

Hittites and “barbarians” in the Late Bronze Age: regional survey in northern Turkey

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The Hittites have attracted less attention from British archaeologists than other Bronze Age states of ancient Southwest Asia, and yet in the second millennium BC they controlled most of Anatolia and at the peak of their power they even conquered Babylon. Here the Director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara describes new research on the northwest frontier of the Hittite empire.

At its peak the Hittite state of the Late Bronze Age was one of the most powerful political entities ever to have arisen in southwestern Asia. The Hittites held sway over almost the whole of Anatolia (modern Asiatic Turkey) and, sporadically, over large swathes of adjacent territory too. The high point of Hittite expansion came with the capture of Babylon in 1595 BC by Mursili I, which brought to a violent end the 300-year-old First Dynasty of Babylon, of which Hammurabi was the dominant figure. But a marked characteristic of the Hittite state is the rapidity and severity with which the extent of its territory waxed and waned. Despite surviving as a political entity for some 450 years from c. 1650 BC, it is often viewed as a fragile phenomenon that teetered on the edge of collapse throughout its history until it irredeemably broke down in the early twelfth century BC.

One factor in the fragility of the Hittite state may have been the location of its capital city, Hattuša. The great city lay in the northern reaches of the empire, far from the cultural and economic centres of Mesopotamia and Syria that attracted the attention of the Hittite kings. At one stage the Hittites moved their capital south, to the city of Tarhuntassa (which archaeologists have yet to find), but before long they returned to Hattuša where they remained until the end. They were a meticulously religious people who laid great stress on the correct conduct of rituals and on the worship of the gods in their proper places. The physical location of a host of impressive temples at Hattuša, “City of a Thousand Gods”, was the major factor in the Hittites’ continued adherence to the city as their capital.

Strategically, however, Hattuša lay in dangerous territory, only a few dozen kilometres from the lands of the Kaška people who occupied the mountainous terrain along the northern borders of the Hittite state and who regularly wreaked havoc on the towns, temples and agricultural lands of the Hittite heartland. We know something about the Kaška people from texts found at Hattuša during decades of German excavations there. The Hittites called the Kaška “swineherds and weavers of

linen”, probably disparagingly, but were prepared to sit down and negotiate with them on the many occasions when military action failed to subdue them. However, in archaeological terms we know little about the Kaška people or about the landscapes in which they lived, despite their proximity to Hattuša and their undoubted significance in the evolution of the Hittite state.

Project Paphlagonia and the Late Bronze Age landscape of northern Turkey

In 1997 I began a five-year programme of multi-period regional survey, on behalf of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, in the modern Turkish provinces of Çankır and Karabük, which together make up what was the southern half of the Roman and Byzantine province of Paphlagonia. This region (Fig. 1) lies immediately to the northwest of Hattuša and is known to have been a Hittite/Kaška border zone throughout the Late Bronze Age. In Project Paphlagonia, we are investigating a wide range of issues centred on long-term human–environment interactions from early prehistory to modern times, by means of extensive and intensive surveys



Figure 1 Location of the Project Paphlagonia research area and major sites mentioned in the text.

(Fig. 2), archival research, and environmental explorations including the extraction of lake cores for pollen and other analyses.¹ In this article I focus on only one of the many intriguing issues, that of the nature of settlement in northern Anatolia during the Late Bronze Age.



Figure 2 Setting up for survey of a hilltop site using the GPS (Global Positioning System) technique.

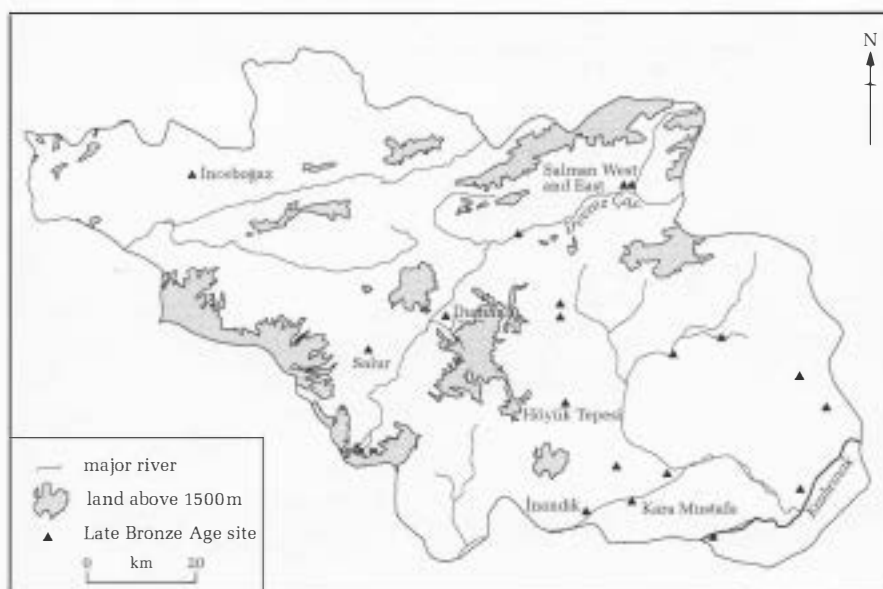


Figure 3 Paphlagonia: distribution of Late Bronze Age sites.

In recent years the subject of Hittite archaeology has budded from its parent stem of excavations at Hattuša, started in 1893, to include the investigation of a string of important sites along or close to the Hittite's northern frontier. Turkish excavations at Maşat (Fig. 1) near modern Zile (the famous Zela of Julius Caesar's *veni vidi vici* campaign) have unearthed buildings of a military garrison and, most significantly, a collection of about a hundred clay tablets with texts in cuneiform ("wedge-shape" writing impressed by a stylus into clay) that elucidate the role of Maşat, probably Hittite Tappiga, as a command post for action against the Kaška people.² Farther southeast, at the large site of Kuşaklı (Fig. 1) (Hittite Şarišša), German excavations are exploring a massive complex of administrative and religious buildings, again with significant numbers of cuneiform texts.³ Closer to Hattuša, Turkish excavations at Ortaköy (Fig. 1) (Hittite Şapinuwa) have uncovered a series of immense palatial and administrative buildings, with an archive of several thousand tablets, written in the ancient Hittite, Hurrian and Akkadian languages.⁴

In addition, extensive surveys in several Turkish provinces and around Hattuša itself are beginning to enhance the regional picture of Bronze Age settlement in northern Turkey.⁵ One result of these and other researches has been to shift the spotlight to some extent away from Hattuša, an untypical Hittite city by virtue of its political and cultic status, towards more regional issues, particularly concerning Hittite settlement and relations with neighbouring peoples. It is to this research topic that the results from Project Paphlagonia are especially germane. In this article I make an initial attempt to reconstruct and interpret a Hittite landscape based on the results of archaeological survey.

During three field seasons of survey in

Paphlagonia, which covered an area of c. 9,000 km², we have located and identified, on the basis of surface pottery collections, many Late Bronze Age sites (Fig. 3). They share several distinctive features. First, they are almost all of substantial size, generally of the order of 3–5 ha. Very few small Late Bronze Age sites have been found in Paphlagonia, despite intensive survey in many suitable areas. The sites take the form of occupation mounds (*höyük* in Turkish) that often overlie natural rock outcrops. They frequently show evidence of their slopes having been deliberately steepened and their summits surrounded by neatly laid stones. All the Late Bronze Age sites are located at key strategic points in the landscape with all-round visibility, at junctions of valleys and at

river crossings, at narrow passes over hills or at the base of natural routes heading into the mountains. Their positioning betokens a desire to control routes of communication across important tracts of the landscape. The sites are also located close to wide expanses of arable land and sources of water, such as springs and streams. They are not fortified refuge sites but nodes of control and landscape exploitation with a strong defensive element.

A major Late Bronze Age site is located at Dumanlı, spread over a long spur at the confluence of a tributary with the Devrez Çay, one of the most important rivers of Paphlagonia (Fig. 3). The site is accessed by a ramp from the south, and an 80 m stretch of massive masonry, still standing 5 m high, protects the weakest point (Fig. 4). The site controls a crossing point of the Devrez Çay, itself probably a frontier at several stages in Hittite history. Now overgrown and isolated, the site will be the subject of further intensive work, including geophysical prospecting for buried walls.

Another key Paphlagonian Late Bronze Age site is the mound of Salman West (Fig. 3), which lies at the modern junction of two major north Anatolian routes. From the *Tabula Peutingeria* (a Roman route map), we know that this crossroads was important in Roman times and the existence of Salman West indicates its significance much earlier too. Only a few kilometres north of the site rises the great bulk of Mount Ilgaz, called *Olgassys* by Strabo and *Kassu* by the Hittites, one of many instances of survival of Late Bronze Age place names in modern Turkish. Like Dumanlı, Salman West is located immediately adjacent to a major topographical feature, in this case a mountain range rather than a river, which may have served as a boundary in Hittite-Kaška relations.



Figure 4 Massive Hittite masonry, 5 m high, at the site of Dumanlı; note the inward slope of the wall face and the vertically stepped façade, features also found in the contemporary walls of Troy VI, Alishar and Hattuša.



Figure 5 The large mound of Inceboğaz, in the middle distance, sited astride a natural pass between higher ground to north and south.

Farther to the northwest, the major mound of Inceboğaz (Fig. 3) sits astride a natural pass in the landscape where east-west communications are confined between stretches of high ground to north and south (Fig. 5). The summit of the site is reached by a wide access ramp at one corner, upon which a large Iron Age burial tumulus was later constructed. Fortifications around the summit and slopes of the mound are probably of both Late Bronze Age and Iron Age date. As with other Late Bronze Age sites, there are excellent water sources and fertile lands in the immediate environs of the site. If we look at other Late Bronze Age sites of Paphlagonia, we see a regular repetition of this picture: fortified mounds at strategic locations in the landscape with plentiful supplies of fresh water and fertile agricultural land. What might be the historical context for the construction and occupation of these sites?

A landscape of terror and control

From texts found at Hattuša we know that the Hittite kings campaigned frequently against the Kaška people, with the king leading his troops from the capital into the mountainous terrain to the north. When these campaigns failed to subdue the Kaška, as they generally did, the king would negotiate with Kaška leaders in an attempt to reach an agreement to protect Hittite crops, livestock, towns and temples

from enemy attack. In one case, we know of an agreement whereby Hittite ritual processions were to be allowed through Kaška-held territory to make offerings to the Storm God at the (archaeologically) unlocated northern town of Nerik, a vivid demonstration of the cultic importance of northern Anatolia within the Hittite world.

Our survey region in southern Paphlagonia comprises a wide swathe of mixed terrain, which for much (probably all) of the Late Bronze Age constituted a border zone between the Hittites and the Kaška. All the Late Bronze Age sites so far located by us may be viewed within the context of Hittite-Kaška relations, and we know that those relations often involved military action (Fig. 6). The sites form a network of nodal points, well distributed across the

landscape and generally within, at most, a day's march of an adjacent control point. The ability to provide fresh water and fodder, for animals and soldiers, was of major importance in the location of each site, as was the ability to fend off surprise enemy attack. Thus, commanding all-round views, control of passes and communication routes, stone fortification, deliberate shaping of mound sides and the provision of ramps for chariot and animal access – all point to military priorities in the location and construction of each site. Furthermore, we know from texts that for the Hittites the notion of towns and permanent settlement was fundamental to their strategy of landscape control, whereas the Kaška viewed the eradication of towns as a key tactic in terrorizing and overthrowing Hittite influence.⁶

Several Hattuša texts tell of “storehouse cities”, settlements in the Hittite landscape that were responsible to the king for collecting and storing fodder, which was kept under seal until required for specific purposes, including cultic festivals and perhaps also consumption by the Hittite army on campaign. One text gives a list of at least 60 storehouse cities.⁷ It is probable that our Late Bronze Age sites in Paphlagonia fit within a scheme of Hittite military organization of this dangerous landscape of terror and control, and that many of them were used as depots and staging posts

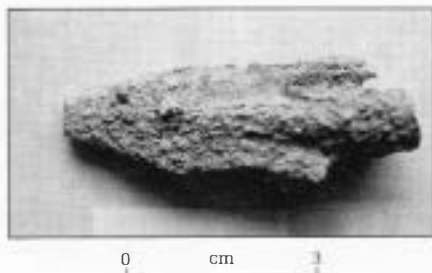


Figure 6 A Late Bronze Age arrowhead from Kara Mustafa (for location of the site, see Fig. 3).

by the military as soldiers passed through the region into the mountains to the north. We hope that further work on the ground and among the often obscure texts will allow identification of archaeological sites with textually attested town names.

After the Hittites: new light on a dark age

Texts from Hattuša fall silent around 1180 BC and there is evidence for massive destruction across the Hittite world, and beyond, at this time. We do not know in detail the factors involved in this apparently sudden collapse, nor do we have any clear idea to what extent the Kaška people may have been involved. It has been suggested that a change in climate affected the agricultural base of the Hittite state in the decades before its final collapse,⁸ but so far there is little evidence with which to test this idea. During our 1999 field season we explored several lakes in the region and have now obtained a sediment core that we hope will provide some climatic and other environmental evidence reaching back as far as the Late Bronze Age.

Continuing excavations at Hattuša are substantially enhancing the picture of the world of Anatolia after the Late Bronze Age.⁹ It is now clear that among the collapsed ruins of the public buildings of the Hittite capital much humbler structures arose and were occupied by Early Iron Age newcomers who had forgotten, or chose not to employ, the use of the wheel for pottery manufacture. There is a possibility that the hand-made pottery found at Hattuša, which is hard to distinguish from much earlier prehistoric wares, belonged to the Kaška people themselves, who had by the early twelfth century BC settled in the ruins of Hattuša; but we have not yet identified this material-culture assemblage in Paphlagonia.

A suggestion of continuity, or at least revival, beyond the collapse of the Hittite state is provided by the frequency with which Late Bronze Age sites in Paphlagonia continue to be occupied later in the Iron Age. More than half of our identified Late Bronze Age sites have yielded surface collections of so-called Phrygian greyware, a distinctive type of pottery that is found through much of central Anatolia in the period c. 900–600 BC (Fig. 7). With their capital at Gordion (Fig. 1), 100 km west of Ankara, the Phrygians were powerful successors to the Hittite state in central Anatolia. It may be that, like the Hittites before them, they too employed a network of sites spaced across the landscape in a new round of struggles with “barbarian” neighbours to the north. Or it may be that the major settlements of northern Anatolia were now under the control of Kaška-related locals engaging in trade with their newly powerful Phrygian neighbours. We are confident that further investigations in the high plains, valleys and mountains of Paphlagonia will contribute to our under-

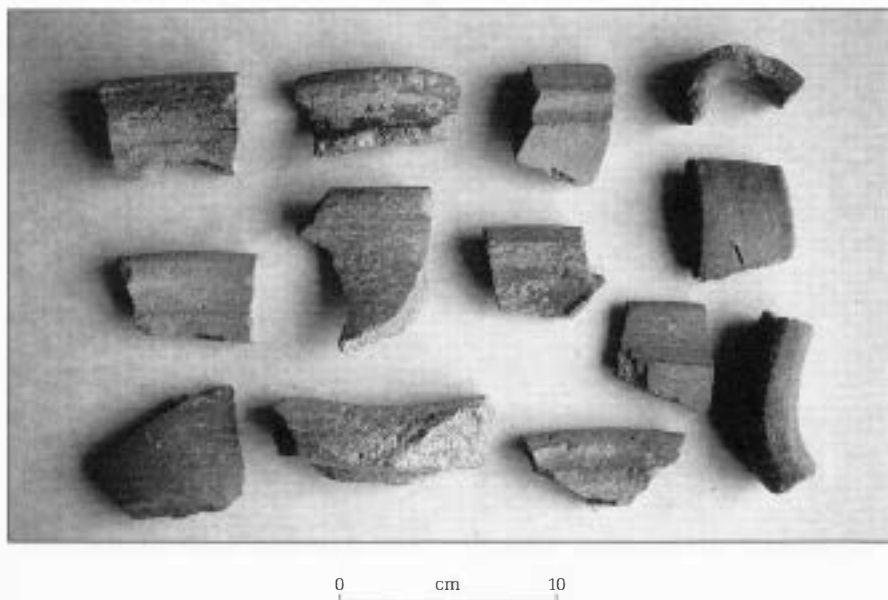


Figure 7 Sherds of Phrygian greyware pottery from Höyük Tepesi (for location of the site see Fig. 3).

standing of this and many other issues in Anatolian archaeology and history.

Notes

1. For preliminary accounts see R. Matthews, T. Pollard, M. Ramage, “Project Paphlagonia: regional survey in northern Anatolia”, in *Ancient Anatolia. Fifty years’ work by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara*, R. Matthews (ed.), 195–206 (London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1998); and R. Matthews, “Project Paphlagonia”, *Anatolian Archaeology* 4, 21–2, 1998.
2. T. Özgüç, *Maşat Höyük 1* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1978).
3. A. Müller-Karpe, “Kuşaklı: Ausgrabungen in einer hethitischen Stadt”, *Antike Welt* 27, 305–12, 1996.
4. A. Süel & M. Süel, *Ortaköy–Sapinuwa archaeological research* (Ankara: Uyum Ajans, 1996). For the texts see A. Ünal, *Hittite and Hurrian cuneiform tablets from Ortaköy (Çorum), central Turkey* (Istanbul: Simburg, 1998).
5. J. Seeher, “Die Ausgrabungen in Boğazköy–Hattuša 1996”, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1997, 317–41, 1997.
6. G. Beckman, “The city and the country in Hatti”, in *Landwirtschaft im alten Orient*, H. Klengel & J. Renger (eds), 161–9 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1999).
7. I. Hoffmann, *Der Erlaß Telipinus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1984). See I. Singer, “The AGRIG in the Hittite texts”, *Anatolian Studies* 34, 97–127, 1984, and, regarding military use of storehouse cities, R. H. Beal, *The organisation of the Hittite military* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992).
8. R. L. Gorny, “Environment, archaeology, and history in Hittite Anatolia”, *Biblical Archaeologist* 52, 78–96, 1989.
9. Now conveniently summarized in J. Seeher, *Hattusha guide: a day in the Hittite capital* (Istanbul: Ege, 1999).