

The Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project in 2020

Christoph Bachhuber & Michele Massa | University of Oxford & University of Chicago

Like many projects scheduled to take place in Turkey in 2020, the Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project (KRASP) was unable to fulfil several of its research aims because of COVID-19 travel restrictions, although fieldwork continued on a reduced scale. The most disappointing impact of the pandemic was the postponement of the Türkmen-Karahöyük Intensive Survey Project (TISP). The 2020 season would have included geophysical survey of the lower town and upper mound at this urban-sized settlement where TISP discovered a Hieroglyphic Luwian inscribed stele of the Great King Hartapu in 2019. We are hopeful that this sub-project will go ahead in 2021.

With a reduced team, we focused instead on filling in some gaps in the data of our extensive survey of the Konya and Karaman plains with an emphasis on the Neolithic to Early Chalcolithic and Late Bronze Age to Iron Age periods. We completed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) surveys at several key sites, but decided to treat summer 2020 largely as a study season. The latter included a re-evaluation of the diagnostic pottery, lithics and small finds, and a collaboration with Hasan Bahar at Selçuk University to analyse materials that he had collected in his surveys in the Konya region in the 1990s to 2000s. Our work in 2020 has led to a refinement of our understanding of the earliest farming settlements in the Konya region, of the territorial dimensions of Bronze and Iron Age settlement and land-use, and of small-scale farming settlement during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, as summarised below.

Early agrarian societies

Following a detailed analysis of Pottery Neolithic sherds recovered from sites in the course of the Lower Çarşamba (Alkaran Höyük and Kısıkyayla Höyük) and the Çarşamba delta (Karhane Höyük, Karaca Höyük and Ürümdü Höyük), we suggest that Çatalhöyük was not the only substantial settlement on the Çarşamba delta during the seventh millennium BC, as has long been suggested (e.g. Baird 2006). While high-visibility settlements like Çatalhöyük and Boncuklu are no doubt the exceptions, our preliminary assessment points to the existence of at least a few Pottery Neolithic sites that have been elusive up to now. The low visibility of such sites can be attributed to post-depositional processes, including the capping of earlier Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements by large Bronze Age and Iron Age deposits, and alluvial accretion of up to 5m on the delta (Ayala et al. 2017), which may have masked low-lying settlements, particularly those of the early Holocene (cf. Boyer et al. 2006). Consequently, Neolithic and Chalcolithic materials are visible on the site surface only if there are no

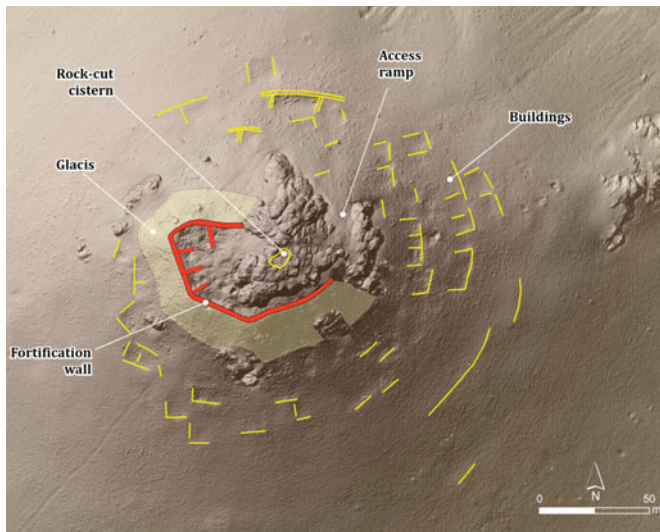
overlying later periods of settlement or if the earlier deposits have been exposed by natural (e.g. water erosion) or human (e.g. looting, road construction) activity. Also, chipped-stone typology in the Konya region is not refined enough to distinguish clearly between Late Aceramic and Pottery Neolithic tools. Lastly, these earliest ceramics are mostly poorly fired and tend to crumble.

The late seventh to early sixth millennium is a dynamic period, as noted already by Douglas Baird's observations on the appearance of numerous small (1–2ha), normally single-phased sites such as Mahsen Höyük, Musluk Höyük and Taştömek I. While Baird (2006) has interpreted this trend as a dispersal from the original Çatalhöyük East settlement, it is worth considering whether the trend represents a demographic expansion of farming communities, alongside Çatalhöyük West which continued to be a large site. Our work at Alkaran Höyük and Kısıkyayla Höyük – both dateable to the Late Pottery Neolithic – also raises the possibility that these are the earliest sedentary settlements in the region to be located beyond the fertile Çarşamba delta.

Territoriality in the Bronze and Iron Ages

Our reassessment of pottery collected from hilltop sites and the completion of UAV surveys at large fortified hilltops, including Seçme Kalesi, Cicek Kalesi and Kana Kalesi, is confirming our understanding of territorial dynamics on the Konya plain during the Bronze and Iron Ages, beginning already in the third millennium BC. One of the most interesting sites is Cicek Kalesi in the foothills of the western Taurus mountains. It is perched above a mountain pass that today defines a stretch of the Konya–Alanya road. We have recorded an uninterrupted sequence between the Early Bronze Age I–II and the Hellenistic period (ca 3000–100 BC). During this time, settlement of the site shifted from the lower terrace during the Early Bronze Age to the main mound beginning in the Middle Bronze Age. On the Early Bronze Age terrace we have recorded unambiguous remnants of dry-wall construction.

Kana Kalesi is located on the opposite side of the Konya plain, along the İsmil–Aksaray road. Like Cicek Kalesi, it was occupied for a very long time from the late Early Bronze Age (EB III), through the second millennium BC to the Late Iron Age and Hellenistic period. The buildings visible just under the surface in the 3D surface model on the next page appear to be associated with the fort, as shown by the ceramic scatters. Pottery from a small settlement on the lower slopes is also contemporary with the fort, suggesting perhaps that the site was a relatively large garrison during the Middle to Late Bronze Age and the Late Iron Age. Kana Kalesi is the largest



3D surface model of the fortified hilltop at Kana Kalesi, highlighting architectural features.

hilltop fort in the KRASP study area dateable to the second millennium BC, and was likely a strategic node in the defensive network during the Hittite period.

Lastly, the largest fortified hilltop in the study area is located at Seçme Kalesi, on a pass that connects the Konya plain with the Lakes District further west. The site abuts a cliff face, is built up with a dry-stone wall that encircles an area of 300m × 130m and includes a lower settlement (ca 4–5ha), making it a possible garrison. The fort appears to have been built initially in the mid-second millennium BC, but pottery distributions and architectural features suggest it reached its largest extent during the eighth to sixth century BC. Architecturally, the fort compares well with Yaraşlı-Çevre Kalesi (Özgüner, Summers 2017), which has been reliably dated to the seventh to sixth century BC.

Our understanding of Bronze Age and Iron Age defensive networks in the Konya region suggests that territorial control was reinforced at pinch points in the landscape (mostly on mountain passes), in contrast to the more solid lines of fortifications of Roman *limes*.

The state and imperial context of farming

One of the primary aims of KRASP includes understanding how early urban and state societies in this region impacted ecologies, particularly through intensification of water management and agricultural practices. Based on the results of previous fieldwork seasons, we observe a dramatic northern expansion of settlement from the Çarşamba delta into arid steppe landscapes during the Late Iron Age (see map to right). The small size (1–5ha) of these sites and the scarcity of fine wares suggest that they formed a network of farming settlements. Provisionally, their Late Iron Age date points to an imperial (Achaemenid) context, which likely included unprecedented efforts to irrigate this steppe region of the Konya plain.

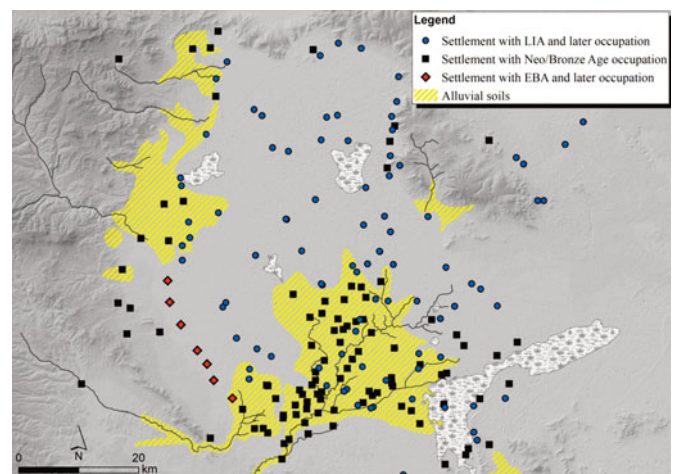
During the 2019 and 2020 seasons, surveys around the major regional centre of Türkmen-Karahöyük on the Çarşamba delta identified similar-sized, low-lying mounds with occupation phases that are limited to the Late Bronze and/or Iron Age. These difficult-to-detect settlements in the alluvium will be a priority of the 2021 field season, but we raise here the possibility that a farming hinterland of food producers had emerged already in the mid- to late second millennium BC to feed urban populations (i.e. at Türkmen-Karahöyük).

Future plans

Adhering to Ministry regulations, 2021 will see the last field season of KRASP. We will dedicate our time to a large-scale geophysical survey at Türkmen-Karahöyük, to completing intensive ceramic collection at the same site and to filling in the remaining gaps in the extensive regional survey.

References

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The northern expansion of settlement into arid steppe landscapes beginning in the Late Iron Age.