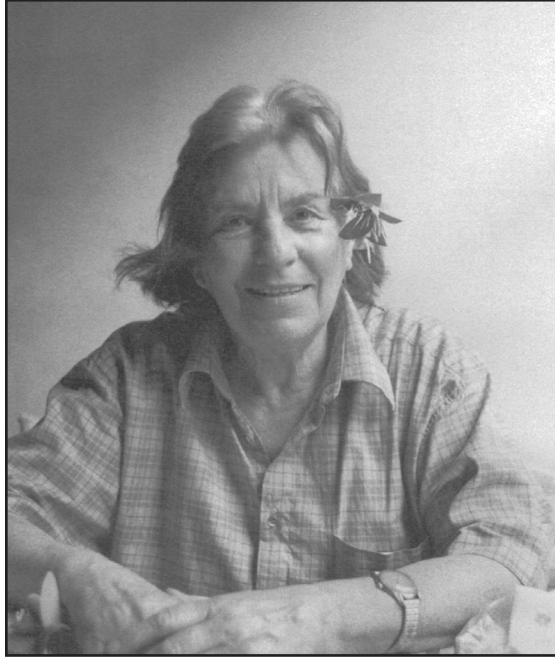

HALET ÇAMBEL



COURTESY OF ARA GÜLER

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Prof. Dr. Halet Çambel, born in 1916, passed away in Istanbul at the age of 97. Even though Çambel was one of the leading archaeologists of her time, she was highly esteemed in several other domains as well, including heritage management, regional planning, linguistics, ethnography, and sports. She can best be described as an intellectual with strong commitments to carry on her work in spite of all burdens. Most of her work was based at the Iron Age, Neo-Hittite center of Karatepe-Aslantaş—not only making possible the decipherment of Hittite hieroglyphic script, but also developing the site within its cultural landscape. As founder of the Prehistory Department of Istanbul University, Çambel was the initiator of several international undertakings that made possible the implementation of multidisciplinary, multinational research projects in Turkey.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF HALET ÇAMBEL¹

Çambel was from an elite Ottoman family; she was born in Berlin while her grandfather was serving as the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the family decided to remain in Germany; as a result, Çambel learned German and Italian before Turkish. In 1924, after the end of the Turkish War of Independence, Çambel returned to Turkey with her family and settled in Istanbul. After the family's repatriation, Çambel's father, Hasan Cemil Bey—highly motivated by the ideology of the young Republic of Turkey, which was at that time striving to develop from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire—was actively involved in the shaping of the new state. He became a close friend of Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. Çambel grew within the political milieu of her father's house, developing the incentive to Atatürk's reforms, particularly in giving an active place to Turkish women. While she attended Arnavutköy American High School for Girls in Istanbul, learning both Turkish and English, she became seriously involved in sports, taking part in fencing, archery, horse riding, judo, and bicycling contests. She represented Turkey in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games in fencing, and was the first female Turk to take part in the Olympic Games; there she won a reputation in refusing the invitation of Hitler.

Her father was one of the founders of the Turkish Historical Society, later becoming its president. Çambel was highly inspired by her father's involvement in history. Aware of her capacity in learning languages, she began her high degree education at Sorbonne University in Paris, studying archaeology and Near Eastern cultures and languages,

¹ See also: Arsebük, Mellink, and Schirmer 1998; Hauptmann 2014; Özdoğan 2014; Özdoğan and Başgelen 2011; *Readings in Prehistory* 1995.

and mastering in Acadian. However, with the outbreak of World War II, Çambel had to return to Turkey before finishing her doctoral thesis. In Istanbul, she found a job at the newly founded Archaeology Department of Istanbul University as the translator-assistant to Prof. Helmuth Th. Bossert, one of the most reputed archaeologists of the time who had taken refuge in Turkey after escaping from Nazi Germany. In 1939 she married Nail Çakırhan, a poet who had just returned from the Soviet Union. She completed her doctoral thesis under Bossert on the assessment of her excavation at the Bronze–Iron Age mound site of Hashöyük in Central Anatolia. From that time on, she continued her career at Istanbul University as the founder of the Prehistory Department (1960), chairing until her retirement in 1984.

Çambel's long-term career was shaped with the recovery in 1949 of the Late Hittite site of Karatepe-Aslantaş in the highlands of Adana. Located on densely forested hilltop with no road connection, the site could only be reached after an adventurous trip on horseback (Ceram 1955). Excavations at this eighth-century BC site had revealed monumental remains of a hitherto unknown Iron Age kingdom; among the remains, along with sculptured orthostats, there were also blocks with bilingual inscriptions in Hittite Luwian hieroglyphic script with their exact translations in Phoenician. Excavations at Karatepe-Aslantaş under the direction of Prof. Bossert continued from 1947 to 1952 and revealed a rich assemblage of Late Hittite art and inscriptions, enabling them to decipher Hittite Luwian hieroglyphic script. Due to the extreme difficulties of the locality, Bossert decided to give an end to the project; Çambel refused and decided to stay on. From that time, up to her last years, she devoted her life to Karatepe-Aslantaş, focusing more on site management and documenting than excavating. She was mostly alone, occasionally accompanied by her husband, and securely established her position by gaining the respect of all Turcoman tribes and villagers in the vicinity, soon to become an esteemed legendary heroine.

While continuing her work at Karatepe-Aslantaş, Çambel designed and implemented several other projects, including excavating at Fikirtepe—the earliest Neolithic settlement of Istanbul—from 1952 to 1954, and founding the Istanbul Chicago Oriental Institute Southeast Anatolian Joint Prehistoric Project with Robert J. Braidwood in 1962. The latter became one of the most long-lasting international archaeological projects, terminating only when Braidwood passed away in 2004. Within the framework of the project—an extensive surface survey of Southeastern Anatolia, an area that had previously remained an archaeological terra incognita revealing hundreds of prehistoric sites (1963)—the early Neolithic sites of Biris Mezarlığı and Söğüt Tarlası (1964) and the sixth-millennium Halafian site of Griki Hacıyan

(1968–1970) were excavated; the most substantive undertaking of the project had been the excavations at Çayönü (1964–1991), revealing an uninterrupted sequence from the ninth to sixth millennium BC of an early Neolithic settlement. Among her other undertakings were the organization of the first cultural inventory field project in Turkey as a part of the regional development plan of the Çukurova region; surveying, mapping, and documenting the entire coastal band between Silifke and Payas (1966–1967); documenting urban heritage in the historic center of Adana (1967); setting up a rescue project along the Keban, Karakaya, and Atatürk Dam reservoirs on the Euphrates (1967–1992), and conducting rescue excavations at the Kumkale Crusade castle (1975–1976) and the Hittite center at Domuztepe (1981–1984; Çambel, Günay, and Sabuncu 2007).

*Assessing Consequent Developments Triggered by the
Groundbreaking Accomplishments of Çambel*

Throughout her academic life, Çambel had always been the generator of long-term projects bearing consequences that extended far ahead of the conceptual framework of her time. Her insistence to remain at Karatepe-Aslantaş after all other members of the team decided to leave stands as the stunning picture of her approach. Her first and prime academic argument was that there was much more to be learned from the site, although the excavation team under Prof. Bossert was satisfied with what had been recovered easily—several architectural blocks with reliefs, bilingual inscriptions, and the foundations of two monumental gate buildings, which had already paved the way to the decipherment of Hittite Luwian hieroglyphs. All the blocks were made of black basalt, a stone alien to the region, and evidently had been brought from a distant volcanic outcrop.

The Karatepe-Aslantaş site is located on a high cliff overlooking the gorge of the Ceyhan River, and it was evident that numerous archaeological fragments had fallen down the cliff and were carried downstream. Çambel organized local villagers living within the catchment area of the river to collect all “black stones” regardless of their shape. In three years, tons of material had been turned in; Çambel spent two decades wiggle-matching what had looked like amorphous lumps of basalt. The result of this arduous work was impressive, as several new reliefs, inscriptions, and the statue of the king came to light, making possible not only the decipherment of Hittite Luwian hieroglyphic script but elaborating its grammatical setup. The inscriptions told the colorful story of Azatiwatas, king of Adanawa (Adana),

who had founded the citadel of Karatepe-Aslantaş. Before her death, Çambel published the results in three monographs that stand as the most detailed documentation of such remains (Çambel 1999; Çambel and Özyar 2003; Çambel et al. 2014).

Along with her scientific concerns, Çambel was worried about leaving what had been exposed at Karatepe-Aslantaş unprotected. During those years the customary practice was to transport important finds to museums, but as there were no roads within 50 kilometers of the site, this was not possible. Later when local governors constructed an approach road to the site, Çambel rejected removing the finds to a museum and insisted that they had to be preserved and displayed in their authentic, natural setting. She appealed to Cesare Brandi from Rome, a leading architect in conservation who had constructed the first shelter in an open-air site in Sicily. Brandi came to Karatepe-Aslantaş, and together Brandi and Çambel improvised measures for conservation of the remains. Çambel and her husband constructed raw concrete sheltering roofs over the entire area of the archaeological remains, one of the earliest of such constructions in the world (Çambel 1993; Özdoğan and Eres 2012).

Karatepe-Aslantaş was located in a remote, densely forested zone, and Çambel was aware that without active collaboration of the local community sustainable protection could not be materialized. She generated strategies in developing local awareness, protecting the environment, and creating sustainable economic welfare for the local community. What Çambel had accomplished in the 1950s was far ahead of her time; now we can describe these accomplishments with terms such as cultural heritage management, sustainable development, cultural environment, and local awareness. Çambel had never used any of these terms in describing her work; in the 1950s, these concepts were not associated with archaeological heritage. She developed such prospects just because she believed that things had to be done that way. These terms became fashionable and formulated in international conventions two decades later. Likewise, the first large-scale multidisciplinary rescue archaeology projects had been initiated with her incentive; the first one, the Keban Project, stands as one of the first and most successful of such undertakings in the world, making possible materialization of over a hundred large-scale rescue excavations. Modalities of the Keban Project were later taken as a model in other dam reservoir areas in Syria and in Iraq (“Featuring Halet Çambel” 2010).

It would be an understatement to consider Çambel’s collaboration with the Braidwood as a simple archaeological project conducting surveys and excavations; it should be acknowledged as one of the

earliest examples and certainly the first multidisciplinary archaeological work in Turkey with the active collaboration of geologists, zoologists, botanists, anthropologists, and architects working together with archaeologists in the field (Braidwood and Braidwood 1982; Çambel and Braidwood 1980). In particular, excavations at Çayönü introduced new objectives, stimulating a generation of young scholars to look at the past with a different perspective (Özdoğan 2013; Özdoğan and Başgelen 2011).

In retrospect, Çambel's intellectual capacity had always been running in front of her academic identity as an archaeologist. She may have written fewer publications than many, but has left behind monumental institutions, trajectories in managing, and, more significantly, a generation inspired by her vision.

Elected 1979

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