

The Destruction of Cultural Heritage and the Suggestions on Preventing This Destruction: Turkey Model

Özdemir Kocak and Nuriye K ülahlı

Abstract—We have been doing archaeological surveys in the west of Turkey for 17 years. Also, in this region we carried out excavations in “Dede Mezari”, MBA Cemetery for five years. During these studies, it has been found out that the thousands of years old sites were destroyed by illegal digs and agricultural activities. The most important way to prevent these ruins to raise the awareness of the security units and local community. It should be explained that the sites and the works that have come out of here have universal character; they should be protected and the archaeologists, art historians or historians who are expert on their fields can do excavations here. It should be emphasized that when the studies are carried out on a scientific level, the results will make a contribution to the development of the region, as well. Because people should be gathered from the local community in order to carry out these studies and certain amount of money will be paid for them. Moreover, the historical area will be brought in tourism and the works extracted from here will be exhibited in museums. So a long-termed and permanent source bearing no risk has been produced. These informative studies which are for local administrators and local people should be as regular workshops, conferences or field practice. It is crucial that the protection awareness of the archaeological sites should be gained at early ages.

Index Terms—Archaeological sites, illegal digs, the preservation of the ancient sites.

I. THE DESTRUCTION PROBLEM OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The earliest settlements in Turkey date back to the Prehistoric periods. From the first cave settlements in Turkey on, people have consistently lived for tens of thousands of years round [1]. The geographical location of this country, the asset of water supplies and fertile lands have been effective on

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Özdemir Koçak is with Selcuk University Faculty of Letters, Department of History, Selcuk University Campus 42130 Konya, Turkey (e-mail: okocak@selcuk.edu.tr, ozdekocak@hotmail.com, okocak@selcuk.edu.tr).

Nuriye K ülahlı is with Selcuk University School of Foreign Languages, Selcuk University Campus 42130 Konya, Turkey (e-mail: nuriyebahce@hotmail.com, nuriye.kulahli@selcuk.edu.tr).

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this fact. Thus, from past to present many sites (settlement, castle, tumulus, cemetery, temple etc.) have remained in Anatolia. If you walk around in any village or town, it is possible for you to see at least one mound and cemetery or ancient settlement remains nearby. It is regarded as a cultural wealth. Yet, this wealth brings along some responsibilities, as well. These are as follows:

1. Documenting of these culture assets,
2. Informing of the related units,
3. Providing their preservation,
4. Evaluating scientifically,
5. Advertising or bringing into tourism.

However, this situation is sometimes difficult as these sites are in substantial amount, they are scattered and many of them are in the regions which are hard to reach. The main problem is probably the damage of these sites that have reached from thousands of years up to now. In Turkey this damage generally happens in two ways: The agricultural activities and illegal excavations [2], [3].

The destruction made in the mounds and cemeteries leads to irrecoverable damages. Also, it becomes impossible to excavate these old sites and the remains here in a good condition. So, the works that may be safely exhibited in the areas where they have been found out and in the museums disappears. Furthermore, some of the archaeological remains gained from the illegal excavations are illicitly taken out of the country. This necessitates the complex legal procedures to take the ruins to their original habitats as they cannot be preserved in their authentic places.

II. THE SAMPLES OF DESTRUCTION IN THE INLAND WESTERN ANATOLIA

For 17 years on, we have been making surveys in the region called inland western Anatolia region of Turkey (Map 1). During these studies, we have broadly examined around 298 mounds and cemeteries the oldest of which dates back to 6000 B.C. Besides, in the same region, we carried on excavations for 5 years in a Middle Bronze Age (MBA) cemetery [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] (Fig.1). During our researches here, we saw how serious this devastation was and we carried out evaluations on what should be done in order to prevent it. Within the scope of our study area and researches, it is clear that these damages in Turkey are based on some reasons:

1. The agricultural destruction,
2. The destruction of illegal excavation,
3. Getting soil from the sites to use or getting remains such as stone-marble and using them anywhere else.

4. The destruction coming from modern construction activities (such as road and railways construction destruction).

These reasons can be increased. However, among these, the most notable ones are the agricultural and illegal excavation ones.

A. The Agricultural Destruction

One of the reasons of the damage in the region is the agricultural activities. The ancient sites are not formally recorded so agricultural activities on them continue. Agricultural activities accompanied by modern farming vehicles lead the culture medium in the sites to be destructed in time and disperse around. As a result, a settlement on which there is a heavy agricultural activity goes down to the level of a plain in a few years and that is, it disappears. One of the related samples we have seen in the region is Cafer Höyük settlement [13]. This mound which is roughly in the south of our study area and in a rich farming basin is in 25 m diameter and at 30 cm height. The villagers around have informed us that this mound was at 8 m height 5-6 years ago. We have determined a limited number of archaeological findings (ceramic sherds). They prove that Cafer Höyük was inhabited in Early Bronze Age (EBA), Late Bronze Age (LBA), Roman Period and Iron Age. That is, the area of this mound started to be inhabited from 3000 B.C on (five thousands of years now). However, the agricultural destruction done in the last decade has caused the mound nearly disappeared.

One of the examples of the agricultural destruction Harmanyeri Höyük, which is in the south-west of our study field and in the area where the branches of The River Menderes, one of the important rivers in Turkey, come out [14]. Here is a fertile and well-watered farming basin. Also, it takes place on a natural way whose past dates back around 3000 B.C. This mound and its surrounding taking place at 200 m east of Modern Çakıcı Village, is used as a farming field by villagers. Wheat and sugar-beet farming are done on this field. Its southwest- northeast direction is 230 m, the northwest-southeast one is 200m, and its current height is 6 m. The south half of the settlement has been destructed as a farming purpose (Fig.3). Here, a cross-section that is about 4 m high occurs. That is, the north section of the settlement has at least survived a little competent until today, yet the south one has almost disappeared. There is a great deal of destruction in the settlement. There is an earth road along the north top points. This road causes destruction whose depth and width is nearly 2 m. Due to these damages, more than half of the settlement has been destructed. Here, there are findings (ceramics, loom weights, fragments of stone tools- bifaces etc) belonging to Late Chalcolithic Age (LCA), EBA, MBA, Roman Period and Middle Age. Namely, the history of this mound dates back to 5500 B.C. It was continuously inhabited later, as well (in 3000s B.C., around and after 2000).

B. The Destruction of Illegal Excavation

Another reason of damage in the region is the illegal excavations. The destruction because of illegal excavations is observed intensely in the field of study. Maybe there are

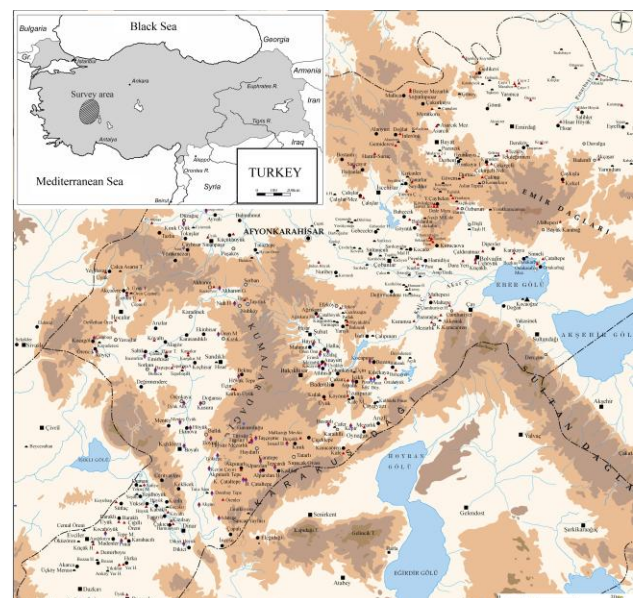
hundreds of examples to this case. However, we are going to give some important examples in this section.

One of these is Dede Mezarı Cemetery [3]. This is an area used as a cemetery 4000 years earlier. (about 2000s B.C). In this cemetery, we have conducted excavation works for 5 seasons in total from 2005 to 2009. In this area there were many pithos graves and cist graves. Almost 80% of these graves were destroyed because of the illegal excavations. We had to uncover the leftovers of the destructed materials during our excavations.

For instance, we found out jugs which remained safe from illegal excavations in A1 grave in A Trench [3]. Illegal diggers had dug the grave, threw away the lid and destructed inside the cist grave. However, the pottery on the west side of the cist grave was not noticed by the illegal diggers. We have found them and delivered to the museum during 2005 excavations (Fig.2).

In 2008 excavations, we encountered with an important damage. Here in H Trench, there are two pithos graves (H5 and H8) in an area [6]. In this area, illegal diggers had dug the grave, lifted the lid and destructed inside the pithos. We found out a pot which was partly saved from the illegal excavations that we call "armshaped libation vessel" in archaeological terms. This vessel is an important finding in terms of archaeology and culture. If it wasn't destructed because of the illegal excavations, it would be displayed in a museum as a whole. This pot was used to sacrifice to Gods in the temples about 2000 B.C. Thus, it is archaeologically a very important piece.

In our 2017 surveys, in Gebeceler Sarıkaya Höyük near Afyonkarahisar city center, we observed another important damage, as well (Fig.4-5). This destruction was done by a construction machine. Firstly, there were two excavations trying in the eastern part of the settlement, then a construction machine dug a 6 meters of deep hole. This hole ended when it reached to the main rock. There aren't many EBA findings whereas there are a lot of MBA ones. Therefore, this mound has a past of at least 5000 years. Illegal excavations caused 2/3 of these cultural inheritances disappear.



Map 1: Survey area



Fig. 1. Dede Mezar excavation 2007, G2 (right), G4 (middle), G5 (left) graves



Fig. 2. Dede Mezar excavation 2005, Trench A cist grave and small findings.



Fig. 3. Harmanyeri Mound, Dinar, destruction.



Fig. 4. Gebeceler Sankaya Mound, destruction.

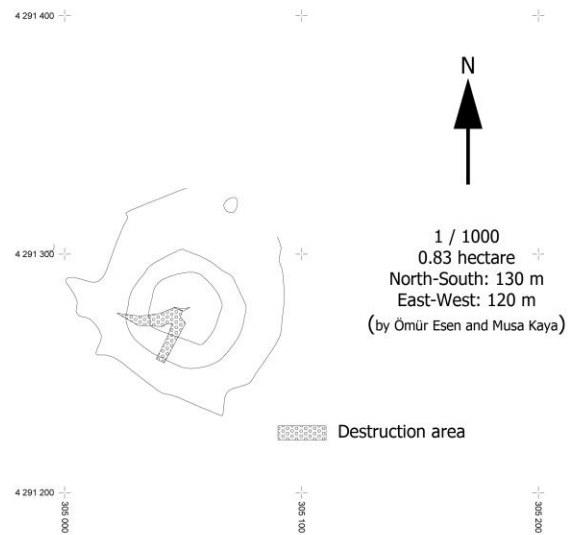


Fig. 5. Gebeceler Sankaya Mound, topographical map.

III. CONCLUSIONS: THE SUGGESTIONS ON PREVENTING CULTURAL HERITAGE

Cultural remains do not only belong to the country they are excavated. They are cultural heritage for all humanity. Therefore, everybody is responsible for protecting these works. However, the methods of protection may vary by different geographical regions. This is also valid for our working site. Hence, the main reasons for the problem should primarily be determined [15]. Located in the middle of Asia and Europe continents, Turkey has specific geographical, social and economic structure features. All of these components should be considered while determining the policies about cultural heritages.

Below are the factors grounding for destruction in Turkey:

- In Turkey, there are a lot of agricultural areas that are scattered; a good part of these archaeological sites are on these agricultural areas.
- There are many works on mountainous areas and hills other than agricultural basins. It makes hard to control them as they are scattered.
- All the archaeological sites in Turkey have not still documented as an inventory yet.
- So many cultural remains give people the idea of getting rich in short time.
- Most of the modern villages and towns have been founded near the old archaeological sites.
- Some of the archaeological sites are on the routes of historical roads and these routes intersect with modern roads.
- In general, public and local administrators do not have much information on the importance of ruins.

Naturally, the first thing to do is to make inventory of all the archaeological sites and in this respect local administrations should be informed about these sites. Therefore, local administrators and security officers can regularly control and protect the site.

The most efficient way to prevent these damages is to raise

the awareness of the local administrators, security officers and public [16]. The training of the local administrators and the security officers should be in the form of “in-service training” and should be constant. Most of these training should definitely be in museums and practically on archaeological sites. As well as the experts from Ministry of Culture and Tourism, museum experts and university academicians should be consulted. Local administrators should be informed about why the cultural remains are important, how to protect them and how to utilize them for tourism. Security officers should be informed about the location, historical and cultural properties of all the cultural remains on the archaeological site. Both local administrators and the security officers should be advised to be in a permanent contact with each other and the local people about the protection of the ruins.

The most important part of the education for the public should mostly be conducted from villages and towns. Here, people may be gathered in village coffee houses or given booklets to raise awareness. It is important to tell them that these ruins are universal, they should be protected and the excavations can only be conducted by archaeologists, art historians and historians. It is important to emphasize that if the studies are carried on with a scientific way, it will contribute to the region economically. An archaeologist who is to excavate an archaeological site in a village or town is permitted to get help from local people and they will be paid for about four or five months a year. Moreover, the historical place will contribute to tourism within a plan and the ruins will be displayed in museums. Maybe, the excavation site will be a tourist attraction and thus long term, sustainable and risk-free source will be produced. People should also be warned that any destruction to the archaeological site will annihilate all of these gains and the people will be in a hard position legally. Because an illegal excavation in an archaeological site is a crime. It should be explained that the person committing this illegal act will be punished not only legally but also socially.

It is important to give insight of protection of archaeological sites at a very early age. Therefore, in primary and high school curricula, there should be a unit or two in relevant subjects (such as social sciences, history) informing about the ruins in Turkey and why and how to protect them. These theoretical studies should be supported practically by taking students to museums and archaeological sites nearby. These activities should be performed in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and its relevant units (Culture and Tourism Administrations and Museums).

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Özdemir Koçak is with Selcuk University Faculty of Letters, Department of History. BA: 1986-1990, İstanbul University, Faculty of Education, The Department of History. MA: 1990/1993, İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, The Department of Ancient History. PhD: İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, The

Department of Ancient History.

He has been working at Faculty of Letters, Selcuk University as a History Department in Konya for 26 years. His papers are: H. Bahar, G. Karauğuz, Ö. Koçak, *Eski çağ Konya Araştırmaları I, Phrygia Paroreus Bölgesi (Anıtlar, Yerleşmeler ve Küçük Buluntular)*, FS Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996; H. Bahar, Ö. Koçak, *Eski çağ Konya Araştırmaları 2 (Neolitik Çağ’dan Roma Dönemi Sonuna Kadar)*, Kömen Yayınevi, Konya, 2004; Ö. Koçak, *Erken Dönemlerde Afyonkarahisar Yerleşmeleri*, Kömen Yayınevi, Konya, 2004; Ö. Koçak, M. Bilgin, “Afyonkarahisar’da İki Önemli Geç Neolitik/Erken Kalkolitik Dönem Yerleşme Yeri: Eyice ve Pani Höyük”, *TÜBA-AR*, 13, 2010, 23-38; Ö. Koçak, M. Bilgin, “Afyonkarahisar Üçün Buluntuları Işığında Batı Anadolu Prehistoryası Üzerine Yeni Gözlemler”, *Adalya*, XVI, 2013, 31-48; Ö. Koçak, M. Bilgin, “İçbatı Anadolu Bölgesinde Geç Neolitik ve Erken Kalkolitik Çağa ait Yeni Yerleşmeler”, *Höyük*, VIII, 2014, 1-9.



Nuriye K lahlı as an English Lecturer, Selcuk University, School of Foreign Languages. BA: 1997-2001, Necmettin Erbakan University, Faculty of Education, The Department of Foreign Languages Education. MA: 2007/2009, Necmettin Erbakan University, Faculty of Education, The Department of Foreign Languages Education. PhD: Selcuk University, The Faculty of Literature, The Department of History.

She has been working at SOFL, Selcuk University as an English Lecturer in Konya for 17 years. Her papers are: K lahlı Nuriye, (2016).

“Isuara Revolts in the Hellenistic and Roma Periods with the Light of Ancient Works.” *International Bozkır Symposium (Pub. No:3846963)*. K lahlı Nuriye, (2015). “The Contribution of Archaeology to the Science of Ancient History.”. *International Conference on the Changing World and Social Research(Pub. No:3847003)*. K lahlı Nuriye, (2016), “Eski Anadolu ve Eski Yunan’da Kadın İşgücü”, *Kadın İşgücü Disiplinlerarası Bir Bakış, Gazi Yayınevi., (Edit.Bilge Aşar, Birol Büyükdogan), ISBN:978-605-344-364-3, No: 3846815*. She is studying on her PhD Thesis, “*Women in Education in Ancient Greece*” with her academic advisor, Prof. Dr. Özdemir Koçak.