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Review of the Early Bronze Age Book of Tepeköy Höyük Excavations in the Varto District of Muş Province

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Early Bronze Age, Eastern Anatolia, Tepeköy Höyük, Cultural Heritage, Rescue Excavations

The book, prepared with the contributions of Energo-Pro, consists of three presentations and 11 chapters; each chapter contains an English abstract. The book includes the results of rescue excavations carried out in 2014, 2017, and 2018 at Tepeköy Höyük in the Varto district of Muş province under the direction of the Ahlat Museum within the scope of the Alpaslan II Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant project. Increasing population and energy needs with urbanisation necessitate the development of dams and similar projects. However, dam or Hydroelectric Power Plant projects have become the biggest cause of the disappearance or destruction of cultural heritage, especially ancient settlements in the areas where they are built (Özdoğan 2008). In the planning processes of dams or similar projects, it is important to identify the cultural and natural monuments that will remain within the impact areas and to develop these projects accordingly or to revise them at the project stage to protect or minimise the impacts of such projects on cultural heritage. Cultural heritage sites in the vicinity of dam projects should be systematically surveyed prior to construction, or if they have to be relocated, necessary measures should be taken to prevent their destruction and protection measures should be developed.

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The work undertaken for the Keban dam project on the Euphrates River is an important endeavour for the archaeology of T rkiye. Although the Keban project did not result in the recovery of all cultural assets within the dam's catchment area, the multidisciplinary and multinational nature of the project with various universities sets an example. Later, similar studies were conducted in the Karakaya, Atat rk, and Ilisu dam areas in east and southeastern T rkiye. With these projects, as many archaeological sites as possible were excavated to effectively document cultural assets. Similar projects in T rkiye are carried out in cooperation with the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and regional museums. Tepek y excavations were carried out as a rescue project in this way, and the information obtained is of great importance for the archaeology of the region, particularly for the Mu  province and the Early Bronze Age of the region in general.

Our knowledge of the Early Bronze Age in Eastern Anatolia is very limited and consists of excavations carried out in Elaz  -Malatya (Arslantepe, Nor untepe etc.), Erzurum (Sos H y k, Karaz, P l r), Van Lake basin (Karag nd z and D lkaya) and surface surveys conducted throughout the region (Marro 2011). Hence, the rescue excavation at Tepek y has provided new data on this subject. In particular, the fact that the present work is dedicated to the Early Bronze Age layer recovered from this rescue excavation makes it even more special for the archaeology of the region.

The geographical features of Tepek y and adjacent areas are given in the first part of the book. The second part of the book contains information on the ancient history of the Mu  Plain and its surroundings. However, this chapter focuses more on the Middle Iron Age of the region, namely the Urartian Kingdom. It should be noted that many of the sources used in this chapter are not included in the bibliography given at the end of the text and that the bibliography is not arranged in alphabetical order. Although many images obtained by the author during the survey in the region are included at the end of the chapter, a map showing the location of the settlements mentioned in the study would have made it easier to understand these settlements in a broader context. It should also be noted that the single-roomed rock-cut tombs in the region are dated to the Urartian period. However, there are also different views on the dating of such rock-cut tombs (K ro lu 2007).

The third chapter of the book narrates the rescue excavations at Tepek y H y k. In this section, the excavations of 2014, 2017, and 2018 are described under separate sub-headings. The 2014 excavations, conducted by the Ahlat Museum, were not aimed at determining the stratigraphy of the mound. Rather than being a scientific fieldwork, this excavation was carried out to collect artefacts, and unfortunately, even the locations of the unearthed artefacts were not properly recorded/documented. Although the author attributes the poor excavation to the destruction of recent houses on the mound (p. 55), it is evident that the museum staff who carried out this excavation lacked the skills and experience to carry out this work.

In 2017, a topographical plan of Tepeköy was made and the trenching system was changed during the fieldwork carried out by the museum (p. 56). Although the author describes the 2017 excavations as “a relatively more systematic excavation compared to the previous excavation season” (p. 56); it seems that the excavators again were not aware or did not know the concept of stratigraphy. It is also obvious that the architectural elements showing the contexts of the stratum and excavation area were not documented properly. As of 2018, when the construction of the Alparslan II Dam was about to be completed, excavations were carried out for the first time under the direction of the museum but with the scientific supervision of S. Erdoğan from Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. For the first time, instead of the find-oriented excavations of the first two excavation seasons, this last field season was conducted to determine the stratigraphy of the mound. However, strangely, for each field season, a separate grid system seems to be utilised.

The excavations revealed the presence of Early and Middle Bronze Age, Early and Middle Iron Age, and Middle Age (Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman) layers. Although it is stated that the Middle Iron Age, which is described as having two phases, is rich in both architecture and artefacts, a complete architecture could not be identified, probably due to poor excavation records (p. 60). The Middle Bronze Age layer, which is labelled as “old and new” and “multi-phased”, is described as a very rich period in terms of architecture and finds (p. 61). The most important find of this period is a horseshoe-shaped hearth with geometric decorations on its façade, which is mostly known from the Early Bronze Age. The Early Bronze Age is mostly characterised by the sounding works carried out on the mound, which consists of “three building” levels and “multiple phases” (p. 62). However, in contrast, when the architecture of this period is described in the next chapter, the Early Bronze Age is discussed as three building levels and a “single phase” (p. 84).

The fourth chapter is devoted to the Early Bronze Age architecture of the Tepeköy mound and its chronological changes. This building level is mostly represented by the remains of round architectural structures and hearths of various sizes, both portable and non-portable. The fifth chapter is concerned with the analysis of Early Bronze Age ceramic forms.

The sixth chapter of the book introduces the bronze metal artefacts recovered from the Tepeköy excavation in the so-called “Warehouse”. In the northern part of the mound, the presence of two rectangular spaces is identified. However, although the article in question mentions two rooms, no architectural remains of these rooms are shown in the corresponding images presented in the study (p. 154 fig. 1). To the east of these two rooms, a fragment of an altered andesite stone with a perforated edge is found among the river stones, which are thought to have been randomly gathered near the remains of an identified hearth. A group of bronze artefacts (two axes, six sickle fragments, two spiral rings, a spearhead and two belt fragments) were unearthed in a cluster under these stones (p. 136). There are stone and terracotta weights and various bone tools in the same area.

The seventh chapter of the study analyses a ‘‘   ’’ stamp seal recovered from the mound; the eighth chapter deals with terracotta and idols; and the ninth with stone tools. The tenth chapter analyzes the animal remains, and the last chapter evaluates the bone tools and objects.

Archaeological studies in and around the Mu  Plain have been limited to surface surveys (except for Kayalidere; Burney 1966). In this respect, despite some shortcomings, especially the work carried out in the first two excavation seasons, the site of Tepek y is important in terms of understanding the settlements and cultures of the region other than the Urartian (Middle Iron Age) period. The increase in archaeological excavations and surveys in the long term in Eastern Anatolia will facilitate the understanding of the ancient cultures of the region. Hence, Murat H y k ( zdemir et al. 2021) in Bing l province and Tepek y excavations stand out as important settlements in this respect, especially in terms of providing information beyond the Middle Iron Age of the region ( if i 2020).

Overall, the chapters in the book are supported by numerous visuals such as drawings and photographs. However, only the first part of the book includes a map showing the topography of Mu  province (p. 4, map 1), and the third chapter includes a map (p. 66, Map 1) that is not very well prepared. It would have been more useful for the reader to understand the book if maps and similar images showing both the topography of the Mu  province and the settlements in the region, which are mentioned in different parts of the work, had been included. In addition, there are deficiencies in the bibliographies of the chapters, alphabetical errors, and incompatible writing styles. However, despite these deficiencies, the presentation of the excavation results to the scientific world without much delay will make significant contributions to the development of the archaeology of the region. Therefore, the editors and authors of the various chapters of the book should be congratulated for their work.

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