Nur Balkan-Atlı

(1953-2019)

Berkay Dinçer

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ESKİ ANADOLU

XXVII

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TABLE DES MATIERES

PRÉFACE	V
PREFACE	VII
IN MEMORIAM	1
Burçin ERDOĞU et Özlem ÇEVİK A Comparative Study of the Sixth Millennium BC Marble Bracelets from Ulucak and Uğurlu	29
Martin GODON et Ozan ÖZBUDAK Early Chalcolithic Pottery from Tepecik-Çiftlik and Gelveri, Central Anatolia: From Local to Supra-Regional Ceramic Style	33
Vladimir SHELESTIN On the Origin of Küçükçekmece Iron Figurines	51
Akın ERSOY et Ludovic LAUGIER Sculptures grecques et romaines de Smyrne, découvertes récentes	57
Élisabeth GOUSSARD, Raphaëlle CHEVALLIER, Olivier HENRY et Christophe BOST Labraunda 2018, Étude d'un poids décoré et d'une couronne : les apports de la conservation-restauration	77
Isabelle HASSELIN ROUS Les figurines en terre cuite de Tarse en Cilicie à l'époque romaine impériale	89
İnci TÜRKOĞLU Early Byzantine Structure at Gerenkuyu Mevkii of Yalı-Bodrum	109
Anca DAN, Sait BAŞARAN, Helmut BRÜCKNER, Ercan ERKUL, Anna PINT, Wolfgang RABBEL, Lyudmila SHUMILOVSKIKH, Dennis WILKEN and Tina WUNDERLICH Ainos in Thrace: Research Perspectives in Historical Geography and Geoarchaeology	127
Hülya ATAŞCIOĞLU AYKUL, M. Baha TANMAN, Miguel Ángel ESCOBAR-CLARÓS A Note on the Turkish Lot III / 1891 from the Bab el-Gasus Cache (Egypt), kept at the Istanbul Archaeology Museums / Ancient Orient Museum	145
CHRONIQUES DES TRAVAUX ARCHEOLOGIQUES EN TURQUIE 2018	
Kenan IŞIK, Bülent GENÇ, Vedat TİMUR et Rıfat KUVANÇ Two Column Bases From Mawan in the Hakkâri Province (Southeast Corner of Turkey): A New Achaemenid Center?	155

Çiğdem MANER

Preliminary Report on the Sixth Season of the Konya Ereğli, Karapınar, Halkapınar and Emirgazi Survey Project (KEYAR) 2018 161

Erkan KONYAR, Bülent GENÇ, Can AVCI et Armağan TAN

Excavations at the Old City, Fortress, and Mound of Van: Work in 2018 169

Olivier HENRY et J. BLID, Chr. BOST, N. CARLESS-UNWIN, R. CHEVALLIER, G. ÇİMEN, A. EYİĞÖR, A. FREJMAN, E. GOUSSARD, V. LUNGU, A. SITZ, A. MUSAT-STREINU, B. VERGNAUD

Labraunda 2018 185

M. SEYER, A. DOLEA, P. M. BES, D. Zs. SCHWARCZ, S. BAYBO, A. K. L. LEUNG, U. QUATEMBER, M. WÖRRLE, H. BRÜCKNER, F. STOCK, A. SYMANCZYK, G. STANZL, K. KUGLER, B. YENER-MARKSTEINER

The Excavation at Limyra/Lycia 2018: Preliminary Report 233

Alessandra RICCI

The Küçükaly Arkeopark (Istanbul), 2016-2018: Excavation, Conservation, Cultural Heritage and Public Archaeology 255

Nergis GÜNSENİN

A Günsenin IV Amphora from Küçükaly 279

Berkay DİNÇER*

NUR BALKAN-ATLI (1953-2019)

Prof. Dr. Nur Balkan-Atlı was one of the pioneers in the prehistory of Turkey. She had a vast field experience both in the Paleolithic and Neolithic archaeology of Anatolia. She was a specialist in lithic technologies of the Neolithic period and she focused her research on the obsidian. One of her main research interests was the obsidian trade during the Neolithic. She was an outstanding scientist but also many of us will remember her as a great mentor and supporter. Nur Balkan-Atlı died on 10 April 2019 in Antalya, due mainly to cardiovascular problems, which she did not pay enough attention to cure.

Nur Balkan-Atlı was born on 2 January 1953. She graduated from Robert College and afterwards she studied in Paris. After completing her PhD in 1985 on “*la néolithisation de l’Anatolie* (the neolithization of Anatolia)” in Paris 1 - Sorbonne University, she got a position at the Prehistory Department of Istanbul University where she worked until her last days. She has participated in excavations at El Kowm basin (Syria), Cafer Höyük (Malatya) and Aşıklı Höyük (Aksaray). She conducted and directed the Kaletepe Neolithic and Paleolithic excavations and the Göllü Dağ survey.

During mid-1990s, she has initiated surveys in the Niğde, Nevşehir and Aksaray provinces with a Franco-Turkish team. Until that time obsidian sources of Central Anatolia were under-recognized. In the first years of those surveys, she identified the Kaletepe obsidian workshop at Kömürcü village in Niğde and started excavations at various spots in the Kaletepe area. The results of these excavations were fascinating since it was the first time that the technological products of East Anatolian and Near Eastern Neolithic were encountered in Central Anatolia. It was known that end products of the Göllü Dağ obsidian had been traded to South Eastern Anatolia, Syria and Palestine before; however, the Kaletepe excavations documented the exact *chaine-opératoire* of this technology. This has radically changed our understanding of the Neolithic and obsidian trade during this period. Her team has also excavated some other sites at Kaletepe, dating between Pre-Pottery Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods.

One of the most important discoveries at Kaletepe was the Lower and Middle Paleolithic site of Kaletepe Deresi 3 (KD3). This site has been excavated between 2001 and 2008. Nur did not personally excavate this site; however, she provided the excavation permit under her name. One of the particular characteristics of her was to trust young students. With her help and support, L. Slimak and then S. L. Kuhn conducted the excavations at Kaletepe Deresi 3. She gave a great liberty to us in scientific methods and approaches while excavating the KD3.

Since the 2000s the greatest problem at Göllü Dağ was the perlite mining that destructs Paleolithic and Neolithic sites. In order to prevent that, she worked very hard for declaring the whole Göllü Dağ as an archaeological and natural protection area, which was a great stress for her. Also in 2004, miners managed to find some archaeologists who have written a report saying that there are no important archaeological sites at Göllü Dağ. So she decided to conduct a more systematic survey at Göllü Dağ. In 2007, we started a pedestrian survey covering an area larger than 30 km². This was one of the most important systematic surveys in Turkey, concentrated in such small area. The Göllü Dağ survey dramatically changed our knowledge about the different obsidian sources and prehistoric sites in Central Anatolia and also proved the importance of the area.

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Nur Balkan Atlı was a great adviser to her students. She supported many of her students in many different ways. She had very strong relations with foreign researchers and she used this for finding grants for her students. Also in collaboration with the IFEA, she supported many of her graduate students to get French courses. In this way, she left a small but influential group of researchers with international contacts. In her last years, she was the head of the Prehistory Department within the Archaeology Department of Istanbul University. She directed the department in the most democratic way, asking every member's ideas for making decisions.

Nur Balkan-Atlı has changed many things in archaeology in Turkey. With her efforts now we are using a more technological approach rather than the typological one in the lithic studies. Her legacy will continue to inspire the next generations of archaeologists in the country.

Figurine d'homme en terre cuite (Louvre, Tarse 314)
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