center of southwest Asia (M. Özdoğan 2004). In this respect, note also that underwater research in Bulgaria has revealed the presence of at least a dozen submerged Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age sites along the Black Sea coast (Draganov 1995), strongly suggesting that the water exchange through the Bosphorus might have been interrupted for some time, probably due to a tectonic event, thus exposing an extensive coastal shelf in the western parts of the Black Sea providing an easy land route between the İkiztepe region and Varna.

The Early Bronze Age

The transition from the Late Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age in northwestern Anatolia, as in most parts of the Near East, marks the gradual development of urban centers. On the other hand, what happened in the Balkans is extremely complicated.

(p. 671) It is evident that the flourishing culture of the Gumelnitsa-Cucuteni groups had collapsed somewhere around 3500 B.C.E., possibly due to a massive invasion coming from the Eurasian steppes, putting an end to sedentary life, highly developed metallurgy, and the elaborately decorated pottery of the Gumelnitsa culture. This period of turbulence is known under different names in the Balkans, including Çernovoda, Salcutsa, and others; it is easily recognized by its rather coarse faced pottery. In eastern Thrace, this type of pottery has been recovered from Tilkiburnu (M. Özdoğan 1982), indicating that the impact of this event reached this region. Nevertheless, no indication of intrusive elements can be identified as having come from the south side of the Sea of Marmara.

The development of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) cultures on the Anatolian side is well attested through a number of excavations, with Troy still standing as the key reference site (see Jablonka, chapter 32 in this volume). During the earliest stages, EBA I-II, there are numerous sites using dark burnished handmade pottery throughout northwestern Anatolia. There is a marked change by EBA III, with earlier sites clustering into larger centers. During this stage, fine burnished red slipped wares appear, mainly as prestige vessels and plates, together with occasional use of the potter's wheel. In Thrace,

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however, sites like those in Anatolia, containing pottery of Troy or of Yortan types, are firmly restricted to the coastal band along the Sea of Marmara. Of these, Menekşe Çatağı is the only one that has been excavated (A. Özdoğan and Işın 2004). Further inland, both the types of sites as well as the pottery assemblages are identical with those in Bulgaria, reflecting local cultures grouped under different names, but conventionally known as the Ezero culture. Throughout the third millennium B.C.E. in Thrace and in most of the Balkans, the cultural process was notably different from that of Anatolia and the Aegean region, being based on animal husbandry (M. Özdoğan 2002). Settlement sites exist, but they are neither intensive nor show any hierarchical organization. The potter's wheel is not introduced until late in the Iron Age. The presence of numerous burial mounds or kurgan-type burials, as well as flint and obsidian arrow points, further supports the presence of steppic elements throughout Thrace during this period (Hristov 2005; Panajotov 1989). However, this does not imply that there was no contact with Anatolia and the Aegean. Some prestige vessels, including the so-called *depas amphikypellon* and metal objects, seem to have been traded. Additionally, the presence of metallic forms and pottery vessels imitating Yortan types, particularly during the Mihalic phase of the Bulgarian Early Bronze Age, exemplifies such contacts.

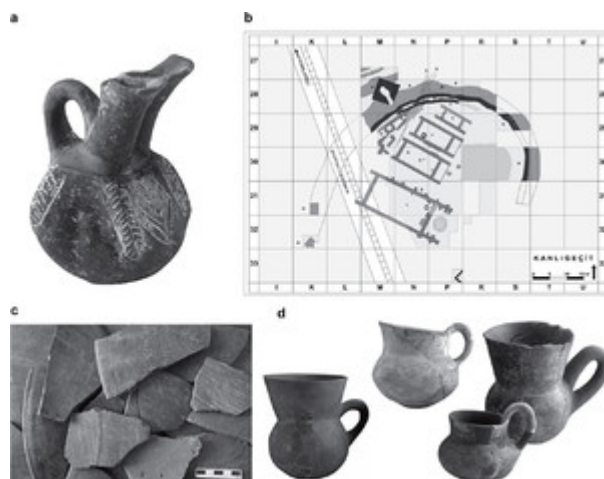


Figure 29.3 . Early Bronze Age at Kanlıgeçit. (a). Double-spouted vessel of Yortan type from phase 2, early. (b) Plan of Kanlıgeçit citadel, phase 1–2. (c) Plain or red-slipped wheelmade plates, phase 2. (d) Juglets from phase 2.

Presently, Kanlıgeçit (M. Özdoğan 2003; M. Özdoğan and Parzinger 2000; Parzinger and Özdoğan 1996) in eastern Thrace stands as the most unusual, and intriguing, Early Bronze Age site in Thrace (figure 29.3). This site, founded during EBA I and continuing into EBA II as a simple village, was constructed entirely of wattle and daub structures like all other sites in Bulgaria. However, by the beginning of EBA III, at

around 2400 cal B.C.E., it had been completely remodeled in the Anatolian fashion with a fortified citadel comprised of mudbrick buildings with stone foundations. Four megara have also been recovered from this site, with the largest one measuring about twenty-six meters long, almost as large as the largest megaron (p. 672) in Troy. In addition to a citadel layout based on an Anatolian urban model, about 15 percent of the pottery consists of Anatolian red slipped and/or wheelmade wares in the form of the so-called Trojan plates. What is more striking is the extensive presence of domestic horse bones, which make up almost 15 percent of the total faunal remains (Benecke 2002, 2009). Whether Kanlıgeçit represents a colonial movement of Anatolian EBA cultures or is the

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reflection of a local élite imitating Anatolian urban centers by bringing in craftsmen is not clear. Nevertheless, it evidently rested on a trade route, which, considering the presence of horses, must be the forerunner of the caravan trade of the early second millennium B.C.E. (Efe 2007). Presumably, the site of Galabovo in western Thrace, which yielded Anatolian and Syrian imports (Leshtakov 2002) must also have been on this route. The Kanlıgeçit citadel was destroyed around 2050 B.C.E., and no further settlement took place anywhere in eastern Thrace in the Early Bronze Age.

The Middle and Late Bronze Age

During the rise of states and empires in Anatolia and in the Aegean, when the Hittites, Mycenaeans (Mountjoy 1997), and their allies were fighting with each other for (p. 673) the procurement of new territories (Niemeier 1998), Thrace remained almost devoid of any settled occupation, strongly suggesting the presence of nomadic tribes. Presumably some of the burial mounds date to this period. Accordingly, there was almost no detectable contact throughout the second millennium B.C.E. between the two sides of the Sea of Marmara. The only find attributable to this period is a metal hoard from Kozmandere, Şarköy (Harmankaya 1995), consisting of 140 metal objects, including a Mycenaean sword and some Anatolian-style bronze axes.

Early Iron Age and Middle Iron Age



Figure 29.4 . The Early Iron Age. (a) A megalith from the highlands of Istranca region. (b) Four-spouted ceremonial vessel with cord-impressed decoration from the burial mound at Taşlıcabayır. (c) Vessels from Taşlıcabayır burial mound with cord-impressed, incised, or fluted decoration. (d) A megalith from Lalapaşa-Edirne region.

By the beginning of the Early Iron Age, Thrace is conventionally considered to be the gateway for migrant groups, including the Phrygians, moving from the Balkans to Anatolia (Tuna, Aktüre, and Lynch 1998; see Sams, chapter 27, and Kealhofer and Grave, chapter 18 this volume). In this regard, the most concrete evidence is the presence of the so-called knobbed ware in layer VIIB2 at Troy (Koppenhöfer 2002), which is identical to the Early Iron Age pottery from the east Balkans and is more

conveniently known as the Babadağ or Psenichevo group. Surface survey in Thrace has revealed hundreds of sites, all of which are rather small and hamlet-like, containing this type of pottery, with the easternmost site actually located within the city of İstanbul

(Fıratlı 1973). The pottery of this period (figure 29.4), besides occasionally having horn-like projections, is characterized by cord-impressed, incised, and fluted decoration, with most vessels being black burnished. Furthermore, the distribution of these sites, with almost all occurring along river terraces or in low plains, is suggestive of a peaceful environment. It is also noteworthy that this type of pottery, so abundant all over Thrace and Bulgaria, is virtually absent elsewhere in Anatolia. The only exceptions to this are Troy and the small island of Avşa in the Sea of Marmara. Accordingly, it seems that if any group moved from the Balkans to Anatolia, it must have done so prior to the beginning of the Early Iron Age. Besides these small settlements, this period in Thrace is marked by the presence of numerous kurgan-like burial mounds and megalithic monuments (figure 29.4). All of these have been extensively documented for Bulgaria (Fol 1982). In eastern Thrace, excavations at the burial mound of Taşlıcabayır (M. Özdoğan 1987) have revealed the full range of the pottery assemblage. A sacrificial pit was discovered at Menekşe Çatağı (Erim-Özdoğan 2003), and the dolmen-like megalithic monument at Lalapaşa has been excavated (Akman 1999, 2010). These have all revealed pottery of a similar tradition. This culture seems to have continued up to the seventh century B.C.E. without any interference.

The Middle Iron Age sees the formation of Thracian culture. The cord-decorated knobbed ware gave way to coarse surfaced wares. Presently, no settlement sites are known, but numerous tumuli and sanctuaries have been recorded. Of these, the only sanctuary to have been excavated is at Aşağı Pınar (M. Özdoğan 2008b), where numerous sacrificial and votive pits have been discovered within a precinct encircled by a deep ditch. The invasion of the region from Persia seems to have put an end to this phase and to the prehistoric cultures.

(p. 674) **Conclusion**

This chapter presented a conspectus on the prehistory of northwestern Turkey, mainly focusing on the role played by eastern Thrace at the intersection of Anatolia, the Aegean, and the Balkans. Indeed, this chapter could have been composed differently by following alternative trajectories—focusing on problems of stratigraphic sequences, changing technologies, subsistence patterns, or environmental concerns. Rather, the main substance has been to focus on the question of whether Thrace was a bridge or a barrier between the east and the west (French 1986), while acknowledging that there are substantial lacunae in our knowledge on every issue noted herein. Accordingly, what is reported here should not be considered conclusive, but more as general overview. Nevertheless, at least it is clear that the answer was much more complicated than implied by the question.

(p. 675) There are major problems in assessing the evidence from northwestern Turkey and the region known as eastern Thrace, first because it constitutes the buffer zone between distinct cultural entities: Anatolia, the Aegean, Balkan, and Pontic regions.

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Moreover, it acts as the narrow bottleneck to any sort of supraregional interaction, inevitably merging distinct cultures.

As has been noted, there are many cultural components easily recognizable in areas adjacent to Thrace; once they enter the Thracian region, however, they are altered before transmission to other regions to fit their distinct environmental conditions. Accordingly, tracing the origins of cultural entities in eastern Thrace is much more difficult than elsewhere, and it should also be considered that they are occasionally late or delayed reflections. Thus, it is evident that a narrative covering some 6,000 years in a buffer region is apt to be of a general nature, avoiding details and controversial issues. Thus, note that the actual picture is much more complex and multifaceted than what has been depicted here, and that to every observation, it is possible to find contradicting data; nevertheless, the present evidence allows insight into the position of Thrace in its supraregional framework. To conclude, evidently eastern Thrace, particularly in the process of Neolithisation and urbanization, is peripheral to Anatolia and to the Near East, but at the same time it becomes the core area of the European cultures. In this respect, in evaluating “core” and “periphery,” it is necessary to use different criteria depending on the regions under consideration.

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