

Sakçagözü in context: Garstang's 1908–1911 excavations revisited

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The site of Sakçagözü (Sakçe Gözü or Coba Höyük) is located in the Islahiye district of Gaziantep – 21km northeast of Zincirli – and first came to light in the late 19th century, when a group of basalt reliefs was found lying on the surface of the mound. The subsequent excavations conducted by John Garstang at the site between 1908 and 1911 uncovered a Neo-Hittite fortified enclosure and a portico leading to a palace, which featured a series of basalt reliefs.

Coba Höyük is the smallest site on the Sakçagözü plain. After his arrival, Garstang immediately started excavations because of the sculpture that was lying on

the surface of the mound. He also conducted excavations at the nearby site of Songurus, located to the northwest of Coba, which is the largest site in the region. Garstang used the Sakçagözü material as well as that collected during his 1907 journey through central and southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria to illustrate his 1910 book *The Land of the Hittites*.

Garstang reburied the reliefs after he had completed his excavations at Sakçagözü, but they were later removed by the Turkish authorities to Ankara in 1939 and put on display at the Anatolian Civilizations Museum, where they still reside today. After the removal of the reliefs from the site, further excavations were carried out by the British Institute at Ankara. These later excavations were undertaken with the aim to sort out the stratigraphy of the site; however, they ended up concentrating on the earlier occupation levels.

The basalt reliefs from Sakçagözü have been dated to the last quarter of the eighth century BC by a number of studies, as have the wall and gate surrounding the enclosure. However, despite these impressive finds, there are no written materials from Sakçagözü that might help to identify its ancient name. Nonetheless, it has been suggested that Sakçagözü should be identified with the city of Lutibu in the kingdom of Sam'al, where the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III confronted a military coalition of northern Syrian and southeastern Anatolian states in 858 BC. Sam'al was located in the eastern part of the Amanus range between Karamanmaraş and Antakya. Like other independent kingdoms in northern Syria and southeastern Anatolia, it was incorporated into the Neo-Assyrian state during the ninth and eighth centuries BC.

My current research project aims to reappraise the regional significance of the site of Sakçagözü and Garstang's excavations there for the Iron Age. In particular, new excavation results, from sites such as Tel-Tayinat, Gedikli-Karahöyük, Tilmen, Zincirli and Karkemiş, and data from other research projects (for example Istanbul University's Islahiye Region Excavation and Research Project) have provided valuable new insights into the small neo-Hittite kingdoms that typified the region's political and material culture during this period. These kingdoms are often overlooked in favour of the larger regional narratives of the Hittites, Assyrians and Urartians. In addition to the data from these archaeological projects, the digitisation of Garstang's photographic archives by the University of Liverpool (ca 900 items), which includes photographs from his 1907 journey and the Sakçagözü excavations, and the availability of unpublished research materials held at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum will assist in the re-evaluation of the Iron Age levels (IX, X and XI) of Sakçagözü, which Garstang published in interim form only.



The excavated portico of Sakçagözü with basalt reliefs in situ (courtesy of The Garstang Museum of Archaeology, University of Liverpool)