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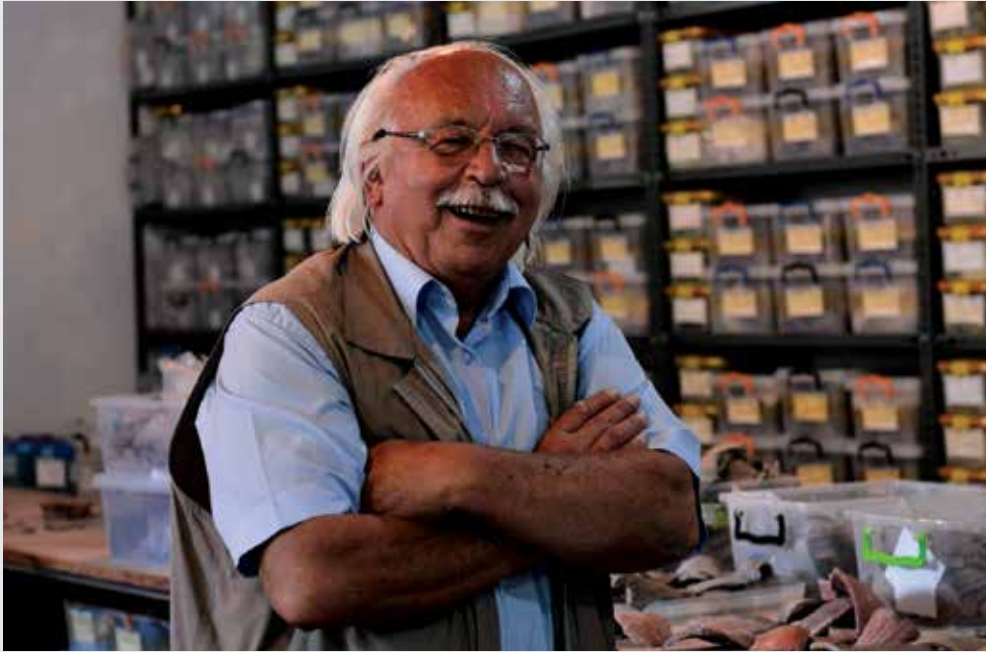
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Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan

"We have to address our common heritage, the past, on a global scale and share science"



He was born on May 30, 1943 in Istanbul. He completed his secondary education at the English Boys' High School and then at Robert College in 1963 and started his higher education at Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Prehistory. He started to work as an "honorary assistant" at Istanbul University in 1970 and spent his entire academic life at Istanbul University. Özdoğan became a professor in 1994, then became president of the Department of Prehistory in 2000, and he retired in 2010. Özdoğan is a member of the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) (2002-2011), the Science Academy (2011), the United States Academy of Sciences (NAS) (2005), the American Archeology Institute (AIA), and the German Archaeological Institutes (DAI).

"We tried to bring a global perspective in terms of world prehistory, but it is quite difficult to explain it in Turkey. The area of constant focus remains Mesopotamia. Let alone Central Asia, the Balkans, Europe, even the Aegean is difficult to perceive. However, cultural history is global and requires a global point of view. You have to consider India and Pakistan to the south and the entire Indian Ocean environment. Besides, each region has interactions with its environment and processes with their own internal dynamics. Now, to bring all these together, you have to take a global perspective. To do any international work, not only for Central Asia but for the world, whether British prehistory or Tanzania, we need to understand that we need to look at the past on a global scale."

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan answered BRIQ Editorial Board member Dr. Hande Günözü's questions.

Which countries is the Shanghai Archeological Forum partnered with? Could you please tell us more about the formation and activities of the Shanghai Archeology Forum?*

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: The Shanghai Archeology Forum was established as an initiative that does not hinder other international collaboration mechanisms in this area, as is typical in the international community. Understanding the situation in China is quite challenging since it is a somewhat foreign place to us. Chinese people have unique ways of engaging with, sharing and adapting to the outside world. The Shanghai Forum has been going on for four years, and I've been a part of it the whole time. According to what I understand, my colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Sciences have established a forum where scientists from other countries are invited to integrate their experience with Chinese knowledge. This provides a basis for Chinese scientists to understand what is happening in the rest of the world and to assume how international collaboration in this area might be possible.

As we are used to organizing meetings with other nations, you might sit down at a table with scientists and discuss a joint project while asking them questions such as, "How do we do it?", "With whom will we hold meetings?" and "Who will publish works related to botany or zoology?" That is not how the Shanghai Forum functions.

Shanghai is a forum that offers a setting for developing mutual relationships. Those who carried out significant work at the time were invited there, where they introduced themselves and shared their accomplishments. This is a manner that shapes the Chinese Academy of Sciences' perspective on the future: What should the world do next? What kind of decisions are to be taken? Will it be the correct approach, realistic, and serve its purpose? I consider this forum to be an enlightening platform. As a result of China's lack of global integration, particularly in social sciences, we might argue that it is intended to prepare an infrastructure.

What exactly does the Shanghai Archeology Forum do in light of what you mentioned earlier?

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: There is no specific research involved by the Shanghai Archeological Forum. It invites scientists from 40 to 45 nations (the last time, it was approximately 180) to China every two years to present their research. The Best Archeological Excavation, Best Research, and Best Finds of That Year are awarded by the Forum. For roughly 10 days, they invite scientists from various nations. This makes it possible for researchers from other nations to interact, get to know one another, and improve their relationships with their Chinese colleagues. Additionally, it can provide an atmosphere where our Chinese friends may observe the annual work done in 46 other nations.

*The Shanghai Archaeological Forum is an organization founded in 2013 within the People's Republic of China's Academy of Sciences, which supports world-class research and strives to preserve and evaluate the world's archaeological heritage.

We may remark that the Forum has been organized wisely. The Chinese Academy of Sciences president proposed, "Let's form an executive committee for the Shanghai Meeting," during the third forum. I was there at the time with British colleague Lord Colin Renfrew. We both disagreed.

All of these worldwide organizations have so far created boards of directors, and deserving colleagues have been elected to these boards. But hardly any of them produced the intended outcome. The establishment evolved personality disorders and envy due to the administrative bureaucracy. The administrators we elected were bureaucrats who broke away from science and traveled the world, and their attitudes changed away from scientific research to pure theory and normativism.

This was because these organizations frequently needed to travel to other parts of the world for meetings. By severing ties with science, people who were elected to these organizations swapped roles and established careers in the management of international organizations. However, the Chinese Academy of Sciences' impartiality and emphasis on the importance of the work method have allowed the Shanghai Forum to continue without losing its quality since it was created. We urged people

not to disrupt the system because of this, and I still concur. Unfortunately, pandemic conditions prevented the forum from taking place this year.

I have been to China several times before for other meetings. I observe that our Chinese colleagues are developing a systematic approach to the world, asking questions like, "How do we set up something new? What does it take for a new formation? What's the issue? What should it be?" They are seeking responses to their inquiries. Therefore, their aim is for science to advance and find its rightful role in academia. I would see this as a means of creating a framework for international collaboration that isn't monopolized by a single nation.

The Correct Method for Scientific Collaboration

What kind of scientific collaboration in the field of archeology can and ought to be developed within the model of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), whose main aim is "development by sharing," which has been put into effect as a cooperation initiative between developing nations, from culture to science and technology, to economic and commercial partnerships?



Prof. Dr. Mehmet Özdoğan gave the closing speech at the 4th Shanghai Archeology Forum.
(Jiangxi Cultural Heritage and Archeology Institute, 2019)

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: This question does not have a simple answer. First and foremost, let me state that everyone has a responsibility to history. History is not the exclusive property of any nation; it belongs to all of us. Choosing and monopolizing a particular part means excluding others. Nevertheless, for the groups to collaborate, they must have the same knowledge, viewpoint, and level of scientific expertise. That is where the problem starts.

Turkiye has a strong background in archaeology, particularly in the social sciences.

Therefore, the basis of collaboration must achieve parity. If not, one side prevents the other and assumes hegemony, something none of us would want right now. It is possible to give various negative examples of this situation. For instance, the young states that emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union opened their doors to nations with the chance and experience of doing scientific research with great hopes of integrating with the rest of the world. Despite not having such ulterior motives, situations resembling the colonialist relations of the 19th century developed due to the teams' inability to accurately understand the internal policies of those countries, the bureaucracy that regulates scientific research, and cultural accumulation. One of the worst examples is when my international colleagues perform research while the locals view collaboration as a chance to travel to another country in a favorable situation rather than as an opportunity for scientific collaboration.

If the relationship is fragile, a team of knowledgeable scientists goes there, while others abuse their reputation, and it becomes scientific blackmail. Simply put, the attitude that "I'll give you the chance to work here, I don't do anything, but let my name be published, and I will make academic progress as a result of that publishing."

This approach has prevented science in those nations from progressing in any way.

Our advantage in Türkiye was that we were on equal ground with our Western counterparts and were not covered by the state's shield. The Turkish archeological system has maintained regional experts on par with other Western nations until a decade ago. Thus, it didn't offer us an archaeological canopy. We had to participate in an open competition. This improved archaeology as a science in Türkiye. As we struggled in open competition with them, we had the chance to advance.

Türkiye has a strong background in archaeology, particularly in the social sciences. On that ground, it is essentially the most advanced scientific level to the nations with which it wishes to collaborate and work, as well as to those capable of learning and putting it to use. Otherwise, finding simple partners will allow scientists to pursue various opportunities, but it's important to avoid actions that go against scientific ethics, such as doing nothing. That's why "stakeholder search" is outdated now. This was the method used by the West in the 18th and 19th centuries. With this method, a common understanding of science with other countries did not develop. For this reason, when collaborative work is to be done, a more difficult but correct way should be chosen. The attitude should not only be like "come, let's work together," but "come, let's think about science together and lay the foundation for how science should be done."

The Common Language Issue Will Be Solved Eventually

What obstacles does the absence of linguistic cooperation reveal to the development of scientific collaboration in archaeology within the framework of the BRI?

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: It doesn't seem to matter much to me. China is the finest example of this. When I first contacted our Chinese colleagues, none spoke English, but they all had translators. I also

didn't see anyone more informed than Chinese people who were familiar with international terminology and the latest news. In the last several years, our Chinese colleagues have attended meetings in the West and joined on several tours of our excavations. All of them were non-English speakers, but one had the impression that they were learning and understanding the world very well.

The situation is the same in Japan. Most of the academics at many Japanese universities don't speak English but are well-informed about the outside world and have excellent relations with it. The situation in Slavic nations is comparable, too. Thereby, even without language, once the fundamental understanding is correct, you can somehow solve the language, and I want to emphasize that when you target the younger generation, they can easily solve the language problem and receive the message. The youth who want to open up to the world and share knowledge with it in good faith should therefore be the target group.

We typically obtain an education unrelated to the Central Asian region while studying at our country's universities. We studied the West and Anatolia, but Asian cultural history and archeology are less well-known to us. China publishes papers in such areas in Chinese, but some reporters speak English there. On the other hand, most publications about Central Asia's archeology are written in Russian. It is impossible to conduct thorough research on those regions' archeology without knowing Russian. How do we get beyond such challenges?

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: That was my initial recommendation to the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). It is not rocket science. There is a long tradition of science in those regions where scientific research was first carried out before us. That is why I emphasized Kazakhstan as an example. In Kazakhstan, 8,000 Kurgans were unearthed up until 1993. If you total up all the excavations in Türkiye, it wouldn't be much.

A Broad Perspective on Cultural History

Language is not the only problem. Mesopotamia is the main focus of Turkish archeological education. Our educational system, except for late periods, is Mesopotamian. The Balkans and Europe are disregarded in this approach and are treated as if they do not exist. We fought diligently at Istanbul University to change this. Although it is very difficult to do so in Türkiye, we tried to provide a broad outlook on prehistoric.

Mesopotamia continues to be the area of constant focus. Even the Aegean, the Balkans, and Central Asia attract little attention. But because history and heritage are universal, it requires an international viewpoint.

If you limit your examination to Central Asia, it won't be appropriate. You should consider the past from all perspectives and approach the problem worldwide because every era has seen movements and shares, and people are constantly moving. If you focus on just one area, you create a pseudoscience around it. The Near East must be thoroughly understood to comprehend and know Central Asia, but South Asia also requires careful consideration of India, Pakistan, and the entire Indian Ocean region.

The Chinese region is towards the East, and there is a huge Eurasian steppe is to the North. Eurasia is the region's unified cultural identity that extends from Korea to Hungary. The discussion is mainly about the Turks, but it is a colorful union that contains all the nations. From east to west, this is correct for all of Central Asia. To comprehend that region, you should consider each and their neighboring cultural regions. Each region also interacts with its environment and has processes with unique internal dynamics. It is necessary to adopt a global perspective to tie everything together. We must understand that it is essential to view the world and the past on a global scale, whether it be British prehistory or Tanzania, not just for Central Asia to interact in any international work.

A Comprehensive Approach Necessary to Understand a Civilization

This method works not only for regions outside our own but also for Turkiye, which is a part of it. It is important to examine Crimea, Bulgaria, and the Mediterranean to understand Turkiye, Syria and Iraq. Our educational system does not include this. Without a worldwide, comprehensive perspective, whether in terms of history, linguistics, or archeology, we cannot comprehend the position of our nation or any other nation in the history of civilization. The phrase “holistic point of view” needs to be properly understood. This necessitates not only the creation of human-made structures and monuments but also the impact on the natural environment, population patterns, population structure, knowledge, and climate changes that affect living conditions.

Science is collective and must be collective. Science is impartial.

In an environment with so much output value, the definition of specialization is constantly evolving. When I was a student, scientists who studied on Bronze Age had to be knowledgeable about every region, from Central Asia to England. The diversity of knowledge and information has grown so much in the intervening period that the definition of an expert is currently confined to specific fields.

You cannot, for instance, claim to be an expert on both Uzbekistan and Syria. But it's also important to have a fundamental understanding of what's going on in various areas. Squeezing the past into one plane, or removing the time scale, is a serious flaw in our educational system. That region's neolithic and paleolithic periods are distinct from one another, as are the region's Bronze Age formation, state and city establishment, agricultural origins, conversion

of agriculture into animal husbandry, migrations received and given, etc.

Since Central Asia is where we started this discussion, attempting to understand Central Asia from the viewpoint of the Near East without understanding this will result in a very contradictory picture. The correct meaning must be used with this statement. In addition to the overall perspective, if we are doing anything for Central Asia, we should mention that there has been a long process there, including the paleolithic, prehistory, prehistoric periods, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Ages of Central Asia, each of which is unique and is very similar to Central Asia.

For instance, we shouldn't ignore the cultural geographies of Ashabad and Kashgar because large and diverse geography cannot be viewed as a single entity as if it had no differences. On the basis of Central Asia as an example, we also need to stop viewing it as a region that has never been explored. Since a long time ago, not only the Russians and Chinese but also our Western colleagues have performed impressive work in that area, as evidenced by recent efforts in the Altai. Scientific progress shouldn't disregard previous research and start from scratch.

Science Needs to be Shared

We must enter Central Asia as researchers and must do so with the correct knowledge, effective strategy, and appropriate steps. Whether there are Chinese, Germans, Americans, or Russians working there, they are scientists. Science is collective and must be collective. Science is impartial. It was Atatürk who handled this correctly. Atatürk, who nationalized everything, asserted that “science should be international” in the early years of the Republican party. He opened up science to the world and welcomed visitors to Turkish excavations. “Archeology has to become universal,” he declared.

China only recently began exploring beyond its borders, but it did so in a very balanced manner. China made the right decisions and moved forward. We can safely say that, generally speaking, my Chinese colleagues have very different attitudes than people in Western nations.

What are the opportunities for partnerships and cooperation between the governments, research organizations, and universities of Russia, China, Turkiye, and Central Asian countries, and how can they be developed in the field of revealing and preserving the history of civilization on the Silk Road?

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: Which route through the north of the Caspian Sea, which one from the south of the Caspian Sea, or which one from the Indian Ocean do we refer to when we say “Silk Road”? Or are we referring to alternative, distinct routes or the main road that is constantly changing?

Let’s explore the Silk Road. We are asking a question that requires an answer. I believe this issue can be referred to as the significance of the Silk Road concerning East and West Asian relations. Many things travel east and originate in the east. However, the Indian Ocean is one of the main routes here. Therefore, what we refer to as the Dilmun trade is a very important trade route that enters the Persian Gulf from Southern China. It has existed since 3.000 BC and occasionally spreads to Africa. It should not be forgotten that the sea route was more convenient and secure in ancient times than the land route.

Many essential items, including rice and chicken from East and Southeast Asia, likely traveled to the west by sea rather than land during the Bronze Age, which began in the third millennium BC. The domestication of horses, camels, and donkeys, on the other hand, led to the importance of the two highways connecting the east and west, the road passing through the Eurasian steppes in the north of the Black Sea and the road coming from the south of the Caspian via Central Asia. However, the geography between these two regions was frequently altered depending on the political structures. Archeological evidence shows that the Eurasian steppes served as an expressway or highway for the horse riding communities during prehistoric times and that different cultures, societies, and even taste preferences impacted life in the two areas.

On the two sides of Asia, there are two distinct cultural formation regions. We must remember the passage of time when we start to question the connection between China and the Near East. The picture that emerges when you ignore civilization’s 5.000-year history and condense it into one dimension will be wholly false and reflect your preferences rather than reality. You must choose the relevant period for your search because the relationship between the two areas is dynamic and constantly changing.

The “Silk Road” can be viewed as a representation of this set of relationships in this context. Although everyone has heard of the phrase “Silk Road”, it still needs to be thoroughly established to transfer to science.



Original figures from different cultures that have reached to the present day. (CSSN, 2019)

The World Neolithic Congress will be Pioneering

Could you please explain to us the origins of the World Neolithic Congress and its contributions to the field of archeology, which will take place in 2023?

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: One of the most significant turning points in the development of civilization was the Neolithic Period. Hunting and gathering were the primary modes of subsistence for a very long time before this process began. However, the Neolithic represents the breaking point of the system that makes up modern civilization. In other words, the system that converts production, farming, surplus product, and surplus value into a city, state, and empire. The Neolithic is responsible for inheritance law, family law, the division of labor, masteries, cities, states, empires, armies, soldiers, war, temples, clergy, and bureaucracy. It is a process that lays the groundwork for modern civilization. In the Near East, in our Anatolia, there is one of the breaking points. However, this procedure is not limited to Anatolia. There was a Neolithic culture in China, one that developed in Southern Siberia and one in Central America. South America has a Neolithic period; we owe them the corn, potatoes, and tomatoes we have today.

How was the present connected to the past? We should internalize the intellectual depth this point of view provides us.

The Neolithic cultures of each region have been extensively studied from various angles, including nutrition and genetic inheritance. However, compiling this information and comparing them all on a table has not been done yet. Recent years have seen a change in the findings of new excavations in the Upper Euphrates and Upper Tigris basin, also known as the Göbeklitepe Cultural Region in Southeast Anatolia. When we used to say, for instance, “Agriculture began first, then settled life,” the opposite was actually the truth. Before agriculture, there was a settled life.

Although we observed a class-based society there, we used to say that class society and stratified society emerged in 3000 BC. The temples were from a later period, but we saw a temple there.

We decided to organize a congress to bring together various Neolithic Periods worldwide due to the excitement this caused. The “Great Neolithic,” which includes the Chinese, Southern Siberian, American, and African Neolithic periods, as well as the Near Eastern Zagros and Anatolian periods, must all be seen on the same table with the Neolithic periods of Anatolia and the Near East.

In China, the Neolithic had been moving westward; in the United States, it had been moving eastward, and both have points where they converge. As a result of the blending of the two, new cultural regions, like Eurasian, are emerging. There will be a congress where these topics can be discussed, though not all issues will be resolved immediately. Obviously, the focus here is on the East Asian model and our Near Eastern Neolithic model. There are models from China and Japan. The part that excites me—and this is the interesting part—is that the Neolithic in China or Japan began for entirely different reasons than it did in the West.

Agriculture began there much later. For instance, they begin with tree seedlings. Most of it is fruit seedlings rather than grains. Settlement is replacing fishing. Twenty thousand years prior to our time, they began using pottery. But BC. The system is the same all over the world in the year 3000. What is emerging? State, empire, military, religious institution, writing, and warfare. All Neolithic people reach the same conclusion about themselves, as if by divine providence. Thus, a system’s return is an intriguing process. When you pull the trigger, the state and its laws—including those governing inheritance and family law—come into play. In this manner, Anatolia, China, Japan, and America all reach the same conclusion.

This congress’s goal is to put them on a table. We would be hosting this congress in China this year if there were no pandemic. Prior to that, we also met with the Novo Sibirsk Academy. Also very interested were their Russian colleagues, but the circumstances were not right



4th Shanghai Archeology Forum award ceremony. (Jiangxi Cultural Heritage and Archeology Institute, 2019)

then. The Chinese Academy of Sciences was extremely welcoming in 2019. We moved here because the most recent events in Türkiye gave us the chance to do this there. Additionally, Chinese coworkers are actively involved in it.

This is a crucial stage in developing the fundamental infrastructure.

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: I really hope so. Of course, everyone must come here once the pandemic conditions have passed in 2023. This sizeable convention wouldn't take place online. Several hundred papers were presented at the "Congress of Near East European Neolithic" in Copenhagen this year, but it was still online mainly out of expediency.

Who Will Assess All These If We Go Back to Primitive Life Again?

What can we learn from history to create a new civilization centered on people and in harmony with the natural world?

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Celal Özdoğan: I don't think humanity has learned anything from its mistakes in the past; otherwise, we wouldn't be in this predicament today. Let me sum up by saying that I believe one of the key lessons on this topic is found in the note Gordon Childe left before his passing, which examines cultural history from an angle that will provide a holistic perspective.

Childe wrote, "I suffer from not being able to explain

what should have happened or not. I can explain everything that happened in the past." Thus, we should interpret it as reading today's glasses helps us understand the past, but Childe emphasizes that these glasses also keep us from seeing everything else. How was the present connected to the past? We should internalize the intellectual depth this point of view provides us. This, however, does not foresee what the future will hold. The future will be shaped differently depending on its initial circumstances; it cannot be a repeat of the past. The Marxist analysis makes you think something "has to be like this," but it doesn't. You can consider it from a capitalist perspective and conclude that it simply isn't true again. Because there are so many parameters and a wide variety of dynamics in the world, you must consider them all.

Do you, for instance, know when and where the next volcanic eruption will occur? When three volcanoes erupt, the climate of the entire world changes. We cannot project forward when we start from that point and bring together many different factors, but can we learn from this experience? I think there is something to be learned from this. Set everything aside, then come back to the tree. Let's not disturb the earth. Who will respond, "that was wonderful", if we climb the tree again and leave the planet alone? Who will remark, "It was okay?" So in order to critique, someone must know the subject. The world was beautiful, it was nasty, it was good, and we need a foundation that can affirm that. What good is sitting on a tree if you don't say that? 🌳