THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN ANATOLIA IN THE THIRD AND SECOND MILLENNIA BC AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH MIGRATION THEORIES

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Although it is often said that Anatolia served as a land bridge between Asia and Europe, research shows that it was quite the opposite in the prehistoric periods during which transportation options were more limited. The fact that the peninsula is surrounded by sea on three sides and contains high mountain ranges in the eastern part isolates it, to some extent, from the neighboring regions (Fig. 1). Separate from central Anatolia, western Anatolia has its own cultural unity and course of developments during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC. The Early Bronze Age sites have been mainly clustered in the plains and along the river valleys. The mountain ranges have formed mostly the natural boundaries that separate these clusters of sites from each other. These geographical settings of western Anatolia, further led to the emergence of specific regional cultures in western Anatolia from the Neolithic period up into the Early Bronze Ages.

In the 1940s, it was Kurt Bittel who first drew attention to the distinct cultural groups, the boundaries of which were defined by the pottery traditions in western Anatolia during the Early Bronze Age.¹ Albrecht Goetze stressed that a cultural unity of its own existed in Anatolia by comparing Anatolian cultures to the eastern Mediterranean cultures. He differentiated certain subgroups with some local differences within this unity.² In the 1960s, James Mellaart and David French defined the boundaries of these subgroups or pottery groups in the light of new excavations and surveys.³ Turan Efe has recently reinterpreted these EBA pottery groups with a new perspective.⁴ According to him, certain pottery groups, having more common traits in comparison to others, form larger units which he defines as ‘cultural regions’. These EBA cultural regions and pottery groups don’t have always clear-cut boundaries; often buffer zones are

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¹ Bittel 1942: 160, 186; Bittel 1945; Bittel/Otto 1939: 29.
formed on the common borders. These borders are primarily determined by pottery and, to a lesser degree, by some small finds such as figurines and idols, as well as certain architectural traditions. They might demonstrate the influential areas of certain political entities which eventually seem to have developed into powerful kingdoms of the EB III period of western Anatolia. It is possible that these kingdoms are predecessors of the Luwic lands of the 2nd millennium mentioned in the Hittite texts.

After the last quarter of 4th millennium BC, in other words, the Transitional Period into the Early Bronze Age\(^5\) (3200–3000/2900 BC), ‘EBA cultural regions’ begin to emerge which largely overlap with those of the previous Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods (Fig. 2). During this period which is an important period of transition in the cultural development of western Anatolia, besides pottery, architectural data also show that a new cultural and possibly political entity began to take shape.\(^6\)

During the next EBA IB (3000/2900–2700 BC), the boundaries of the cultural regions are more clearly established (Fig. 3). These regions are ‘Troy-Yortan’, ‘Bithynia’, ‘Phrygia’, ‘Büyük Menderes-Upper Porsuk’\(^7\) and ‘Lycia-Pisidia’. At the same time local pottery groups become more apparent within these cultural regions. Among them, we can mention Demirchüyük and Upper Sakarya pottery groups within the Phrygian cultural region.\(^8\) The boundaries of the groups within others are not clear yet. Since the figurines and idols are now more diversified in shape, style and decoration, they contribute to the identification of these boundaries as well.

The architectural and archaeological findings of the next EB II period (2700–2400 BC) demonstrate that stronger political powers appear and that a development towards urbanism is underway. There is a substantial increase in the number of sites in this period. Although this increase is mainly due to a population explosion, it can also be related to the changes in the socio-economic basis which had most probably something to do with the discovery of new raw material resources. The boundaries of the cultural regions in this period seem to have remained stable, while the distribution areas of the pottery groups are more crystallized (Fig. 4).

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\(^5\) The term “transitional period into the Early Bronze Age” has been introduced by T. Efe (Efe/Ilaslı/Topbaş 1995: 376).


\(^7\) The term has been introduced by the author.

\(^8\) Efe 2003: 89ff.