

The Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project 2021: the prehistoric past, the archaeological present and looking to the future

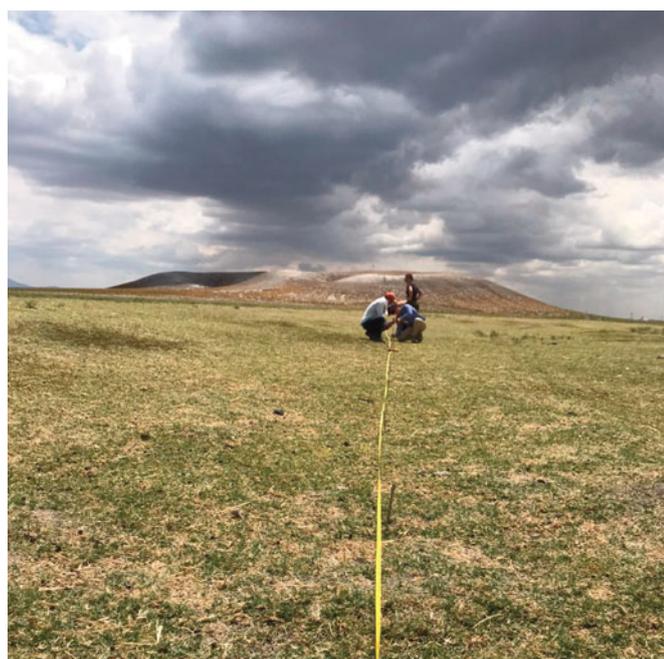
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Despite Covid-19 travel restrictions preventing several international researchers of the Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project (KRASP) from travelling to Turkey, we were able to conduct our fifth season of fieldwork on a reduced scale. The priorities for the 2021 field season included initiating geophysical survey at the urban-sized settlement called Türkmen-Karahöyük, where in 2019 the Türkmen-Karahöyük Intensive Survey Project discovered a Hieroglyphic Luwian inscribed stele of the Iron Age King Hartapu, beginning informal interviews with local stakeholders in the archaeological landscapes of the study area and completing the regional (extensive) survey.

Türkmen-Karahöyük Intensive Survey Project

The Türkmen-Karahöyük Intensive Survey Project (TISP), a sub-project led by James Osborne and funded by the Oriental Institute (University of Chicago), initiated its first season of geophysical survey using magnetometry. For the first time, TISP was able to visualise the urban layout of the site during its last, large-scale phase of settlement in the Hellenistic period. TISP also continued the intensive survey that was begun in 2019. The most remarkable find from the 2021 survey was a stele inscribed with a single Hieroglyphic Luwian sign.



Geophysical work at Türkmen-Karahöyük.

Contemporary Pasts of Archaeological Landscapes

In 2021 fieldwork was also initiated for the Contemporary Pasts of Archaeological Landscapes (CPAL) sub-project, led by heritage researcher Hakan Tarhan and anthropologist Erol Sağlam. CPAL is addressing the interface between the material remains of the ancient past and settlement, land-use and dwelling in the Konya region today. Currently, the priority for CPAL is the farming village of Türkmen-Karahöyük that was settled around the upper mound of the site in the early 20th century. CPAL is engaging with one of the greatest challenges facing field archaeology today. This involves attempts to reconcile two divergent ethics: one towards the preservation of the material remains of the archaeological past and the other concerned with the self-determination of local communities to use the material remains of the past in ways that benefit them.

CPAL researchers conducted informal interviews and conversations with members of the local community in an effort to understand two aspects of the archaeology and archaeological heritage of Türkmen-Karahöyük. On the one hand, the interviewees were asked to describe the presence of the archaeological landscape in their day-to-day lives and in their memories and personal histories. On the other hand, CPAL began evaluating attitudes towards a possible long-term and large-scale archaeological project at Türkmen-Karahöyük and the expectations of the village community regarding such a project.

While these conversations have only just begun, CPAL has been able to determine genuine interest in the archaeology and ancient past of Türkmen-Karahöyük and its surroundings, beyond simply the financial gain that could be gained from unsanctioned digging. Most of the interviewees were candid about their involvement in these activities at Türkmen-Karahöyük and neighbouring sites. Yet, many of their finds have not been circulated into (illicit) antiquities markets. After learning that several households in the village kept ancient architectural and statuary fragments, for example as ornaments in gardens and courtyards, the government representative, İsmail Sarıpınar, consulted with the mayor, Mehmet Çelik, to encourage village households to volunteer their found objects for a public display in the village square. Happily, many households volunteered, and the event generated genuine excitement in the village. This coming together supports CPAL's preliminary assessment of the positive attributes of archaeological heritage in the

Türkmen-Karahöyük village and the community's favourable views on the future of archaeological fieldwork at the site. In the short term, CPAL is considering how we might collaborate with the village to turn this group of objects into a permanent display in the village square, foregrounding local and personal histories alongside their ancient contextualisation.

Concluding KRASP's extensive survey

Of course, we would have loved to have ended the final season of KRASP's extensive survey with our full team in action, not least to celebrate the many achievements of our survey since the first season of fieldwork in 2017. Nevertheless, with a reduced team we were still able to fill in some crucial gaps in our understanding of regional settlement patterns in the KRASP study area. From Türkmen-Karahöyük, we set out to record small, flat 'satellite sites' in the vicinity of the urban centre. Some of these sites are invisible from the ground, but became apparent to us through recently available HEXAGON satellite imagery taken from spy missions in 1971. The historical satellite imagery shows the landscapes of the Konya plain before they were extensively transformed by mechanised agriculture (see figure below). Also, working with contemporary satellite imagery (Sentinel-2 and DESIS), we collaborated with Daniele Cerra (German Aerospace Centre) who used an algorithm to semi-automatically detect anthrosoils (e.g. nitrate-rich soils deposited by humans) on the Konya plain. Based on these satellite-derived data, we were able to visit

sites located in the vicinity of Türkmen-Karahöyük that we would not have been aware of otherwise.

We determined that the flat morphology of each of these sites was due to their relatively short periods of settlement (no more than 300–500 years). The dating of these sites is compelling, and restricted to two periods. The earlier is dated to the Early Chalcolithic (ca 6000–5500 BC), when sites such as Alanlı Höyük, Mahsen Höyük, Taştömek and Çataltepe Höyük were in all likelihood not satellites of Türkmen-Karahöyük, but rather part of a constellation of small farming settlements across the Çarşamba alluvium and also part of a gradual dispersal away from the apparent Neolithic centre of the Konya plain at Çatalhöyük. The later periodisation of these sites is Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (ca 1400–700 BCE), when Türkmen-Karahöyük emerged as the largest urban centre on the Konya plain. In all likelihood, Kocabel Höyük, Gökhöyük, Kepir Höyük I–II, Eski Küllük and Halaç Höyük are satellites of Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Türkmen-Karahöyük, or, more precisely, farming settlements in the urban hinterland that fed a population living in a large, 130ha, city.

In 2022 the priority will be for TISP to expand and complete its geophysical survey of Türkmen-Karahöyük and for KRASP to finalise its databases and analyses for a monograph-length publication. We sincerely hope that the culmination of KRASP is the end of just the first chapter of our research into the archaeology and archaeological heritage of the Konya plain.



Satellite images of the large Early Bronze Age settlement at Samih Höyük. The image on the left (a) was taken by the HEXAGON spy-satellite mission in 1971. On the right (b), a 2021 Google Earth image shows the subsequent levelling of large parts of the mound for agriculture.