

Platform of Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform / Those who are backing our cultural heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage / Chapter 14

Yesemek Open Air Museum and Hittite Cultural Heritage with Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin

TOPICS: The Importance of Yesemek Open Air Museum, The Connection between the Hittite Empire and Yesemek, Excavations at Yesemek and Important Finds, Hittite Art and Yesemek

Nükhet Everi: In today's interview, we will talk about Yesemek Open Air Museum. Yesemek is known as an important sculpture workshop of the Hittite Empire. Our guest today is Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin, who participated in the excavations in Yesemek. Could you tell us about the importance of the Yesemek Open Air Museum and the contributions of the excavations to the world of history and archaeology?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: Yesemek Open Air Museum is a sculpture workshop located within the borders of Gaziantep province and is known to belong to the Hittite Imperial Age. This is a very important centre especially in terms of sculpture making techniques and the study of Hittite art. In Yesemek, various sculptures, architectural pieces and other archaeological finds from the Hittite period were unearthed. These finds contributed greatly to our understanding of the artistic and cultural structure of the Hittite Empire.

Nükhet Everi: Which important finds did you find/discover during the excavations at Yesemek and how did you establish the connection between these finds and the Hittite Empire?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: During the excavations at Yesemek, we found/discovered many important finds from the Hittite Imperial Age. Especially sculpture fragments, architectural elements, and pottery show that important artistic and religious activities were carried out here. Among the finds are statue bodies, column bases, and various figurative sculptures. Especially the Luwian hieroglyphic inscription on the statue body found in 1991 shows that this was an active sculpture workshop in the 13th century BC. These inscriptions and other finds reflect the artistic and religious understanding of the Hittite Empire.

Nükhet Everi: What can you say about the relationship between the finds at Yesemek and other Hittite sites?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: Yesemek was an important centre within the expanding borders of the Hittite Empire. For this reason, the artefacts found here also give us clues about its relations with other Hittite settlements. For example, the Taşlı Geçit Mound, which was flooded by the Tahta Köprü Dam, suggests that the Hittite authority that organised the workshop at Yesemek was probably administered from there. Such connections show how Yesemek interacted with other centres of the Hittite Empire.

Nükhet Everi: What information have we learned about the religious and social structure of the Hittite Empire? What do the finds at Yesemek tell us about this?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: The Hittite Empire had a religion-oriented state structure. The Hittite king also served as the high priest. The statues and other religious depictions found in Yesemek show how the Hittites depicted their gods and mythological figures. These artefacts reveal how important the Hittites' religious beliefs were in their daily lives and how religious rituals were intertwined with art. In addition, the stylistic characteristics of the sculptures at Yesemek provide important information about the evolution of Hittite art and its interaction with other cultures.

Nükhet Everi: What do you think about the influence of the Hittites in regions other than Central Anatolia? What clues does Yesemek give us in this sense?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: The influence of the Hittites was not limited to Central Anatolia, but spread to wide geographies such as Syria and Mesopotamia. The finds at Yesemek show how Hittite art and architecture were adopted and adapted in these vast geographies. Especially the sculptures and reliefs in particular reveal the universality of Hittite art. This shows how widely the cultural and artistic influence of the Hittites spread.

Nükhet Everi: What do you think about the future of the excavations at Yesemek? Is it possible to obtain new finds?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: Yes, new excavations at Yesemek will allow us to learn more about the Hittite Empire. The region is still not fully explored, and it is possible to reach unearthing important findings with new excavations. In particular, the remains of underground structures can give us more information about the social, economic, and religious structure of the Hittite Empire when more detailed research is carried out. In addition, by using new technologies and methods, Yesemek will be analysed in more depth and new finds will be unearthed.

Nükhet Everi: What were the biggest challenges you faced in your work and how did you overcome them?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: The biggest challenge was the size of the excavation areas and the fact that they were located in hard-to-reach areas. However, we overcame these difficulties with teamwork and modern archaeological methods. Especially georadar and geomagnetic methods in particular provided us with great convenience in detecting the remains underground. The support and cooperation of the local community also played an important role in the success of our work.

Nükhet Everi: What are the contributions of your work at Yesemek to the world of archaeology in general?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: Our work at Yesemek has enabled us to better understand the Hittite Empire's artistic and religious life of the Hittite Empire. While the finds reveal the details of Hittite art and architecture, they also provide important information about the social and economic structures of the Hittites. These studies contribute greatly to the understanding of the Hittite Empire in the general archaeological world. In addition, the international exhibition and promotion of the finds from Yesemek is helping the Hittite art and culture to be recognised worldwide.

Nükhet Everi: What are the future goals of your work at Yesemek?

Prof. Dr. Atilla Engin: Our future goals include further expansion and elaboration of the excavations at Yesemek. By using new technologies and methods, we aim to analyse the region in more depth and unearth new finds. We also plan to attract more visitors to the Yesemek Open Air Museum and to develop the region as a tourist attraction. These studies will continue to illuminate the unknown aspects of the Hittite Empire.

Supporting our work in Yesemek and informing the public through such interviews makes a great contribution to the world of archaeology. I would like to thank all my teammates and our supporters. We would also be happy to see all archaeological enthusiasts and supporters with us for the protection and promotion of the Yesemek Open Air Museum.