

Surveying the Pleistocene Humans in Anatolia: The Latest Studies



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Abstract

The timing and route of early human dispersals out of the African continent are among the most important issues currently discussed in paleoanthropology. Several questions arise concerning both early and later dispersals: When did migration events happen? From which populations did these dispersing hominins stem? Which routes did they use? One of the likely dispersal corridors passes through Turkey, which is situated among three continents and therefore can be seen as an important bridge among them. Despite its geographic position, paleoanthropological and archaeological research for Pleistocene period in Turkey has been limited, and the known fossil human record from this region is small. Although most of the known fossil human remains were found during early investigations, in the last decade new finds have further highlighted the region's potential for paleoanthropological and archaeological research. This article reviews the latest studies from Turkey, which are focused on Pleistocene human patterns.

Keywords: Anatolia; Pleistocene; Paleoanthropology; Palaeolithic; Survey

Introduction

Anatolia lies directly on one of the likely dispersal corridors from Africa and the Near East into Europe. Hominin fossil finds from Turkey can therefore help in answering questions about hominin dispersals, both for the dispersal event of early Homo species, as well as for the later Out of Africa migration of modern humans. Despite its critical geographic position, paleoanthropological and archaeological research on Pleistocene humans in Turkey has been limited, and the known fossil human record from this region is small. The most important reason of this limitation is the denseness of classical period archaeological sites in Turkey. Turkey has substantial potential for Palaeolithic sites, it is most likely that the poor fossil record is a consequence of the scarcity of excavations and surveys. According to The Archaeological Settlements of Turkey (www.tayproject.org), there have been currently an estimated 488 known Palaeolithic sites in the country, and the number is expected to rise as research efforts intensify. Despite this number, there are just seven sites which yields Palaeolithic human remains; Kocabaş village from Denizli, Karain Cave and Beldibi Rock shelter from Antalya, Merdivenli Cave, Kanal Cave, İncili Cave and Üçağızlı Cave from Hatay [1]. Although this period has been underestimated for a long time, Pleistocene and Palaeolithic surveys have started to increase in recent years, especially in the last five years. In Turkey, this kind of studies are conducted by the anthropologists and archaeologist with the

permission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. And these studies are open to foreign researchers as well. This mini review aims to summarize the latest Palaeolithic surveys in Anatolia. In this review, the surveys are mentioned which yields the evidence of human existence.

The Latest Studies

In the recent years, the efforts on Pleistocene and Palaeolithic surveys have been increasing and these studies don't just focus on the specific provinces but also different regions of Anatolia. The surveys which yield material are listed below in a provincial order from the eastern to western Turkey.

Van

The most detailed survey study, in respect of Palaeolithic lithics, comes from Van. Baykara et al. conducted survey in 2014 and 2015. They described Lower Palaeolithic obsidian uni and bifaces, Clactonian flakes, Levallois core, flakes, blade and choppers, Middle Palaeolithic obsidian tool, Levallois core and flakes [2-3].

Gaziantep

In 2011, Güleçet al. found the material from Lower to Upper Palaeolithic. These are; Levallois cores, bifaces, Acheulean hand axes, flakes, blades, side scrapers, end scrapers, Clactonian flakes and side scrapers [4].

Şanlıurfa

Middle Palaeolithic bifaces, Levallois points and some other Lower Palaeolithic materials (no more information is given) were found by Çelik in 2013 and 2015 [5-6].

Hatay

Güleç et al. conducted surveys in Hatay [7-8]. Hatay is also important since it has four different caves which yields humans remains [1]. The team found a lot of raw materials, workshops, Middle Palaeolithic Levallois cores, possible Lower Palaeolithic tools with broad edges and bifaces and some other materials which were attributed to Lower and Middle Palaeolithic [7-8].

Niğde

Levallois thick flakes and a side scraper which could be dated to Paleolithic were found during the fieldwork in 2015 [9].

Aksaray

Yamanet al. found Lower Palaeolithic flakes, Lower-Middle Palaeolithic probably Levallois core and Abbevillien biface which is not certain [10].

Çorum

Middle Palaeolithic core, flake, blade and chopper, Lower Palaeolithic flakes found in 2015 survey in Çorum [11].

Zonguldak

Zonguldak survey yielded core, blade and scrapers which could be attributed to Middle Palaeolithic [12].

Sakarya

Sakarya surveys yield an abundant material from Lower to Upper Palaeolithic [13-14]. Levallois cores, Clactonian flakes, Levallois points and cores, chopping tools, scrapers, Middle-Upper transition or Upper Paleolithic prismatic blade cores and typical Middle Palaeolithic Mousterian side scrapers were found in 2013 and 2014.

Denizli

Denizli is the one of the most important province for the Palaeolithic research since the oldest human remain from Turkey was found there. Özçelik et al. conducted fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 in the area and found Clactonian flakes, cores, chopper, Lower Palaeolithic Acheuleen bifaces, Lower-Middle Palaeolithic cores, end scrapers, Levallois cores, Levallois ends Middle Palaeolithic Mousterien point, side scraper and flakes [15-16].

Muğla

Muğla et al. found a flint stone flake which could be dated to Palaeolithic during their survey in 2013 [17].

Çanakkale

Çanakkale et al. conducted a survey in Çanakkale and found flakes and blades probably dated to Lower/Middle Palaeolithic,

Lower Palaeolithic flakes and cores, late Middle Palaeolithic cores, flakes and hand axes and Early Upper Palaeolithic end scraper, chisel, blade, backed knife and cores [18-19].

Conclusion

Despite its potential for Pleistocene humans and their Palaeolithic culture, finds are not abundant since this period has been underestimated for a long time. Fortunately, Turkish prehistory made a leap in last years and anthropologists/archaeologist started to survey in the localities for this very important period. Each year a new Pleistocene/Palaeolithic survey is started and thus the importance of the region is highlighted day by day. It is known that at least three human species habituated in the different parts of Anatolia during Pleistocene period, but the fossil record is sparse and these finds are generally located on the Mediterranean coast [1]. But the lithic record shows another story since they can be found in the whole Anatolia. This implies that humans spread to whole Anatolia during the Pleistocene period. It would be not so surprising if the new fossil material is found in next years.

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