THE TYPOLOGY OF EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS OF TURKISH THRACE

Umut M. DOĞAN
Edirne Archaeology and Ethnography Museum, Edirne, Türkiye,
e-mail: arkmud@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1519-1551

Abstract: This study, based on the surveys conducted for the author's PhD thesis, provides data and suggestions on the geographical distribution of the Early Iron Age settlements in Turkish Thrace, which constitutes a significant part of Eastern Thrace. The area from which the data were obtained consists of: the valleys fed by two major rivers, the Maritsa (Meriç) and Tundzha (Tunca) rivers in the province of Edirne, the valleys fed by the Süloğlu stream, the region north of the Saros Gulf, the Tozakli Valley and its immediate surroundings, near the Pinarhisar district of the Kırklareli province. This study area is an important data area for the region as it covers both the inner Eastern Thrace close to the Istranca Mountains and the coasts of the Saros Gulf in the South.

During the surveys conducted between 2021 and 2023, the centres found in this region during previous surveys were revisited and examined, and new centres were identified.

The observations made on the settlement typology largely coincide with the Early Iron Age data from other parts of Thrace. In addition to small and medium sized unfortified settlements situated in the valleys, fortress type settlements located at certain points of the valleys and built high above the river level were also identified. These two settlement types suggest that the village and hamlet-type lowland settlements established on the ridges close to the river beds along the valleys in the Early Iron Age may have been connected to the administrative centres in the fortress-type settlements established on high places.

Rezumat: Acest studiu, având ca punct de pornire cercetările de suprafață desfășurate de autor pentru lucrarea de doctorat, oferă date și sugestii privind distribuția geografică a așezărilor din prima epocă a fierului din Tracia Turcească, ce constituie o parte importantă a Traciei de Est. Aria de unde au fost colectate datele cuprinde: văile râurilor Mariţa și Tunca din provincia Edirne, văile deservite de râul Süloğlu, regiunea de la nord de golful Saros, valea Tozakli și zona imediat înconjurătoare, în apropierea districtului Pinarhisar din provincia Kırklareli. Această arie de studiu este importantă pentru regiune, deoarece acoperă atât interiorul Traciei de Est, în apropiere de Munții Istranca, cât și coastele golfului Saros în sud.

În cursul cercetărilor de suprafață desfășurate în anii 2021-2023 au fost revizitate și examinate așezări descoperite în cursul unor cercetări mai vechi și au fost identificate și noi centre.

Observațiile realizate pe marginea tipologiei așezărilor corespund în general cu datele privind prima epocă a fierului din alte părți ale Traciei. Pe lângă așezări nefortificate de dimensiuni mici și medii aflate pe văile râurilor, așezări fortificate au fost identificate, construite în zone înalte, în anumite puncte de-a lungul văilor. Existența acestor două tipuri de locuire sugerează că așezările de tip sat și cătun din zonele joase, stabilite pe malurile râurilor în prima epocă a fierului, ar fi putut fi conectate cu centrele administrative care ar fi existat în așezările fortificate situate în zonele înalte.

Keywords: Eastern Thrace, Early Iron Age, settlement tipology, Maritsa (Meriç) Basin, Tundzha (Tunca) Basin, Edirne, Kırklareli, Saros Gulf.

Cuvinte cheie: Tracia de est, prima epocă a fierului, tipologia așezărilor, Mariţa, Tundža, Edirne, Kırklareli, Golful Saros.

INTRODUCTION

The part of the Ancient Thrace Region within the borders of Turkey is separated from the other parts of the region by the Maritsa (Meriç) River in the west and the elevations formed by the Istranca (Yıldız) Mountains in the north and north-west. This area represents from a geographical perspective the "Eastern Thrace".

In the early 1980s, M. Özdogan's surveys in the Marmara Region, including Eastern Thrace, were an important step in determining the Early Iron Age settlement distribution of the region, although they focused mostly on the prehistoric cultures preceding the Early Iron Age[1]. Another study that shed light on the settlement typology of the region was based on the surveys conducted by B. Erdoğu, again prioritising the areas offering data on the prehistoric habitation before the Early Iron Age[2].

Since these studies consisted of short-term projects and primarily aimed at identifying pre-Iron Age settlements, they could not provide sufficient data on the qualitative and quantitative identities of the settlement distribution of the region during the Early Iron Age.

The surveys conducted by us in certain parts of the provinces of Edirne and Kırklareli between 2021 and 2023 within the scope of doctoral dissertation research have provided the opportunity to compile and reinterpret data on the Early Iron Age settlement archaeology of Eastern Thrace and to propose theories regarding habitation during this period. The data obtained during this survey, in which we used certain areas of the region for testing purposes, will hopefully lead in the future to an increase of the interest in Early Iron Age research in the region (Fig. 1).

During the surveys conducted in 2001-2003, both the Early Iron Age settlements recorded in previous years were re-examined and new settlements were identified, the focus of the research being on determining the topographical and geographical characteristics preferred for habitation by the local Early Iron Age communities in comparison with other historical periods.

EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS IN TURKISH THRACE

The research has revealed that there was a significant increase in the number of settlements throughout the Thracian Region, especially in the Sacramento Valley, Strandzha (Istranca/Yıldız), and the Rhodopes during the Early Iron Age in

[1] Özdoğan 1982a, 21-58; Özdoğan 1982b, 37-49; Özdoğan 1983, 137-142; Özdoğan 1984, 63-68; Özdoğan 1985, 221-232; Özdoğan 1986a, 51-71; Özdoğan 1986b, 29-39.

[2] Erdoğu 1997; Erdoğu 1999.

comparison with the previous period[3], although a significant number of these are the continuation of Bronze Age settlements[4].

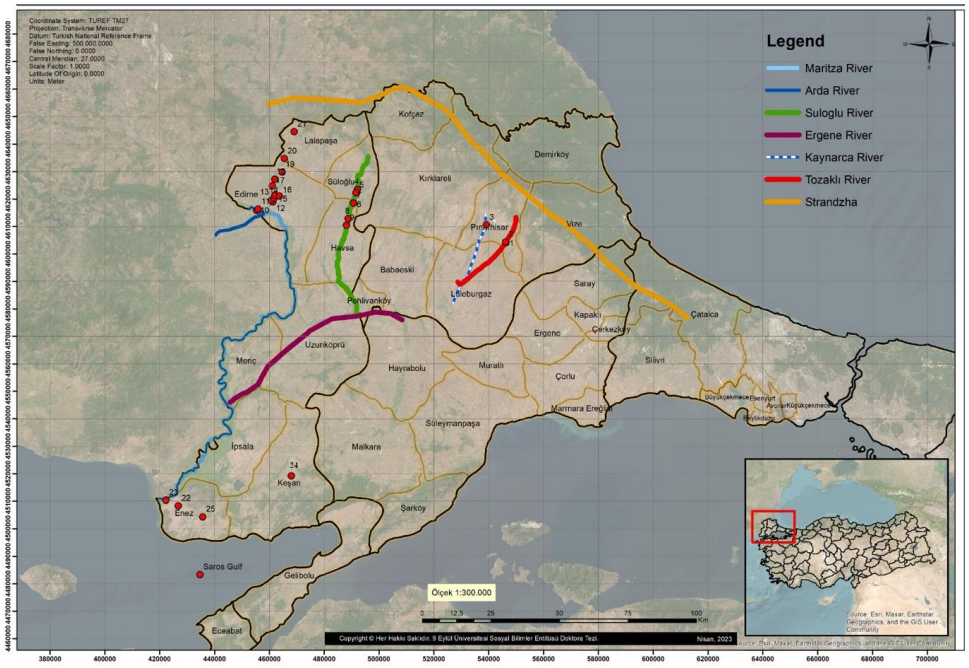

Fig. 1. Study Area. Turkish Thrace: 1. Beşiktepe; 2. Ovayolu; 3. Batak Değirmen; 4. Bekçitepe; 5. Kocatepe; 6. Ahmedi Kalfa; 7. Yukarıova; 8. Bağlıkarkası; 9. Cevizlik; 10. Bahçelik/Eski Kadın; 11. Kazanova; 12. Çardakaltı; 13. Çardaklı; 14. Hapishane; 15. Yorulmaz Çiftliği; 16. Köprübaşı; 17. Adatepe; 18. Alatepe; 19. Gölsırtı; 20. Su Akacağı; 21. Kokarca; 22. Hocaçeşme; 23. Ainos/Enez; 24. Keşan Mezarlık Tepe; 25. Umurbey.

The preferred locations are in the hilly areas, on the slopes, and near water sources. It is considered that caves or rock shelters were also used for settlements especially during the early phases of the Iron Age[5].

Our research in Eastern Thrace has provided data which were compared with the results obtained from other parts of the Thracian Region. It can be noticed that Early Iron Age settlements, both on the plain and on heights, were generally established close to water sources, but with a sufficient distance to be protected from the negative effects of that source. In addition, the data obtained so far also showed that cemeteries

3 Georgieva 2001, 83; Bozhinova 2012, 51; Zdravkova 2008, 495.

4 Lesthakov 2004; Chapman *et alii* 2009, 165, Fig. 7.

5 Ailincăi 2016, 201-202; Chapman *et alii* 2009, 173; Stamberova 2020, 141; Zdravkova 2008, 496.

or isolated burial structures such as dolmens are functioning in connection with the settlements, but not always in immediate vicinity.

Early Iron Age Settlements in the Maritsa Valley

The immediate surroundings of the valley formed by the Evros River, which largely forms the Bulgarian-Turkish border, are currently under military control. For this reason, it is difficult to conduct detailed research in the valley. Even more, the ongoing floods and bed changes in the Evros Delta might have prevented the communities from settling too close to the river stream during the Early Iron Age, a situation also known from other historical periods. The fact that no settlement traces were found in an area of approximately 1 km in diameter in the sections of the river within the borders of the Edirne province can thus be explained by the flood risk in the lower part of the valley. Still, a scenario in which the thick alluvial fill formed over time may have covered the settlement traces cannot be completely overruled.

Nevertheless, the *Bahçelik/Eski Kadın* and *Kazanova* sites, which were discovered close to the area where the river enters Turkey, provide extremely important information about the Early Iron Age cultural structure of the region. Bahçelik, where a short-term excavation was carried out by the Edirne Museum Directorate in the 1990s, and the Kazanova Mound, located a few hundred metres north of it and identified by us for the first time, share a series of cultural traits. As a hypothesis, based on the high quality decoration and form characteristics of the ceramics from Bahçelik/Eski Kadın, it could be suggested that this area may have been in fact the burial ground of the Kazanova Mound rather than a settlement (Fig. 2).

Early Iron Age Settlements in the Tundzha (Tunca) Valley

Numerous Early Iron Age settlements have been identified on both sides of the Tundzha (Tunca) River, which enters Turkish Thrace from the north and joins the Maritsa River near the provincial centre of Edirne. The sharp turns formed by the river as it flows formed natural terraces high above the water level. These terraces formed an ideal area for Early Iron Age communities to settle in the vicinity of the river.

In addition to *Çardakaltı*, *Yorulmaz Çiftliği*, *Köprübaşı*, *Ada Tepe* settlements[6], which have been investigated in previous years in the regions close to the course of the river along the Tundzha (Tunca) Valley, *Göl Sırtı* (Fig. 3), *Ala Tepe* and *Suakacağı* (Fig. 4) settlements identified by us also offered surface finds indicating their belonging to the Early Iron Age (Fig. 1).

[6] Erdoğu 1997, 274 sqq.

Fig. 2. Location of Kazanova Mound (Edited from Google Earth).

Fig. 3. General view of Ala Tepe Settlement from West.

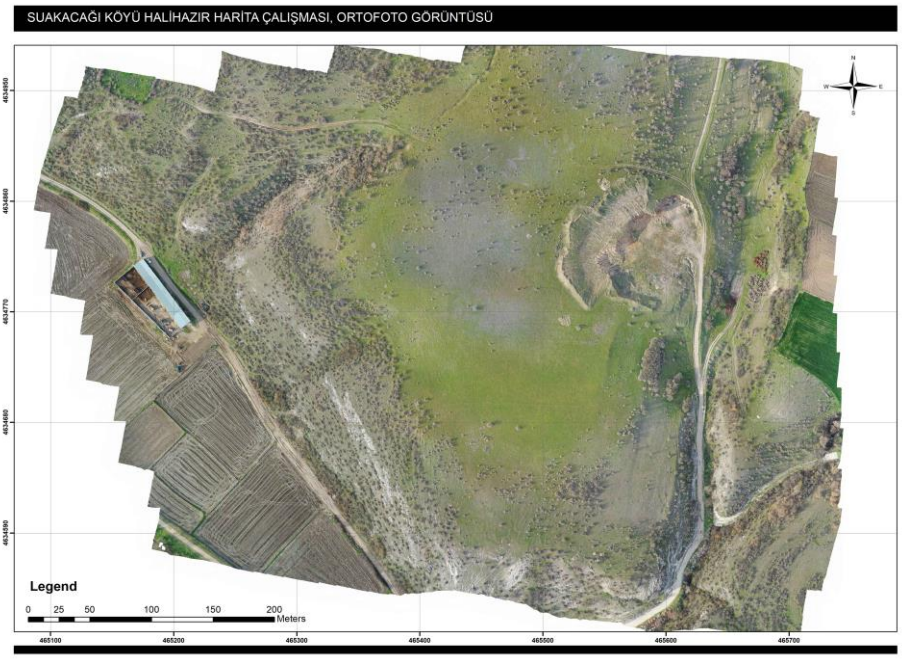

Fig. 4. 3D Model View of the Suakacağı settlement.

In addition, the site from Kokarca, which is situated outside the main corridor of this valley, but which we consider in the same group due to its proximity to the valley, seems to have been a very important settlement. Unfortunately, as it was massively affected due to the construction of a pond, it is difficult at present to ascertain the exact nature of the site. Still, the high quality of some of the pottery found at the surface suggests that the site from Kokarca may be a Late Bronze/Early Iron Age cemetery. Some of the shards recovered from the site clearly show the cultural connection of this centre, located on the foothills of the mountainous area in the northern part of Turkish Thrace, with Northern Thrace and the Southern Carpathians.

Early Iron Age Settlements in the Süloglu and Hasköy Valleys

Another region in Eastern Thrace with a high density of Early Iron Age data centres is the valley irrigated by the Süloğlu Stream. Located in the interior of Eastern Thrace, the Süloğlu Valley extends northwards from the Strandja Mountains. The Süloğlu Stream becomes the Hasköy Stream in the north and connects to the Maritsa (Meriç) River in the northwest.

The pottery shards recovered at the surface from the *Bekçitepe*, *Kocatepe* (Fig. 5), *Yukarı Ova*, *Ahmedi Kalfa* and *Bağlık Arkası* data sites located along the valley, on both

sides of the streams and close to the stream bed, are culturally compatible with finds from other parts of the region. In the case of the Kocatepe settlement[7], which is the most important settlement of the valley, Early Iron Age finds are mostly clustered on the southern edge of the mound.

The settlement from Cevizlik (Fig. 6) in the Hasköy Valley is a centre that was investigated in previous years[8] but has been re-verified by us. The Cevizlik settlement, which seems to have spread over a much larger area compared to many other Early Iron Age settlements known in the region, may be one of the key settlements in terms of regional archaeology.

Fig. 5. Satellite view showing the approximate boundaries of the Kocatepe Mound (Edited from Google Earth).

Early Iron Age Settlements in the northern part of Saroz Bay

The northern coastal line of the Saroz Gulf, which lies within the administrative boundaries of Enez and Keşan, the two southernmost districts of Edirne, is a fertile and strategic geographical area fed by the two rivers that are connected to the Evros River and the wide coastal band. The area is one of the gateways of Thrace to Anatolia, with both natural corridors opening eastwards and a short-distance

[7] On the EBA findings of the "Kocatepe Mound" identified by M. Özdogan during his 1989 surveys, see: Özdoğan 2014.

[8] Czyborra 2001, 178, Taf. 5; 6/1-6; 30, 3.12; Erdoğu 1997.

maritime traffic line providing access to the Gallipoli peninsula and the northern Aegean islands. The Hisarlı Mountain, which extends parallel to the coastline in the east-west direction, complements the geographical landscape of the region. There are wide oval plains between the large and small hills in the area south of the mountain. These geographical traits of the region, together with the important water resources, have proved beneficial for the continued inhabitation of the area and supported the existence of settlements during the Iron Age.

Fig. 6. Satellite view showing the approximate boundaries of the Cevizlik Settlement (Edited from Google Earth).

Although not very detailed, there are reports indicating the presence of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age finds in this region[9]. During the research carried out by us, *Hoca Çeşme Mound*, *Değirmentepe/Umurbey Settlement*, *Hasköy Settlement* and *Göztepe Settlement* were investigated; in the same time, we verified whether there were any Early Iron Age materials among the pottery found during previous archaeological research in the ancient city of *Ainos* (Fig. 7).

[9] Beksaç 2014, 80, 90; Beksaç 2015, 263-264.

Fig. 7. General view of Enez (Ainos) Castel (Edirne Museum).

The former excavation director from Ainos, S. Başaran, pointed out that the dark grey, monochrome, burnished shards found in the fill on the bedrock surface, in Trenches IV, IVa-b, Mzü, H, and D in Enez Castle (the acropolis of the ancient city of Ainos), resemble the 2nd millennium BC pottery known from Thrace, Western Anatolia and the Troy region, in terms of paste, form and decoration[10]. Unfortunately, no examples of these ceramics were identified during the excavations in the Ainos excavation storage room. However, some wheel-made dark grey paste and burnished bazzi ceramics examined in the repository show significant similarities with the handmade pottery of the Early Iron Age. This proves that some ceramic practices representing the 7th century BC culture in Ainos continued the Early Iron Age tradition.

Among the pottery shards found at the surface of the other settlements analysed in the northern part of the Gulf of Saroz, no samples representing the Early Iron Age as clearly as the ones from Inner Eastern Thrace were found. The few finds obtained seem to indicate at this stage of the investigation the existence of short-term, small settlements.

[10] Başaran, 1996, 108, Res. 3

Early Iron Age Settlements in and around Tozakli Valley

Our studies in the province of Kırklareli were limited to the Tozaklı Valley and its immediate surroundings near the town of Pınarhisar. During the surveys conducted here, the *Beşiktepe* fortress-type settlement and the *Ovayolu* Mound, located on opposite sides of the stream in the central part of the valley, yielded finds that can be dated to the Early Iron Age (Fig. 8).

In addition, a small area on the eastern skirts of the Batak Degirmen Mound, located at the intersection of two small streams in the northwestern part of the Tozaklı Valley, yielded a small number of finds dated to the Early Iron Age.

Fig. 8. 3D Model View of Beşiktepe and Ovayolu Settlements.

OBSERVATIONS ON SETTLEMENT PRACTICES

The results obtained from the surveys conducted in the past in the Eastern Thrace Region, including the Early Iron Age cultures, and the surveys conducted by us in 2021-2023 reveal that there was remarkable settlement standardization in the region during this period. It can be noticed that certain geographical and topographic characteristics were preferred for site location in the Early Iron Age. The areas alongside rivers stand out as the most sought for places for the establishment of settlements during this period. The ridges or flat terraces on the riverbanks seem to have constituted ideal locations for the Early Iron Age settlers looking for advantageous locations. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that only the widest parts of the valleys were preferred. Narrow and deep valleys seem to have been avoided, most probably because the risk of landslides and flood rifts was too high.

In general, the Early Iron Age settlements in Eastern Thrace can be clustered in two sub-groups in terms of their topographical characteristics: 1) In-valley and lowland

settlements; 2) Hilltop settlements. This suggestion is in line with the data documented in previous years. The first type, "in-valley and plain settlements", sometimes appear as mounds of prehistoric origin and sometimes as flat settlements starting with the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age and not containing thick archaeological layers.

No Early Iron Age settlement has been found on a slope or at the foot of a slope, both in our own surveys and in the regions surveyed during previous years. Likewise, no settlement has been found in areas more than 1 km away from water sources.

The flat settlements or mounds situated in the valleys were generally located on an embankment, a terrace or a low promontory that would not be affected by the flooding of the river, approximately 30 to 800 m away from the river sources.

In the case of the Early Iron Age settlements located on the plain it is almost impossible to determine their boundaries, situation that can be explained by the lack of fortifications made of stones.

Nevertheless, the main settlement boundaries can be approximated by considering the ceramic material distribution at the surface in the settlement areas. According to this distribution, in Eastern Thrace during the Early Iron Age, the largest settlements have an area of approximately 30.000 square metres, while the smallest settlement has an area of 2500 square metres.

At first glance, the close relationship of Eastern Thracian settlements with water resources suggests that these settlements relied on an agricultural economy. Nevertheless, it would not be wrong to think that such settlements, which were found in the *Süloğlu* Valley in Edirne, around Lalapasa, in the Tundzha (Tunca) Valley, around Hisarlı Mountain in the north of the Saroz Gulf, and in the parts of Kırklareli close to the Istranca Mountains, were involved in animal husbandry as well as agricultural production. This frequently encountered type of economy in the case of the Early Iron Age settlements from Eastern Thrace, based on agriculture and animal husbandry, seems similar to the settlement tradition of the Babadag culture of Romania in the north[11].

The hilltop settlement phenomenon in Eastern Thrace has been presented in a general manner to scientific attention, based on the surveys conducted by us. The settlements of *Suakacağı*, *Çardakaltı* in Edirne, and *Beşiktepe* in Kırklareli can be considered as good examples for this type of settlement, with their locations on hills dominating the valley.

Fortress type settlements such as Suakacağı, Çardakaltı and Beşiktepe can be considered as the administrative centres of the lowland settlements in their vicinity. It is also conceivable that these fortified settlements played a martial role, being important in defending the areas they controlled. This hypothesis was taken into

[11] Ailincăi 2016, 201.

consideration also in the case of fortified settlements situated in high places from Thrace and the area north from Thrace functioning during the Bronze Age[12].

Thus, such fortress-type settlements from Eastern Thrace must be part of a tradition of fortress-type settlements established on strategic hills in the Middle Struma Valley, the Mesta Valley[13], the Morova Valley in Serbia[14], in the wider area around Dobruja[15] and along the shores of the Adriatic Sea[16].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fortress-type settlements in the region can be considered as the earliest archaeological reflection of Herodotus' commentary on "Thracians live in tribes" for the social structure of 5th century BC Thrace. Each hilltop settlement was the administrative centre of the villages and hamlets belonging to a single tribe, which spread in the valley and its immediate surroundings. In this sense, these structures could be considered as reflecting the Latin word oppidum[17].

The fortress-type settlements identified in Eastern Thrace (Suakacağı, Çardakaltı and Beşiktepe) were probably used both in the chaotic/warlike social structure of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition phase of the 12th century BC and as administrative centres during the peaceful period of the Early Iron Age Phases I and II.

There are also many Late Iron Age, Late Antique and Medieval castles in the mountainous parts of Eastern Thrace. *Hasar Fortress*, *Burunucu Fortress*, *Düzorman Fortress*, *Gözyaka Fortress*, *Hamidiye Fortress*, Karakoçan Tepe Fortress, Koruköy Fortress, Koyva Fortress, *Üsküp Hisarcık Fortress*, *Maya Tepe Fortress*, *Kale Tepe Fortress*, *Düzorman Fortress*, *Armağan Fortress* and *Soğucak (Koru) Fortress* are only a few of them. The first phase of these and similar fortresses, which are outside the scope of our thesis research, may belong to the Early Iron Age. The fortress-type settlements such as Suakacağı, Çardakaltı and Beşiktepe, identified during our research, suggest that fortress-type settlements in the Early Iron Age may have been more widespread in Eastern Thrace. Therefore, the Late Period fortresses in the Strandja Mountains should be reconsidered from this perspective, as their beginning could be traced during earlier periods.

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12 Kiss 2012, 211 sqq.; Váczi 2007; Krause 2019; Ailincăi 2016, 202, fig. 2; Bejinariu 2017.

13 Nenova 2018, 124, 131-135.

14 Bulatovic, Filipovic 2017, 150, 158.

15 Ailincăi 2016, 202.

16 Lacono *et alii* 2001.

17 The Latin word oppidum, meaning "fortified administrative centre", is more commonly used in modern literature for fortified fortresses established in the north-western Balkans in the Early Iron Age.

In her description of fortress-type settlements in the Thracian region, M. Vassileva links the destruction of mound-type settlements in the late 2nd millennium BC, which covers the Late Bronze Age, with the development of the settlement type on high ground[18], contrary to opinions suggesting that such fortress-type settlements emerged after the second phase of the Early Iron Age[19]. However, as far as the Thracian Region is concerned, fortress-type settlements used during the transition phase and the EIA I-II periods should be distinguished from the fortress settlements with dry masonry stone architecture established towards the middle or in the second half of the 1st millennium BC.

While the fortresses of Suakacağı, Çardakaltı and Beşiktepe in Eastern Thrace are products of the Early Iron Age culture, many dry-stone fortified fortresses located high in the Strandja Mountains must have been built in response to the new socio-cultural structure created by the Early Iron Age, especially by the Aegean colonies.

The fact that many important Early Iron Age settlements have been identified even within the limited areal of our research in Eastern Thrace has proved that the region is in need of an extensive research. Long-term surveys in the valleys and on the mountain slopes will reveal a lot of new information about the Early Iron Age settlement culture in Eastern Thrace and the connection of settlements with religious structures such as dolmens.

As a final conclusion, although it is possible that warrior and nomadic cultures dominated the region during the transition phase from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age (12th century BC), the density of unfortified villages in the plain rather than in strategic locations points to a more peaceful life throughout the Early Iron Age.

[18] Vassileva 2021, 30.

[19] Chapman *et alii* 2009, 172.

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