



JOURNAL OF ANCIENT HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Institute of Archeology and Art History of
Romanian Academy Cluj-Napoca
Technical University Of Cluj-Napoca



Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14795/j.v10i2>

ISSN 2360 266x

ISSN-L 2360 266x



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No. 10.2/2023

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REVIEW: MIHAI BĂRBULESCU, ISTORIA ARHEOLOGIEI ÎN ROMÂNIA, CIVILIZAȚIA ROMÂNEASCĂ NR. 33, EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE, BUCUREȘTI, 2022, 490 PP. ISBN: 978-606-27-3660-6. 96

Design & layout:
Petru Ureche

AN AEOLIC OR YÖRÜK GRAVESTONE, A CAPITAL, OR AN ANICONIC CULT OBJECT? PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE NEW TYPE OF VOLUTED STONE OBJECTS FROM AEOLIS

Abstract: This paper presents a new type of stone objects within the boundaries of the Aeolis region. One of them is found in an old Turkish cemetery next to Kale Tepe, north of Dumanlı Mountain, and the rest found in and around of the Samurlu Turkish cemetery. Objects in question are particularly interesting for both their size and shapes. They are not similar to any other known archaeological or ethnological object. Despite the Kale Tepe and Samurlu examples were found in Turkish cemeteries, they are also so close to the known ancient sites or related necropolises. In Samurlu Cemetery, there are so many spolia architectural elements which reflect the traces of an ancient settlement here. The characteristic of those architectural elements makes us think about the existence of a temple here. Similarly, Kale Tepe, where one of the examples was found, gives the impression of a Persian garrison. Although the archaeological findings from here and its surroundings date back to the 7th and 6th centuries BC, the density of the finds indicates the 5th and 4th centuries BC. In this study, we will try to convey our thoughts on the purpose of use of the objects in question in the light of examples we have identified in the field and others reported to us by our colleagues.

Keywords: *Aeolis, Aniconic, Gravestone, Aphrodite, Hagne Thea, Classical Period.*

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DOI: 10.14795/j.v10i2.865

ISSN 2360 – 266X

ISSN-L 2360 – 266X

INTRODUCTION

According to accounts in ancient texts, the Aeolians, who were one of the major tribes of mainland Greece, inhabited the region from the north of today's Bay of Izmir to Troas at the end of the 2nd millennium BC. The most well-known Aeolian cities mentioned by Herodotus are Kyme, Larisa, Neonteichos, Temnos, Killa, Notion, Aigirosessa, Pitane, Aigai, Myrina, Gryneion.¹ However, many other settlements such as Tisna, Boione, Adai, Hermoupedion are also known from ancient texts (Fig. 1).

It is known that a colonisation process from Greece to Western Anatolia is mentioned by ancient writers. There are major inconsistencies between the results of the archaeological research carried out in Aeolis and its surroundings and the information provided by these sources. Ancient sources are full of detailed information about these migratory movements.

¹ HDT. I.149.

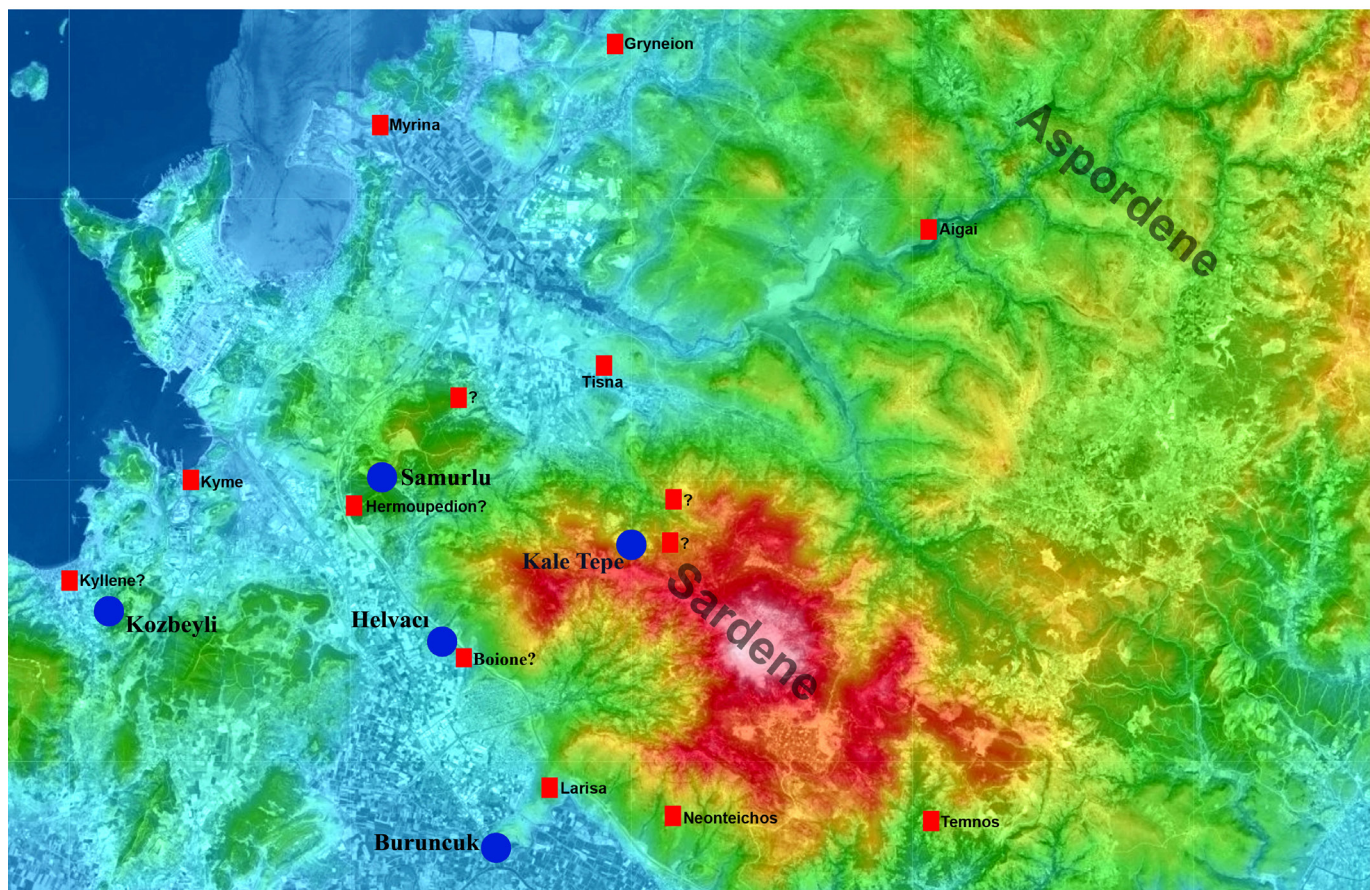


Fig. 1. Map of Ancient Aeolis and the distribution of the new type of stone objects. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

Although these texts state that the migrations began in the 12th and 11th centuries BC and ended with the founding of Myrina in 1047 BC, the archaeological evidence from the region and its immediate surroundings certainly does not support such a large-scale migration from Greece.² The interaction of the Iron Age city-states of Aeolis with the eastern Mediterranean, which seems to have developed with local dynamics rather than being the result of migration from Greece until the 8th and 7th centuries BC, is remarkable.³

A BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT THE ONGOING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS IN MT. SARDENE

Although it is an area that has attracted the attention of archaeologists for more than a century, our information on Aeolis is much more limited than on its neighbours Lydia, Ionia, and Caria. The reason for the lack of information about the region can be explained by the fact that the interest mentioned above developed into archaeological research extremely late. To better understand the rural settlements of the Aeolis region in particular, an archaeological survey focused on ancient Tisna was launched in 2018 in the Güzelhisar/Pythicos valley.⁴ The research carried out in Tisna

revealed the existence of a large and fortified settlement, contrary to what was previously thought. It is now known that the city, surrounded by a 2400-meter-long outer wall, was fortified and coins were minted just before or at the beginning of the 4th century BC. It is possible to state that the first settlement in Tisna was established at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, but the period in which the city was most powerful was between the 8th and 4th centuries BC.

The research area, which is not limited to Tisna, also includes the Dumanlı Mountain, known as *Mount Sardene* in ancient times.⁵ The mountain is best known for the towns of Larisa, Neonteichos and Temnos, which were built on its southern slopes. The Hermus Valley lies to the south of the mountain, and given this situation, the density of settlement on the southern slopes is quite significant. The Pythicos valley, to the north of the mountain, is as important as Hermus, providing access to ancient Lydia and famous for its fertile land. Indeed, here too there are fertile lands, sheltered roads leading to Lydia and many freshwater springs.

Despite all these favourable conditions, there are few modern studies on the archaeological presence in the north of Mount Sardene. In this respect, we have intensified our investigations in the region since 2021. The focus of our research was to discover cities that were mentioned in

² ROSE 2008, *passim*; ERDAN/GÜR 2018, *passim*.

³ ERDAN/GÜR 2018, 407-410.

⁴ For the detailed information about the city and close surrounding see, ERDAN/TIRO 2018, *passim*; ERDAN/GÜR 2018, *passim*; AYDAŞ/ERDAN 2019, *passim*; AYDOĞMUŞ 2019, *passim*; ERDAN 2019, *passim*; ERDAN/AYDOĞMUŞ 2019, *passim*; VARDAR/ERDAN/ÖNER 2019, *passim*; AYDOĞMUŞ 2020, *passim*; ERDAN 2020, *passim*; ERDAN/YILMAZ

KOLANCI/TAŞPINAR 2020, *passim*; GÜR 2020, *passim*; ERDAN 2021, *passim*; ERÖN/ÇAKAN 2021, *passim*; ÜRKMEZ 2021, *passim*; ERDAN 2022, *passim*; CIVELEK 2023, *passim*.

⁵ ERDAN et alii. 2022, *passim*.



Fig. 2. General view of Kale Tepe. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

ancient texts as being within the borders of Aeolis, but which had not yet been located.

A NEW TYPE OF STONE OBJECTS FROM KALE TEPE AND SAMURLU

In the summer of 2021, the first results of the survey came quickly, revealing an unknown site with many ancient ruins, known to the locals as *Dedeköy*. The archaeological material found in the area, especially the pottery, dates from the 7th century BC to the 18th century AD. To create a comprehensive plan of the site in the summer of 2022, the main objective was to document the archaeological existence of *Dedeköy* and its immediate surroundings. In this context, research was carried out at Kale Tepe,⁸ about 500 meters to the west of the site.

Kale Tepe, which lies just half a kilometre west of *Dedeköy*, on the networks that will allow it to be in contact with many known settlements in the Aeolis region, is also important because it lies at the centre of many known ancient cities in the region. These include Tisna in the north, Aigai in the north-east, Larisa, Neonteichos, Temnos, Herakleia in the south, Kyme in the south-west, Myrina in the west, Gryneion, Elaia and Pitane in the north-west.

The survey carried out at Kale Tepe revealed that it was a military settlement dating from the Archaic or Classical periods. Kale Tepe was built on a rocky area of about 300 x 120 meters and has massive fortifications and towers (Fig. 2). The characteristics of the walls are compatible with the 6th and 5th centuries BC, but no archaeological material before the 5th century BC has been found here. Attic pottery from the 5th and 4th centuries BC is the most common group of artefacts found in Kale Tepe (Fig. 3).

An old and abandoned Ottoman-Turkish cemetery was found just 120 m south of the hill (Fig. 4). A stone object, which is possibly reused as a gravestone, was found here, but it is unclear where it was actually moved from. It



Fig. 3. 5th and 4th century BC pottery from Kale Tepe. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

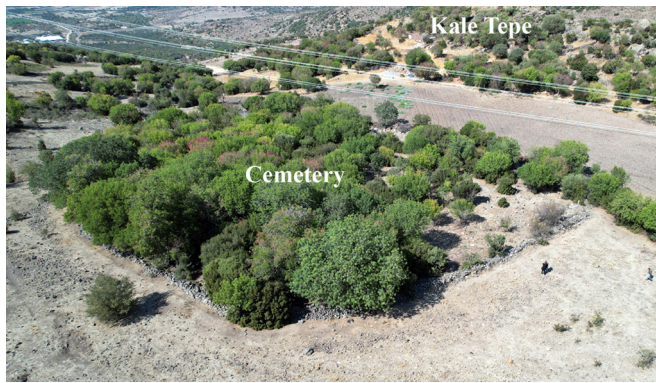


Fig. 4. Old Ottoman-Turkish cemetery near Kale Tepe. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

is 15.4 cm high, 10.6 cm wide and made of local tufa stone. There are volutes on both sides, but unlike Aeolic capitals, there are no traces of central palmettes or other ornaments. Both the upper and lower surfaces are smooth and there is no evidence of a dowel hole or socket. One of the volutes on the reverse is broken, as is part of the object (Fig. 5).

The other four stone objects were found recently in Samurlu Cemetery, which is on the southern edge of Mount Sardene. The objects found here are also reused as an Ottoman-Turkish gravestone in the cemetery. They are all like the one found in Kale Tepe, and they are all made of local tufa stone. No. 2. is 26 cm high and 24,5 cm wide (Fig. 6), No. 3. is 24 cm high and 19,2 cm wide (Fig. 7), No. 4. is 16

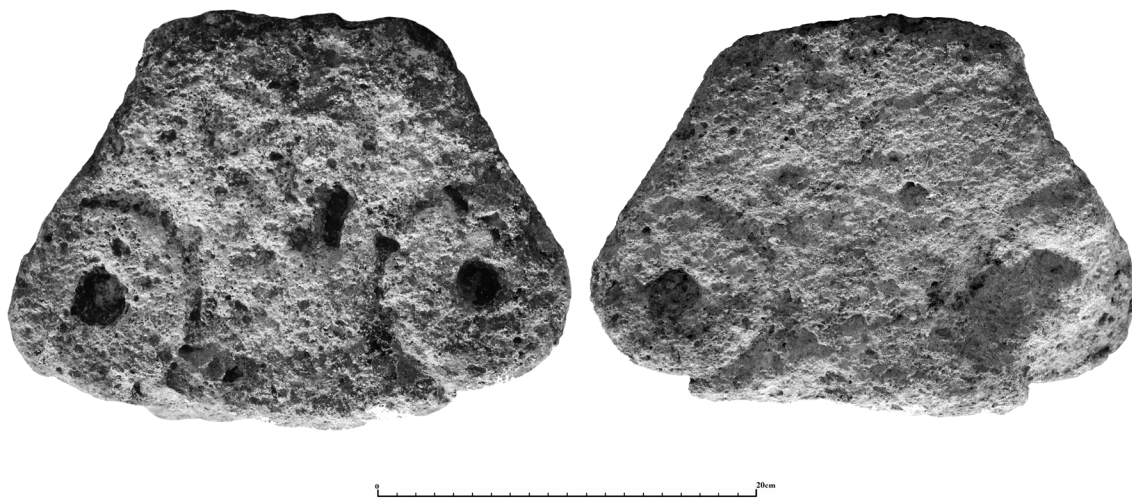


Fig. 5. Stone Object No. 1. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

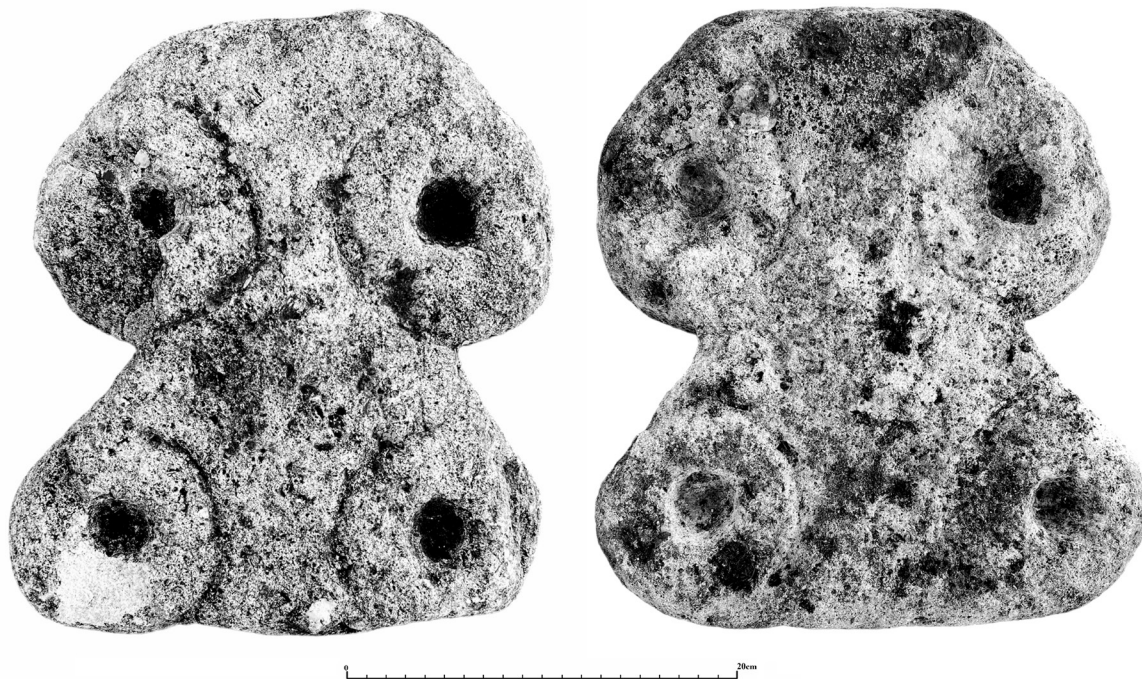


Fig. 6. Stone Object No. 2. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

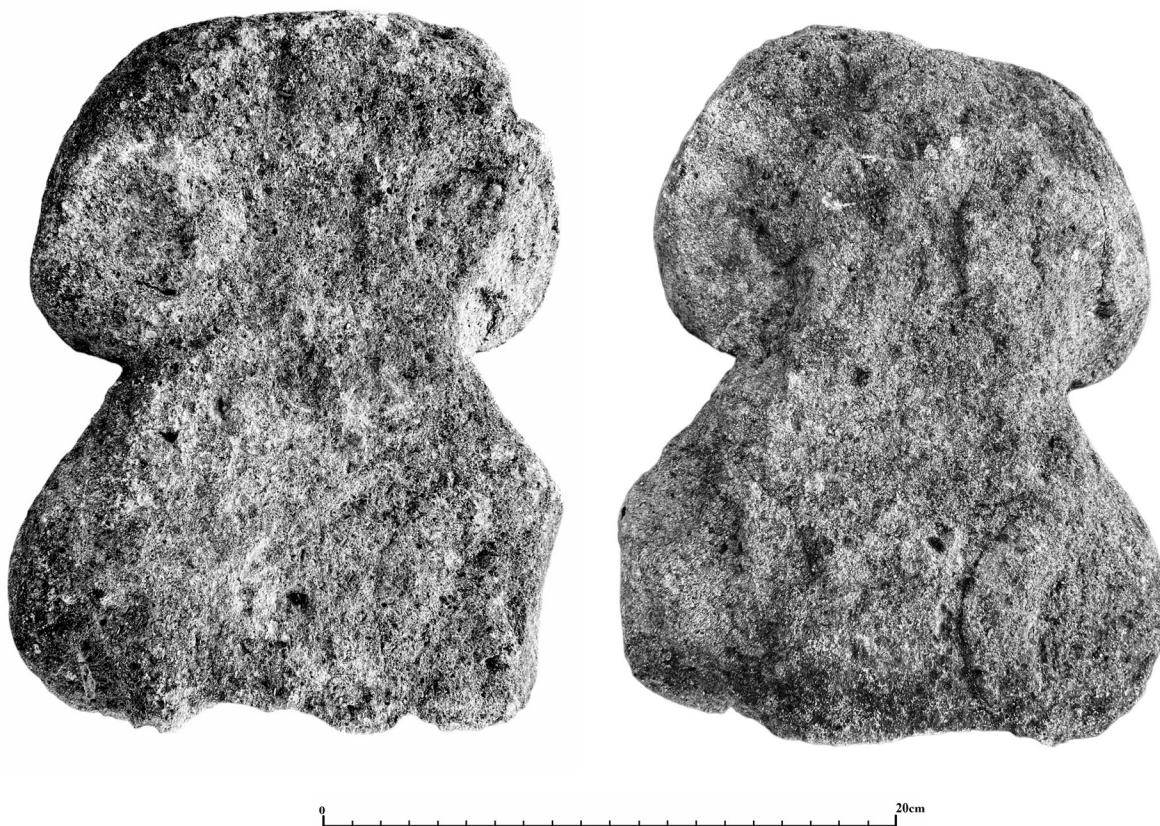


Fig. 7. Stone Object No. 3. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

cm high and 25,3 cm wide (Fig. 8), and No. 5. is 30 cm high and 22 cm wide (Fig. 9).

FUNCTION OF THE OBJECTS

It is often difficult to understand the production reasons and functions of new and unknown objects. The situation is further complicated by the fact that these objects

have been discovered by surveys rather than excavations. Therefore, when characterizing these objects whose context is unclear, it is better to consider a more hypothetical approach than to make precise judgements.

Five stone objects were introduced and identified as part of our study. However, our colleagues who are also working in the area reported us three more. They were



Fig. 8. Stone Object No. 4. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).



Fig. 9. Stone Object No. 5. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

discovered in the close villages such as Buruncuk,⁶ Kozbeyli⁷ and Helvacı.⁸ The stone objects in Buruncuk and Helvacı were reported to be found in the Ottoman-Turkish cemetery, while the one in Kozbeyli was found in the middle of the village. The Buruncuk example stands out in terms of the data it provides, demonstrating that the objects were used by being inserted into a nest or directly into the ground. The long and narrow protrusion that emerges from under the body of the stone object here must have been made for this purpose (Fig. 10).

By whom were these stones adorned with volutes, and for what purpose were they crafted and used? It is unquestionably obvious that we must search for a definitive response to this query before we can try to comprehend the purpose of objects. Without solid evidence and absolute certainty, the samples discovered by both us and our colleagues were in Ottoman-Turkish cemeteries, potentially indicating that this tradition is Turkish, and even more precisely, it is restricted to the Yörük-Turks who once and already inhabits the region.

The fact that there are no inscriptions on the stones in question, and the lack of any other examples of a similar nature in the Turkish gravestone typology, has led us to

⁶ <https://folkportal.org.tr/rit/dugun/volutlu-mezar-ogesi/.html> Accessed on 04.05.2023.

⁷ Personal communication with Prof. Turgut Saner.

⁸ Personal communication with Assoc. Prof. Ertan Daş.

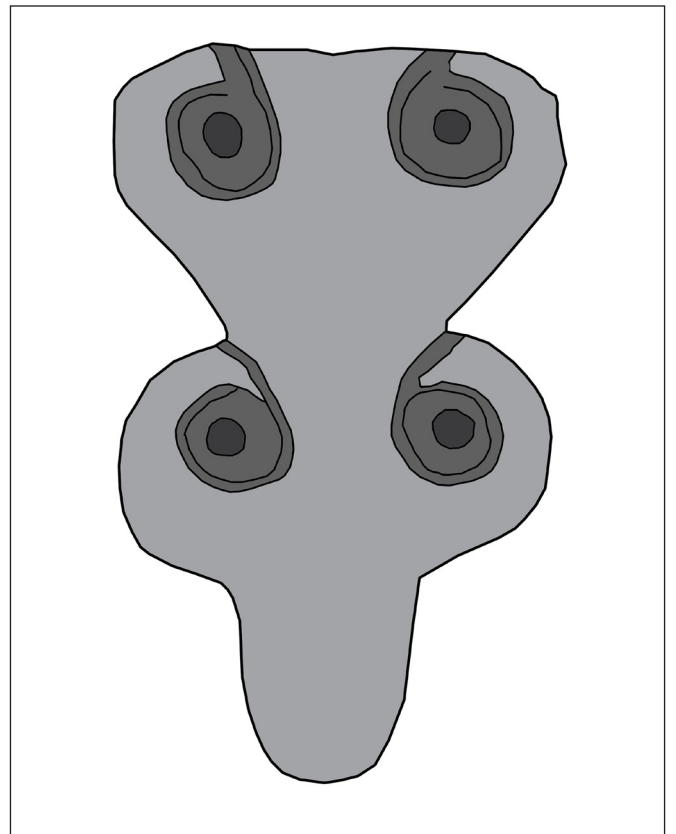


Fig. 10. Stone Object from Buruncuk. (Drawing after <https://folkportal.org.tr/rit/dugun/volutlu-mezar-ogesi/.html>).

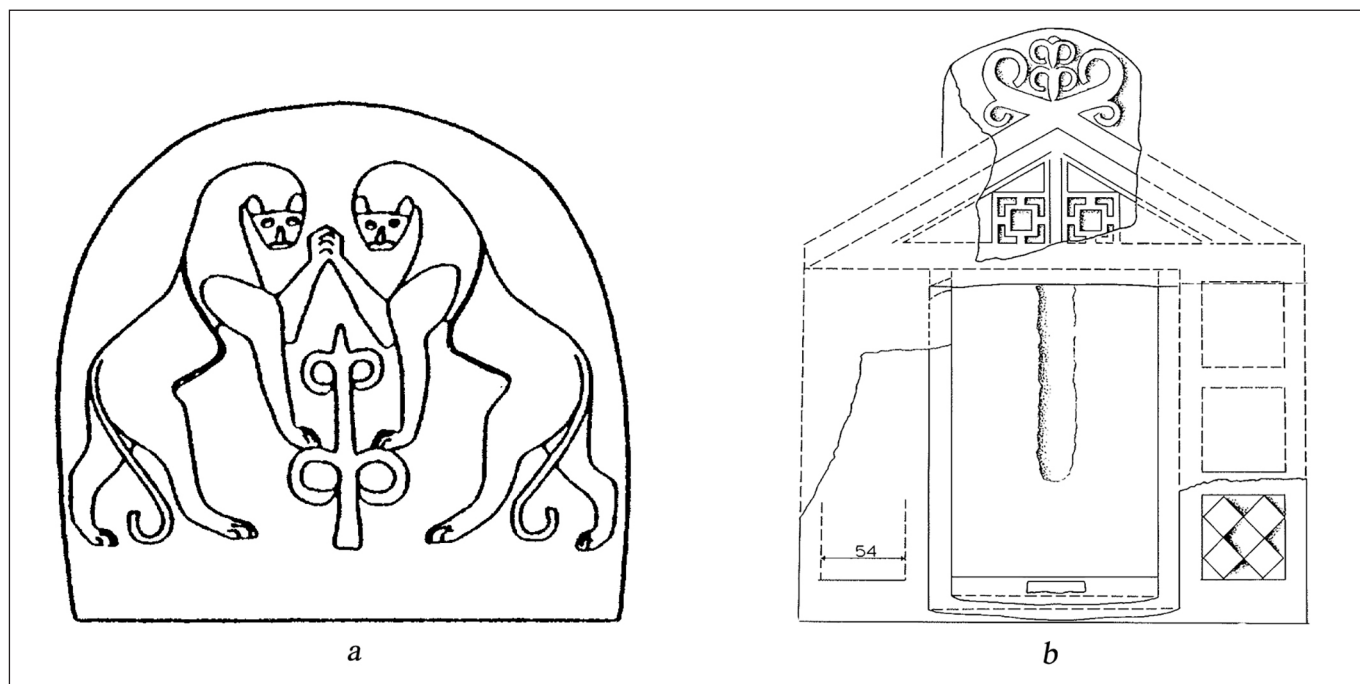


Fig. 11. a: Antefix from Gordion (Glendinning 1996, 107, Fig. 7), b: Drawing of the Hyacinth Monument (Haspels 1971, Pl. 515).

question the validity of this possibility. The Yörüks, who have different burial types, such as the kurgans, barks, wooden sarcophagi, pillars, and obo, engraved tamgas into their gravestones. After the Turkish Republican Period, this conventional tamga which shows the characteristic of the pre-Islamic Turkish culture was no longer practiced. Certain ethnic groups were also used to be represented by the inscribed names “Yörük”, “Turkmen”, and “Avşar” which are traditionally found on gravestones. During the Republican era, the common practices found on Yörük gravestones diminished slowly. The tamga tradition was no longer practiced, but its memory remains in the gravestones which were commonly made in the shape of swords. Instead of inscriptions, the gravestones featured drawings of various motifs, including the tree of life, sun, moon, star, flower, and cypress tree. However, as can be seen the new type of stone objects do not contain any tamga, an ethnic group name, or the motifs mentioned above. However, we should not be deceived by the fact that the finds are found near or in Turkish cemeteries, as these cemeteries were already established in places where an old necropolis or an old settlement was located.

As such, these objects can be classified as belonging to the ancient world. So, what was the purpose of these objects? The number of potential interpretations for such objects is rather limited. The stone object from Kale Tepe must be associated with an Aeolian city, the name of which is unknown today, near Dedeköy, which might have had a Persian garrison within its borders. The situation at Samurlu is no different. Excavations carried out there in recent years have revealed more than one necropolis area of Kyme, the most important city of Aeolis.⁹ However, some scholars have suggested that the settlement of Hermoupedion, mentioned

in ancient texts, is located in the vicinity of Samurlu, since ancient sources mention its proximity to Kyme.¹⁰ According to Heinle the name of the city can easily be interpreted as “the place of Hermes”.¹¹

The Buruncuk stone object is in the same area in which the city of ancient Larisa was once established. According to accounts from antiquity, it is suggested that Kyllene, one of the lost Aeolian cities, may have been situated close to Kozbeyli. This distribution map is the key proof that we should not link the find spots of the artefacts with the Ottoman-Turkish cemeteries directly, as these cemeteries are already situated in an ancient settlement or necropolis. Through this discovery, it can be hypothesized that the stone objects could be previously unknown Aeolic gravestones. Nevertheless, the scarcity of inscriptions and the absence of similar objects in the already-excavated Aeolian cemeteries create a challenge for this hypothesis.

One could argue that they are somehow related to Proto-Aeolic capitals. In fact, the site where the stone objects have been discovered is in the same region as many of the renowned Aeolic capitals. Smyrna,¹² Larisa,¹³ Kyme,¹⁴ Aigai,¹⁵ Mytilene,¹⁶ Klopédi,¹⁷ Eressos,¹⁸ Neandria,¹⁹ Assos,²⁰ Troia,²¹ Ainos²² are the sites of Aeolic capitals identified so

¹⁰ RAGONE 2003, 276, Tav. 1.

¹¹ HEINLE 2015, 42.

¹² BETANCOURT 1977, 58-62; NICHOLLS 1998, 146-148.

¹³ BOEHLAU/SCHÉFOLD 1940, 142-143; BETANCOURT 1977, 73-81; AKURGAL 2010, 286, 288.

¹⁴ PARAPETI 2017, *passim*.

¹⁵ RADT 1991, 481-484.

¹⁶ BETANCOURT 1977, 87; AKURGAL 2010, 287.

¹⁷ BETANCOURT 1977, 82-86; ΠΟΥΓΓΟΥ/ΔΟΥΛΟΥΜΠΕΚΗΣ 2014, 13-15.

¹⁸ CONDIS 1946, *passim*; BETANCOURT 1977, 63-72.

¹⁹ CLARKE 1886, 1-20; WIEGARTZ 1994, 117-132; AKURGAL 2010, 84-85.

²⁰ ENGEL 2020, 354-356.

²¹ ROSE 2013, 65-67.

²² BAŞARAN 2000, 155-168.

⁹ ÜRKMEZ 2014, *passim*; ÜRKMEZ 2016, *passim*.

far in Aeolis and its surroundings. Even though the volutes have the same traditional roots, there is no incontrovertible evidence that the stones are related to Aeolic capitals, but there is no indication that the intended use of the stone objects is analogous to an Aeolian capital.

It is worth mentioning another possible option. A motif from the ancient Phrygian region, with which the Aeolis settlements have a close cultural relationship, is comparable to the newly found stone objects. This design, known as the *tree of life*, has its origins in ancient Anatolian and Mesopotamian cultures and can be seen in the architectural terracotta of Gordion (Fig. 11a) and the acroter of the Hyacinth Monument (Fig. 11b). According to the Gordion architectural terracotta, the *tree of life* is between two lions and is firmly attached to the ground. Taking this concept as a hypothesis, as shown in Buruncuk, the stone objects placed on the ground could have represented the *tree of life* in a sacred place in the area, or they could have been used as an acroter by being placed on a nest.

It is much more likely that the objects we are discussing are aniconic cult objects, rather than any of the other possibilities we have mentioned. It is known that “T”, square, rectangular, conical or pyramidal stone pillars with a rounded top, which have been called variously *huwaši*,²³ *puluši*,²⁴ *višhap*²⁵ and idol²⁶ since prehistoric times in Anatolia; amorphous stones called *baitylos*²⁷ and *diopetus*,²⁸ believed to have fallen from the sky, considered to be the realm of the gods; Dome-shaped stones called *omphalos*,²⁹ considered the centre of the world; tree of life or wooden poles; stepped monuments and niches were amongst the non-iconic objects of worship that replaced the images of gods and goddesses and assumed a symbolic function to reach them. The ritual offerings of beer, wine, olive oil, bread, cereals, seeds, bulls, and sheep to these objects, which were often found near mountains, forests and water sources and used in cult ceremonies, show that they were revered as cult statues of gods.³⁰

In the Aeolis Region, two mountains, Aspordene (Yunt Mountain) and Sardene (Dumanlı Mountain), are closely tied to the mother goddess cult, and host different types of aniconic cult objects. In the rural territory of Aigai, niches opening into the rocks overlooking the valley where the Pythikos (Guzelhisar) Stream flows;³¹ the sanctuaries containing niches, altars, and stepped monuments in Sarıkale Tepe³² and Kocakale Tepe³³ areas of Tisna and the *baitylos*³⁴ in the cella of the temple in the Larisa Acropolis prove the existence of aniconic religious practices in the region.

The fragment from Stephanus of Byzantium corroborates the fact that “*Όρος Κύμης*” (Mount Kyme) was the former name of Mount Sardene, the place where stone objects were uncovered.³⁵ Through inscriptions, it is revealed that certain cults gained popularity in the mountain and in its vicinity. Not only was there a widely held belief in river gods in the region,³⁶ but two cults found in the inscriptions are remarkable. Among the many gods and goddesses, Hagne Thea, who relates to Magna Mater, can be found in a Late Hellenistic Period inscription from the village of Türkelli which is near the villages of Samurlu, Helvacı and Buruncuk, the places where the stone objects have been located.

Another inscription with a reference to a local cult is a spolia found in Helvacı. The dedication was made in honour of Aphrodite Dosandra (*δωσανδρα*). Aphrodite must have been worshiped in this locality with the powerful epithet as a goddess who helps the girls to find a good and suitable husband.³⁷

The temple drawing found on a bedrock on the southern slope of Sardene Mountain, an area known as Serden Kayalıkları by the local people, featuring the goddess riding a goat and surrounded by two lions, provides us with a better understanding of the sense of belief in the region. This depiction displays both Aphrodite and Cybele's images and characteristics, allowing us to understand the cult of the mother goddess that is linked to the mountains.³⁸ A comparable situation is reflected by the Aphrodite plates found in Karahayıt, where we have found a bedrock with niche which reflects cult practices of Cybele in the region.³⁹ Additionally, there is considerable archaeological data that suggests the Tisna Sarıkale Tepe Acropolis Sanctuary was a shared worship area related to Cybele and Aphrodite.

CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration all the above, the rare and distinct stone objects that were discovered in the region could be related to the combination of the Cybele and Aphrodite cult in the area. This is not an unexpected outcome for Cybele, who was previously worshipped as an aniconic stele or idol in Anatolia, or for Aphrodite, who was also worshipped through *baitylos* in places such as Paphos.⁴⁰ A chest-like image, fashioned with volutes, might have been a representation of Aphrodite, who was associated with Cybele in the Aeolis region.

Without any finds similar to stone objects identified amongst the discoveries from the tombs, especially in the Samurlu necropolises, the likelihood that these are objects related to aniconic worship increases. With the additional archaeological evidence found in Kale Tepe, one could conclude that the objects in question may date back to between the 5th century BC and the 4th century BC. Although the stone objects which resemble the Aeolic order seem to

²³ DARGA 1969, 497-499; TARACHA 2009, 61.

²⁴ PIOTROVSKI 1965, 46.

²⁵ GÜNERİ 2013, 177-179, Fig. 1-2.

²⁶ ROLLER 2013, 104.

²⁷ OVERBECK 1864, 146; EVANS 1901, 118-119.

²⁸ OAKLEY 1971, 207-211.

²⁹ COOPER 1978, 122, “*Omphalos*”.

³⁰ GURNEY 1977, 27; SIR GAVAZ 2020, 152; PIOTROVSKI 1965, 39; ÇİLİNGİROĞLU 2004, 258.

³¹ ERDOĞAN 2003, 370.

³² ERDAN 2019, 29-30.

³³ ERDAN 2019, 32-33; ERDAN/GÜR 2020, 73-74.

³⁴ BOEHLAU/SCHEFOLD 1940, 59.

³⁵ STEPH. BYZ. s. v. Σαιδηνή.

³⁶ KAYA 2020, *passim*.

³⁷ HEINLE 2015, 55.

³⁸ DOĞER 1998, 277; ERDOĞAN 2003, 369-370; ERDAN *et alii*. 2020, 6-7.

³⁹ ERDAN *et alii*. 2020, *passim*.

⁴⁰ ZEMAN 2008, *passim*.



a



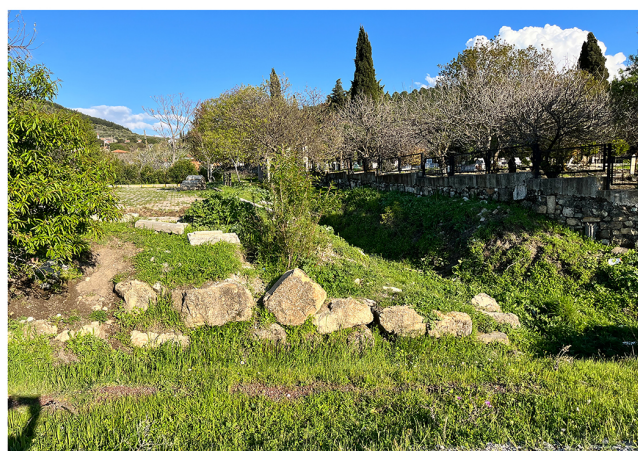
b



d



c



e

Fig. 12. a: Fragment of an architrave, b-d: Fragments of columns, e: Polygonal wall just outside the cemetery. (Archive of Tisna Survey Project).

have been produced in the same workshops in the region, there are no facts now to back up this hypothesis.

It would not be right to exclude completely a kind of tradition developed by the Yörük-Turkmen groups belonging to the *Derici* tribes known to have lived in the region in the 19th century and later. However, we must note that none of the stone objects had inscriptions related to tribal names, which is a common occurrence on Yörük gravestones. Remains of ancient architectural elements such as architrave (Fig. 12a) and column fragments (Fig. 12b-d) were observed in the Samurlu cemetery, some of which were spolia and some were buried in the ground. The polygonal wall (Fig. 12e) just outside the cemetery that follows a regular line is also an indication that the area was previously developed on an ancient site.

It is believed that excavations in the future in the region will be significant for better comprehension of the purpose of the stone objects we observed in the study. We also plan to focus our research in this area to find the connection between an ancient temple near Kale Tepe that we discovered in 2021 and these objects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank first the Tisna research team for their dedication to the scientific investigation of the city and its surrounding. Further thanks are to Prof. Antonio La Marca, Prof. Suat Ateşlier, Prof. Abdulkadir Baran, Prof. Ertan Daş, Prof. Turgut Saner, Assoc. Prof. Aydın Erön, Assoc. Prof. Hazar Kaba, Dr. Carmello Colelli and Dr. Adem Yurtsever for their kind remarks and opinions about the stone objects from Kale Tepe and Samurlu. Tisna survey project is carried out with the permission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye and with the financial support of Aydın Adnan Menderes University and Aliğa Municipality. We thank the authorities of the institutions.

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