

Çeşme–Bağlararası:
A Western Anatolian Harbour Settlement at the
beginning of the Late Bronze Age

VASIF ŞAHOĞLU

Abstract

Çeşme–Bağlararası is a relatively newly discovered settlement situated at the westernmost tip of the Urla Peninsula. The site is located at the center of the modern town of Çeşme and must have been an important harbour settlement from at least the EBA onwards. The site reflects a very well–preserved settlement layout consisting of house blocks divided by streets at a time period contemporary with the MM III in Crete (CB 2b). The site has an indigenous cultural character with small percentages of imported Minoan/Minoanizing pottery during this phase and yielded domestic structures as well as a workshop for wine production – one of the earliest examples in Anatolia to date. After a severe earthquake which destroyed this phase, a relatively short period of occupation followed with the same cultural elements (CB 2a). An important change can be observed in the cultural character of the site in the following CB 1 phase, which is contemporary with the LM IA period. Although no proper architectural feature has been uncovered so far, numerous pits give an idea of this period at the site. These pits include pottery as well as bone and other organic remains. Finds from these contexts reflect the local character of the site with an increasing amount of imported pottery from the Cyclades, Crete, and the Eastern Aegean islands as well as from other Anatolian sites. Çeşme–Bağlararası is a promising new site with an indigenous Coastal Western Anatolian settlement character, reflecting the strong local culture of this littoral. New discoveries at this site are beginning to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics and character of the so called “Minoan Thalassocracy” in the Aegean as well as understanding the “presence influence” of the Hittite culture in Western Anatolia.

PART 3B

CHAPTER 27

Acknowledgments

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ÇEŞME–BAĞLARARASI IS SITUATED AT THE HEART OF THE MODERN ÇEŞME province of İzmir. The location of the Bronze Age settlement at the harbour indicates the importance of this favourable harbouring location for thousands of years. Çeşme–Bağlararası is a relatively new discovered archaeological site (FIG. 1). Its discovery in 2001 revealed the presence of an important Bronze Age harbour town inhabited from the 3rd mil. BC onwards. Çeşme–Bağlararası reflects a horizontally shifting settlement making it different from the usual mound formation of Anatolia (FIG. 2). This is probably caused by the changing coastline and/or shifting of the river bed of a probable river formation adjacent to the site.

The site was inhabited from the middle of the 3rd mil. onwards, with various breaks in the occupation history. Future research is expected to fill these gaps in the habitation history which must be due to the above–mentioned character of the site.

Table 1: Çeşme–Bağlararası stratigraphy.

LEVELS	PERIOD	PARALLELS
Çeşme–Bağlararası 0	LBA	LH III A2 – III B
Çeşme–Bağlararası 1	LBA	LM IA
Çeşme–Bağlararası 2a	End of MBA	MM III
Çeşme–Bağlararası 2b	End of MBA	MM III
Çeşme–Bağlararası 3	EBA II	EM II / EC II

Çeşme–Bağlararası Level 3

Çeşme–Bağlararası level 3 belongs to the traditional Anatolian EBA II period. The settlement reflects a well planned structure with houses opening to streets. The architecture consists of houses with stone foundations and mudbrick superstructure (FIGS. 3–4). The walls of the houses were white plastered. The EBA settlement consists of domestic structures with rectangular or trapezoidal plans. The houses are usually single roomed and share common walls with the adjacent structures – a feature similar to the Liman Tepe Level VI long houses.¹ Inner architectural

1 Erkanal et al. 2010, 348–52; see also Erkanal and Şahoğlu (forthcoming); Kouka and Şahoğlu (forthcoming).

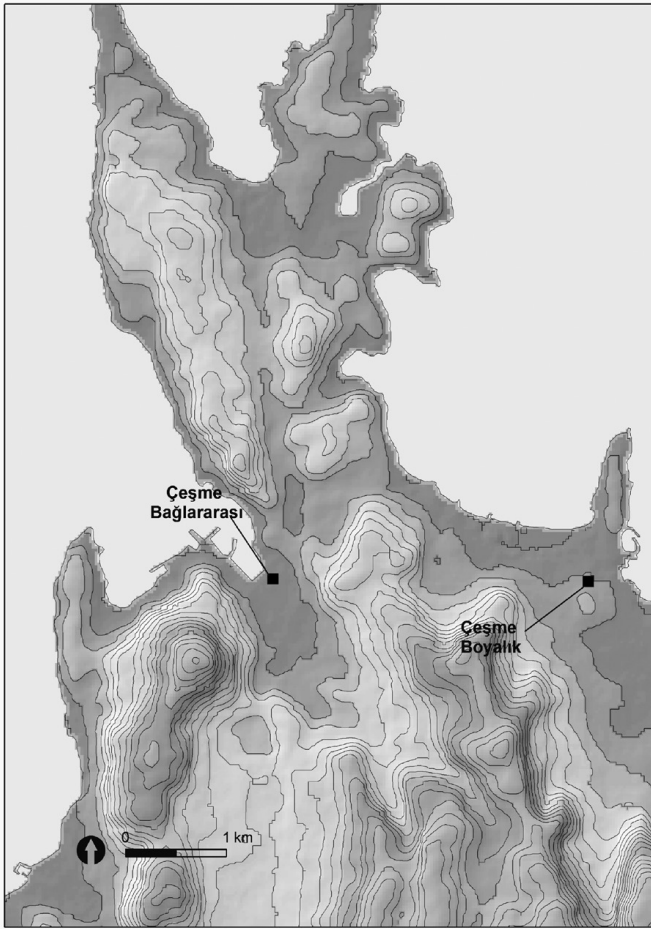


Fig. 1 Map showing the location of Çeşme–Bağlararası (map by Michele Massa).

features are a distinctive aspect of Bağlararası. Each house has a central hearth usually associated with a plastered platform (Figs. 3–4).² These platforms and hearths were renewed many times and must have been used for a relatively long time. Most of the houses had plastered floors which were renewed over and over again and used for a very long time. Flat stones and pebbles were found under the lowest plastered floor of houses 39 and 52 (Fig. 4). This may be an installation for preparing a stable flat surface before the plastering of the floors.

The settlement layout of the Bağlararası EBA settlement reflects a very compact structure. Although this brings to mind the possible presence of a defensive system surrounding the settlement, as of 2011 there is no archaeological evidence supporting this suggestion.

The excavated part of the EBA settlement reflects a domestic quarter (Figs. 3–4). The large number of flintstone tools and weights suggests production activities taking place within domestic features. Various forms of loom weights suggest the

2 Şahoğlu *et al.* 2010, 465, Fig. 4.



Fig. 2 Aerial photo of Çeşme-Bağlararası (photo by Hakan Çetinkaya).



Fig. 3 Aerial photo showing the excavation areas at Çeşme-Bağlararası (photo by Hakan Çetinkaya).



Fig. 4 Çeşme–Bağlararası 3rd mil. BC settlement (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).



Fig. 5 Çeşme–Bağlararası 2nd mil. BC settlement (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).



Fig. 6 Çeşme–Bağlararası 2nd mil. BC settlement (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).

presence of different textile traditions in Çeşme–Bağlararası during this period. Discoid formed weights, which are usually referred to as “Minoan loom weights,” have been found in various houses.³ This new discovery opens up a whole new discussion regarding the terminology used for this type of weight. The presence of such a type in EBA levels with no Minoan links at Çeşme–Bağlararası clearly indicates a local development for this type of weight. The absence of obsidian finds at Bağlararası is an important issue to be addressed. Excavated deposits included almost no obsidian tools in comparison with the large number of flint artefacts. The pottery assemblage also reflects a local development with no visible imports. Çeşme–Bağlararası reflects a totally different cultural dynamic when compared with the contemporary Liman Tepe settlement just 50 kms away. This is also the period of the rise of the early urban centers in Western Anatolia. Liman Tepe is clearly a regional center in this respect and the fact that it reflects a somewhat different character than Çeşme–Bağlararası during the middle of the 3rd mil. BC may be an indication for the presence of different territories of power engaged in different networks during this period.

Following Level 3 at Çeşme–Bağlararası, there seem to be a gap in the settlement history. A pit dating to the beginning of the 2nd mil. BC has been found in 2010

3 Şahoğlu et al. (forthcoming)



Fig. 7 Çeşme–Bağlararası 2nd mil. BC settlement – Winehouse (photo by Vasıf Şahoğlu).

with no related architecture.⁴ This evidence suggests that there is no gap in the settlement history during the latest EBA and early MBA, but the traces of the settlements of these periods are yet to be discovered in the neighbouring unexcavated areas. Level 2B is the most extensively investigated period at Çeşme–Bağlararası.

Çeşme–Bağlararası Level 2B

Level 2B is the main architectural phase at Çeşme–Bağlararası. This period is contemporary with MM III in Crete. The settlement of this period reflects a very dense layout.⁵ Domestic buildings are located next to industrial features, like the “winehouse,”⁶ indicating that there is probably no special area within the settlement assigned to industrial activities. Insulae of houses are separated by narrow streets – a tradition continuing from the 3rd mil. BC (FIG. 5). The walls of the houses in some cases—as in the case of House 1—make an apsidal turn in order to leave

4 Şahoğlu et al. (forthcoming)

5 Şahoğlu 2007, fig. 1–2.

6 Şahoğlu 2007, 314–15; see also Erkanal and Keskin 2009, 99–100 fig. 3.



Fig. 8 Two facepots from the Wine House at Çeşme–Bağlararası level 2B (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos, restoration by Michel Roggenbucke).

space for the streets (FIG. 5). This feature may be an indication of limited space within the settlement and can be considered to be an indication of the probable existence of a fortification wall surrounding the site. In fact, a new discovery in the 2011 season revealed the presence of a probable fortification wall surrounding the settlement. This feature, which was discovered in the northeastern part of the excavation areas, consists of a thick wall which projects at the limit of the excavated area. Thus, not much can be said about its extent at the moment. Use of thick and neat limestones on its construction distinguishes this wall from any of the other previously excavated architectural features at the site.

The houses within the Level 2B settlement have independent walls that separate them from the neighbouring houses unlike the preceding 3rd mil. BC settlement. They usually consist of a single room and the walls are built of stone foundations with a mudbrick superstructure (FIGS. 5–6). Walls are plastered on both sides including the stone foundations which is again a continuing tradition from the 3rd mil. BC at the site.

Each domestic structure has an oven with a domed superstructure on the left inner corner of the house as entered from the door (FIG. 6). This seems to be a consistent feature and reflects a change from the preceding Level 3 settlement, where the hearths/ovens were always located at a central position within the house in association with a plastered platform (FIG. 4).⁷ In most cases, one or two jars were

7 Şahoğlu et al. 2010, 465 fig. 4.



Fig. 9 Group of pots from House 20 and 31 at Çeşme–Bağlararası level 2B (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos, restoration by Michel Roggenbucke).

permanently located next to these ovens. In one structure (House 20), a plastered working space also accompanies these features.⁸

The Winehouse has a special function at the site and reflects a specialized plan (FIG. 7). This is a trapezoidal building consisting of the main room and three subterranean storerooms attached to it. The floor of the main room is located higher than the storerooms and the three rectangular subterranean storerooms can only be reached from above. The severe earthquake that destroyed this phase also destroyed these three storerooms, but nevertheless the data at hand is enough to make further comments regarding the function of each storeroom. A special circular plastered area in the main room must have been used for squeezing the grapes. A few grinding stones were also found nearby this installation in the main room. The biggest of the three rectangular storerooms was located at the center (FIG. 7). This room has been found to be plastered on all sides including the floor and did not include much pottery in it. The northwestern room, on the other hand, was paved with flat stones on the floor and included many drinking and pouring vessels among which trefoil and round-mouthed jugs seem to be dominant. The

8 Şahoğlu 2007, 313–4.



Fig. 10 Finds associated with metallurgical activities at Çeşme–Bağlararası level 2A (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).



Fig. 11 S profile one handed cups from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).

last room included many charred organic remains, including grape and olive stones together with almond and fish bones.

Two big facepots found in the street at the corner of the wine house, must have fallen into the street from this house during the earthquake event and should be considered with the inventory of this house. These special pots might have been used for storing the grapes in the main room of the wine house (FIG. 8).

Discovery of a structure associated with the production of wine among the domestic structures is a good indication that there may not have been a specialized zone within the settlement for production purposes and this type of structure may be unevenly distributed within the settlement. The winehouse discovered in Çeşme–Bağlararası is one of the earliest of its kind in Anatolia and also reflects the first link in a very long chain of the tradition of wine-making at Çeşme.

Rooms 20 and 31 belong to the same building complex, which is located next to the winehouse and, again, was destroyed by a severe earthquake.⁹ The two rooms of this house were separated from each other by a simple mudbrick wall without stone foundations. The entrance to the house is through the first room (H-31).

⁹ Şahoğlu 2007, 313–14 fig. 3.

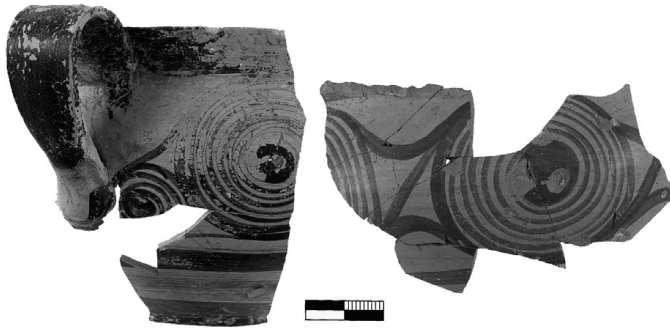


Fig. 12 Imported Minoan one handed cups from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).



Fig. 13 Imported Minoanizing pottery fragment from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).

A domed oven and a permanent jar next to it, a hearth, and a plastered working platform were found in the inner room (H-20) along with c. 30 pots scattered all around (FIG. 9). A large post hole in this room must have belonged to a large wooden beam supporting the ceiling. *In situ* pottery ranges from big storage jars to fine table wares, from jugs to lids. A few imported sherds have also been found in this room. These are the earliest *Minoan/Minoanizing* finds at the site and reflect a more uniform character than the following period 1 imports—possibly coming from the same source.

The severe earthquake that destroyed the entire settlement must have taken place prior to the Thera eruption—sometime during the course of the MM III period. The settlement went through a rapid re-organization and life continued at the site without any break after this earthquake.

Çeşme–Bağlararası Level 2A

This level represents the period following the severe earthquake, which destroyed Çeşme–Bağlararası, at the end of Level 2B. Various installations throughout the site help us to understand the cultural developments during this period. Many



Fig. 14 Imported light on dark painted sherd from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).



Fig. 15 Western Anatolian Gray Ware bowl from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).

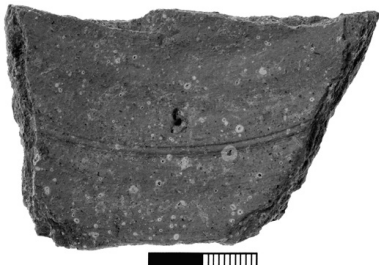


Fig. 16 Imported Milet ware jar fragment from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).

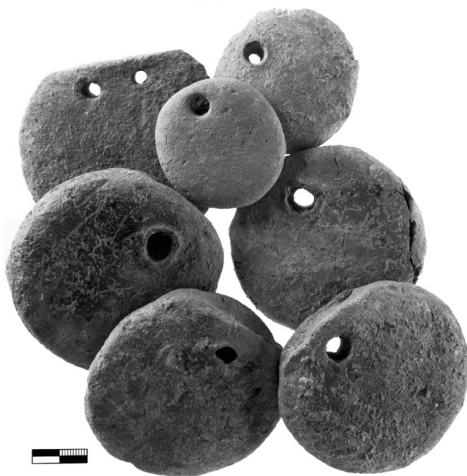


Fig. 17 A group of so called Minoan loom weights from Çeşme–Bağlararası level 1 pits (photo by Chronis Papanikolopoulos).

hearths, stone, plastered, and clay bins all indicate newly built installations for survival after a natural disaster (FIG. 6). Clay and plastered bins must have been used for storing liquids while the stone bins must have been used for storing the grains and other food products. The large number of hearths also indicate a simple but necessary feature for survival. Some of the previous structures have been reused, some have been remodeled, and some have been abandoned in this period. An interesting feature is the blocking of the doorways of Level 2B houses by using vertically placed flat stones (FIG. 6). This seem to be a common practice at the site and must have had a special function since almost all of the doorways were found to have been blocked in this way.

There seems to have been no change in pottery development, and this period reflects a continuity in pottery forms. Various finds reflect metal working and metallurgical activities at the site during this period (FIG. 10). An ivory seal reflects Minoan aspects and could also be a find originally belonging to the Level 2B.¹⁰

The continuity of the settlement at Çeşme–Bağlararası stops at the end of level 2A. The following period 1, which is contemporary with LM IA, is so far only attested by pits and a small wall fragment. The entire excavation area is covered with pits of various shapes, which also destroyed the preceding levels.

Çeşme–Bağlararası Level 1

The pits clearly indicate that there is a settlement of Level 1 in very close proximity to the excavated area. Future excavations and investigations will surely supply us with complementary data regarding this situation. The function of these pits so far remains to be solved. In the meantime, the preliminary study of the material from these contexts indicate that at least some of them should be associated with various feasting activities during this period. The pits yielded large numbers of drinking cups (FIG. 11) as well as other shapes, animal bones, organic materials, and imported Minoan¹¹ (FIG. 12) and Minoanizing¹² dark–on–light (FIG. 13) and light–on–dark (FIG. 14) painted pottery dating to the LM IA period. Western Anatolian gray wares (FIG. 15) and imports from the Miletus (FIG. 16) area are also among the characteristic finds of these pits. Numerous examples of the so–called Minoan loom weights are also found in these pits (FIG. 16).¹³

10 Erkanal and Keskin 2009.

11 Erkanal and Karaturgut 2004, Fig. 5; see also Şahoğlu 2007, Fig. 10; Erkanal and Keskin 2009, Fig. 10; Aykurt 2011, tortoise shell ripple ware.

12 Erkanal and Karaturgut 2004, 3–4, 7; see also Şahoğlu 2007, 11–2; Erkanal and Keskin 2009, 11–3.

13 Erkanal and Karaturgut 2004, Fig. 8.

The imports of Level 1 included mainly fine and semifine painted pottery fragments belonging to Minoan and Minoanizing styles which were produced either on Crete, in the Cyclades or in the southeastern Aegean islands. The fine wares reflect the highest quality Minoan pottery craft which can also be called “palatial” (FIG. 12). Various cups and jugs found in the pits belong to this group. The Minoanizing pottery which must have been originated from the Cyclades and the southeastern Aegean islands includes semifine bridge spouted jars, cups and jugs (FIG. 13). Monochrome and polychrome dark-on-light wares dominate this group of pottery although a smaller number of light-on-dark wares, which probably have originated in the southeastern Aegean islands, also exist (FIG. 14).¹⁴ There are no indications regarding the end of Level 1 at Çeşme-Bağlararası. Future work will undoubtedly shed more light on this subject.

Present data suggests another “gap” following Level 1 in the habitation history at Çeşme-Bağlararası. Following this gap, various pits dating to the later part of the LBA (LH IIIA2/LH IIIB1) have also been found at the site.¹⁵ These pits included local Western Anatolian buff wares together with local gray wares. Imported and locally made Mycenaean pottery also forms an important part of the finds from these pits. Just like the Level 1 pits, no architectural features of this period have been encountered within the excavation area limits.

Excavations at this newly discovered Bronze Age site, located at the westernmost tip of Anatolia, have revealed that the habitation history of Çeşme goes back to at least 5000 years B.P. This location has been one of the most favourable harbouring areas in the Aegean and continuously used for this purpose for thousands of years. Excavations at Çeşme-Bağlararası have gradually started to reveal the cultural development of the region during the prehistoric periods. The area seems to have a unique local character which has a continuity through time and eventually develops into today’s modern town of Çeşme.

The most important aspect of Çeşme-Bağlararası is its 2nd mil. BC habitation with very well preserved architectural features and material finds. Archaeological research at the site has shown that Çeşme-Bağlararası has a strong local character in architecture and in pottery development. Çeşme-Bağlararası clearly reflects a typical Western Anatolian 2nd mil. BC settlement and yields important information regarding the architecture, daily life, economic activities, and natural events of its period.

The Aegean links of the site make it a unique settlement in Anatolia. Çeşme-Bağlararası is one of the very few sites which revealed relations with Minoan culture. Important amount of Minoanizing pottery have been unearthed in various pits

14 Şahoğlu 2007 fig 11.

15 Şahoğlu 2007, 310; see also Erkanal and Keskin 2009, 99; Aykurt 2010.

belonging to Level 1 together with Minoan pottery of highest quality, along with the local Western Anatolian wares. Although the true Minoan examples seem to have a more uniform fabric, the Minoanizing examples, which must have been originated from the Cyclades and southeastern Aegean islands, reflect a more complex picture with a wide variety of different fabrics, suggesting pottery coming from many different sources.

This complex situation conforms well with the atmosphere surrounding the Aegean during the LM IA period. This is a period when the Minoan seafarers were dominating the Aegean sea trade and setting up colonies at various locations aiming to secure the flow of trade under their control. The Minoan power was probably dominating most of the Aegean islands which were all dependent on the sea and Minoan lifestyles and art was clearly reflected in a major part of the Aegean during this period. It was as a result of this situation that local imitations of Minoan pottery was also predominating the pottery production around the Aegean – especially the islands of the Aegean.

The period contemporary with the MM III and LM IA periods at Çeşme–Bağlararası, gives us a unique picture of a Western Anatolian harbour settlement. The site reflects a true coastal Western Anatolian character with the majority of the pottery well known from the other sites in the region, like Liman Tepe. Locally, made Central Anatolian type pottery is important for the indication of the continuation of cultural relations to this area. The site must have acted as a harbour settlement during the MM III period as evidenced by the Western Aegean imports. Çeşme–Bağlararası must have gained more importance within the Minoan sea trade during the LM IA period and acted as one of the most important gateways between Anatolia and the Aegean during this period.

Çeşme–Bağlararası is completely different from Liman Tepe, which is approximately 50 km to the east, in terms of the percentages of the imported pottery. Bağlararası is also very different from Miletus in the south or Samothrace in the north for example, which are considered “Minoan colonies.” The character of each site and its role in the sea trade networks of the Aegean seems not to be dependent on their proximity to the core of the Minoan civilization, but rather has to do with the local dynamics and different social responses of various regions during the first half of the 2nd mil. BC.

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