ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY IN SAHMURATLI VILLAGE BY KERKENES EXCAVATIONS IN TURKEY

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SUMMARY

This paper is about an ethnoarchaeological research which aims at providing cultural information on the Sahmuratli Village for the Kerkenes Mountain Archaeological Project. Methods of social anthropology and ethnoarchaeology are used. Sahmuratli which identifies itself with the Castle of Keykavus on the mountain is a modern village which has become part of the urban world in Turkey and Europe through the market economy, kinship ties, modern houses level of education, efficient means of transportation and communication, patterns of consumption and information about Turkish and world affairs. The villagers are no more traditional peasants but commercial farmers and landlords.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological survey of Kerkenes Iron Age City in Yozgat, situated between the Hittite capital Hattusa and Cappadocia east of Ankara, is led by Dr. Geoffrey and Françoise Summers of METU. Started in 1993 it has completed its 5th season. Kerkenes was ancient Pteria, founded by the Median king Aystages, following the «Battle of the Eclipse», 28th May 585 BC. (Summers, 1997). According to Herodotus of Halicarnassus in Turkey, «Cresus destroyed it in 547 BC, following his divinely sanctioned crossing of the Halys (Kizilir-
mak), in the mistaken belief that he would destroy the Persian Empire of the Achamenid Dynasty after the fall of the Median Dynasty, rather than his own» (Summers, 1997).

According to Dr. Summers the ancient city of the Kerkenes Mountain was originally inhabited sometime between the 6th and 5th century BC. The granodiorite rocks, cold springs, pear trees, bushes, grass vineyards and orchards give the site its present characteristic look. The city walls are 7.5 km in length and 4.6 m in width. There are no traces of a second inner wall. The area within the city walls has almost totally been utilized. There is a highly efficient system of water collection and distribution. Summers has determined two areas, one at the north and the other at the south which distinguish themselves as important locations enclosing public places, a palace and a wide street. The geophysical evidence suggests that the construction of the city was not totally finished when it was abandoned and therefore the settlement could survive less than a generation only. It was destroyed by fire. Summers, team has dated the pottery found at the site to be from the 6th cent. BC. The site is not obscured by later settlements except two much smaller locations inhabited later. The peak of Keykavus was inhabited at the Hellenistic period while the southwestern end of city has been occupied until the early Byzantine times (Summers & Summers, 1994: 2-20).

The objective of this ethnoarchaeological research, which has started in 1995, is to present information to the archaeologist by studying the same variables under different conditions to test hypotheses to do experiments and find answers to questions that arise during archaeological investigations. The Kerkenes and Sahmuratli people manipulate (d) similar environments but in different ways. Childe, the pioneer of Western socio-archaeology, has suggested to the archaeologists that «the study of living human societies as functioning organisms» is revealing (Gjessing, 1975:324). We have then to assume that an understanding of the past is only possible with reference to social processes occurring in the present (Watson, 1979:5, McIntosh, 1986:148). Because, while archaeologists deal «with artifacts arranged in types or class» «social anthropologists work with functional coherent systems» (Gjessing, 1975:331). Ethnographic data, therefore can serve to facilitate the testing of hypotheses in relating material and behavioral/cultural phenomena as well as serving «as basis for models of particular social relations which are postulated to have been the context for an observed archaeological structure» (Binford, 1989:270). While Social Anthropology holistically studies the structure and function in the human behaviors of present societies (Radcliffe-Brown, 1935:359), the ethnographer studies their material culture with little emphasis on the social relations they reflect. Therefore «ethnoarchaeological research investigates aspects of contemporary sociocultural behavior from an archaeological perspective» integrating «ethnographic and ethnohistoric data with archaeological data» (Kramer, 1979:1,3; McIntosh, 1986:148).
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METHODS

The daily life is recorded through photographs, films and social anthropological methods of participant observation, in-depth interviewing of key informants, collecting place names, recording oral history, legends and lyrics. Documents and maps kept by the local authorities are inspected. Visits are made to lands, sights and settlements around the village.

SAHMURATLI VILLAGE

Sahmuratli Village is situated 12 km south of Sorgun Town and 30 km east of the city of Yozgat near Ankara. Sahmuratli (1,150 m) is located on the eastern slopes of Mt. Kerkenes (1,472 m). There are lignite, zinc and lead mines and thermal springs within a distance of 3 to 150 km. Of the 9 villages surrounding the mountain, Sahmuratli is the closest to the ancient city (2 km). The villagers work in their fields at an altitude of 1,000 m. It has hot and dry summers with sudden thunderstorms and long and cold winters with heavy snowfall. There are creeks that run down from the mountain and pass by the village. An artesian well supplies the houses with running water (Ergenekon 1996a:10). There is electricity and telephone and a good road connects it to Sorgun town. The mosque and the village primary school render the only public services there. There is a small shop. A village headman (mukhtar) and the council of elders including the village guard, elected at the local elections govern the village. The mukhtar has the authority to register marriages in front of two witnesses in his office. Other officials representing the central government are the two school teachers and the Imam. There are little disputes among the villagers and with other villages when property rights are concerned. Lands are registered by official cadastration and protected by the Turkish Law. Village administration organizes economical support and labor among the villagers for projects of collective interest.

The villagers have a good deal of fair haired and blue-eyed people with a heavy tan who are of medium height and jovial in character. The population has been decreasing recently due to emigration. 333 (171 M, 162 F) people lived in 76 households in July 1997 compared to 87 households in 1994 and 103 households (471 people with 223 M, 248 F) in 1990. Birth and death rates are low. Emigration gained momentum towards the end of 1960s due to the push of mechanization and consequent unemployment and the pull of urban jobs and services. Sorgun, Yozgat, Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Germany, Holland, France and Australia are the main destinations of emigration where they are employed as workers or minor employees. Few families have moved back after retiring from skilled or semi-skilled jobs in the cities.

All villagers are farmers except the mukhtar who runs a commercial poultry of 4,000 chicken and a 70 year old self retired iron-smith. There are several doctors, agricultural engineers, teachers, officers, technicians, artisans like gold-smiths, tailors, or shop-keepers selling clothes, shoes furniture, in towns.
or other cities and countries. The village economy is based on cash-crop agriculture. They own around 90 square kilometers of land 53.3 sq. km of which is within the ancient city walls. The practice of fallow is abandoned recently after the mechanization and intensification through fertilization and wild grass management after 1965. This increased land productivity and reduced the drudgery of labor. There are 201 registered farm machinery including 32 tractors. In 1997, 5 of 76 families owned lands between 400 and 100 acres while the rest owned lesser. Only the mukhtar’s family who ran a poultry farm had no land.

The villagers follow a folk calendar adjusted to their ecosystem which divides the year into four according to the earth’s movement around the sun. These are 21-22 March (Spring), 21-22 June (Summer), 21-22 September (Fall) and 21-22 December (Winter). The agricultural calendar fits into this calendar. Months are referred to in numbers, January being the first. The year starts in September when the fields are prepared. They are then cultivated in October. There is a rest period between November and February. In March the vineyards are tended and all grains and lentils are cultivated. In April the crops fertilized with Nitrogen and chemicals are used to kill the wild grass. In May chick-peas and vegetables are cultivated and the vineyards are tended again. There is a break in June. In July barley, rye, oat are harvested and lentils are picked. In August wheat is harvested and the chick-peas are picked. The products are then sold at the local grain market to prices determined by the state or to private traders who can pay more.

New and profitable crops like lentils and chick-peas were added to the traditional crops of wheat, rye, barley and vetch recently. Seasonal labor among Gypsy, Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish campsites is hired for picking lentils and chick-peas. Vine cultivation and animal husbandry have recessed in recent years due to emigration. Only two families own commercial sheep herds while one family owns cattle. The nearest markets for them are in Yozgat and Ankara. All families however keep a few sheep and cattle for their own use. All animals are grazed at Mt. Kerkenes. Yozgat and Sorgun were known as regions of horse-racing. Horses have however completely been replaced in the surrounding villages as well as Sahmuratli by private cars and minibuses. Two families keep bee-hives at their vineyards and men go partridge hunting when snow falls on Kerkenes. Along the creek east of the village the villagers own vegetable gardens where they grow beans, maize, parsley, green pepper, cucumbers and tomatoes with some fruit trees and poplin woods used for construction and trade. The Kerkenes mountain is rich with herbs such as thyme and rosebud bushes which are used as spices to cure pain and some diseases. A certain kind is used as an incense for ritual purification when social occasions such as weddings and male circumcision call for it to keep the evil away. Agricultural products are stored after they are processed through sun-drying or pickling of some fruits and vegetables, salting of vine leaves, processing wheat grains to make «bulgur», processing grapes to obtain molasses of different concentrations. Cheese, butter, cream and yogurt are made with
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electrical equipment or bought ready made from traveling salesmen. Flat bread is made by women through cooperation called «imece», once every month or so for each household. They are then kept in a dry place for consumption. «Ayran» made of diluted yogurt and grape molasses, water, are drunk cold while hot tea is consumed at every occasion. Local breakfast is served in the morning and at noon while cooked meals are eaten around 8 p.m. Meals which consist of soups, various dishes of bulgur, homemade macaroni and flour vegetable dishes, tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers as salads. Various deserts of molasses and milk, sweets and pastries are heavily supplemented with a variety of bread. Wooden spoons are replaced by metal ones and are used for soups or stews while drier dishes are scooped up with a piece of dry bread by hand from a common large pan. The family sits on cushions around a circular and small wooden table of 15 cm. Pulling the cloth underneath it over their knees to serve as napkins. Guests however are given a separate plate, utensils and glass.

According to the oral history the village is said to have been founded 500 years ago by three lineages by the founder of the ancient city who was called Shah Murat, therefore the village name (Ergenekon, 1996b:12). The village has 2 quarters known as the Upper Quarter and the Lower Quarter. Villagers have abandoned their old one-storey houses built of grano-diorite stone foundations, mud-brick walls, wooden floors and ceilings and flat roofs designed to house the family, the farm animals and store agricultural products and traditional equipment. It kept them warm in winter and cool in summer. New houses generally of two-storeys, stone foundations, brick walls and tiled roofs are built the last 20 years. They keep hot in summer and cold in winter which have to be heated with dung, fire-wood or lignite coal. The first floors are used to keep farm machinery, cars and as storage while a corner is reserved for a few farm animals. New houses contain a separate bath-room and an indoors toilet (for the elderly) but the outdoors one is used as a rule. Toilets empty into a closed cesspool. Gas burners are used in kitchens to cook food. An outdoors oven house is built within the housing premises enclosed with a wall for privacy. Clothes are first boiled then washed with soap or detergent. Most families have a well in their gardens. Of the 76 houses 19% has 5 rooms, 41.8% has 4, 17.6% has 2 and 4% has 1 room. Number of persons per room is 0.78 while number of rooms per person is 1.2 for the whole village. Roofed areas range between 100 to 300 square m.

The inhabitants are related to each other and the surrounding villages through endogamy. Almost predetermined marriage partners are children of siblings of the same (parallel-cousin) or the opposite sex (cross-cousin) of the parents' or grandparents' generation whether they be in Sahmuratli, Holland or Germany. There is bride-price and intricate preparations and rituals at every step of an act of marriage. It is finalized by a 4-day conspicuous wedding which starts on Thursdays and ends on Sundays. Chastity is important and divorce is practiced only when it is absolutely necessary. Eloping happens when families do not give consent to a marriage partner. Pregnant women are taken...
to the hospital 12 km away. The water cisterns of the ancient city are now pools of mud fostering frogs and leaches. These places which have international fame are believed to cure skin diseases such as scabby or hemorrhoid and barrenness. One only has to bath in them (Ergenekon, 1996a:10).

A local dialect of the Turkish language is spoken in Sahmuratli. The villagers are positive to literacy training of the illiterate and educating their children. They are proud of all the theologians, poets, authors and statesmen who were once natives of this village. A few legends and their versions which date back to Shah Kay Kawus (Keykavus) who was either the father or the son Cambyses of Shah Cyrus of Persia from the 6th cent. BC. (Lewy, 1949; Ergenekon, 1997). The villagers are quick to compose rhymes, verses and poems that fit a social situation (Ergenekon 1996b:12). The local tradition of weaving impressing fabrics and rugs is unfortunately abandoned by women.

The villagers follow the Moslem Sunnite sect with pre-Islamic elements in it. Two nearby villages are however Moslem Alewites which is a mixture of mainly Islam and some Christianity. With higher income, more people visit Mecca for pilgrimage nowadays. When someone dies they are buried in one of the local cemeteries. There are rituals which take place during and after a burial. Some use ready made rectangular sarcophagi to frame and mark the grave with lyrics or a verse from the Koran written on the tombstone. Women wear scarves and dresses while long stockings cover their legs, men wear a shirt and trousers. Woolen sweaters and coats are used in winter. The traditional «salvar», the baggy trousers, is abandoned as a local dressing.

CONCLUSION

Sahmuratli village is situated at a place which gives access to centrally placed resources such as pasture and agricultural land, water, flora, fauna, mines, seasonal human labor and services. The location allows the circulation of trade goods by good roads and effective transportation. The villagers make use of modern machines in agriculture and electrical household equipment in domestic labor. However they still keep traditional farming equipment and utensils at home to be used when necessary or there is shortage of electricity. Traditional methods and equipment are used when they are not replaced by modern ones. The material culture of Sahmuratli keeps some traditions intact such as marriage patterns while mechanization has defined new roles to the peasants which require a change in behavior as far as relation to land, housing and living standards are concerned. The Kerkenes City was most likely situated at a place that gave access to natural resources as well as defense and political supremacy. The elite of the city must have exploited villages far and wide who were most probably tilling the land with the oxen-plow and harvesting it with manual labor and wooden equipment still available today. Yet there is more to be discovered about Sahmuratli and the other villages around the mountain. Whether Shah Murat is the founder of Kerkenes City, this village or both has yet to be answered in the seasons of 1998-99.
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