

## The first field season of the Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project

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The Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project (KRASP), initiated in 2016, is a six-year joint project of the universities of Oxford and Bilecik, focused on the Çumra and Karatay districts (Konya). Our study area encompasses the BIAA-sponsored excavations at Pınarbaşı, Boncuklu and Çatalhöyük. The British Institute at Ankara has also supported the first two phases of KRASP. The first included a study of legacy survey materials collected by James Mellaart, David French and Ian Todd, among others. Phase 2 of KRASP – fieldwork – was initiated in summer 2017, on the eastern margin of our study area.

We have set out to achieve a number of goals with these legacy and fieldwork elements. Many of them align with *longue durée* approaches to archaeological landscapes, including the production of a diachronic outline of human-environment interactions in different ecological niches and a related (diachronic) assessment of the formation of archaeological landscapes. KRASP is also interested in how and why, and with what consequences, networks of communication formed within and beyond the landscapes of the Konya plain. This might, for example, have been mediated by networks of production and exchange, mobility related to (pastoral) transhumance or political consolidation, or a combination of these. The last aim of KRASP is different from the others because it is concerned with the ‘archaeological present’. This is, similarly, a study of landscapes, but develops ethnographic methodologies to understand how people living in the KRASP study area today relate to the archaeological landscapes they inhabit.

The Konya plain has attracted numerous regional surveys over the past 60+ years, including those of Douglas Baird, Sachihito Omura, Hasan Bahar, Semih Güneri, David French, Ian Todd and James Mellaart. Invariably, previous research has focused on the cultivated areas of the Çarşamba river delta and has prioritised high-visibility settlement mound sites. KRASP’s fieldwork area straddles this well-trodden landscape and includes the higher elevation and more arid zones of the steppe and highlands – or ‘the margin’. Our fieldwork is focused on a ca 2,000km<sup>2</sup> region that extends east, southeast and northeast of the Çarşamba alluvial fan, encompassing the eastern edge of the cultivated zone, the arch of the Bozdağlar mountains and the steppe zone that separates the two.

There are several reasons why the margin appeals to us. First, by defining discrete ecological niches we can begin to address environmentally mediated human activity and the relationship between the margin and other ecozones in different periods. Palaeoenvironmental reconstructions are

requisite for this aspect of KRASP. More broadly, by recording non-mounded settlement sites, fortified hilltops, religious buildings, quarries, rock monuments, cave shelters, temporary/pastoral encampments and mortuary monuments, KRASP is examining both historically contingent settlement in the margin and the economic, political and ideological motivations to interact with these landscapes. The margin also offers a window onto some of the earliest human activity on the Konya plain, evidence for which has been deeply buried under the alluvium.

KRASP was initiated in 2016 with detailed analyses of legacy materials collected by BIAA-based surveys, as well as an assessment of all relevant (published) research on the Konya plain. The BIAA legacy material comprises mostly prehistoric pottery dating from the Neolithic through to the Iron Age. Study of this corpus, including typological/chronological, geo-chemical (p-XRF) and spatial analyses, forms an essential component of KRASP’s holistic study. Work on the legacy material has been essential both in creating the chronological framework for KRASP and also for defining the spatial extent of our regional analysis. We are developing a multi-scalar analytical strategy in a study that encompasses the whole of the Konya plain. The legacy material is helping to define the largest geographical scale of our project, within which the data and results from our more focused fieldwork in the eastern margin can be ‘nested’. Within this framework we have created a digital database and a Geographical Information System (GIS) platform to collect and locate data from all known archaeological sites on the Konya plain.

The two largest and most consequential research outcomes from the first phase of KRASP are (1) the visualisation and analysis of settlement patterns and networks of production and exchange from the Neolithic to the Iron Age and (2) an understanding of how the archaeological landscape of the Konya plain has evolved from the initiation of the BIAA-based surveys (the 1950s) to the present, in particular as a consequence of recent human impacts on archaeological landscapes. This work is ongoing, and is being integrated with the results of the fieldwork.

Many of our fieldwork methodologies were pioneered in the surveys led by Douglas Baird in a region adjacent to the west of the KRASP fieldwork area. Our site detection strategies include analyses of satellite imagery, topographic maps and 5m-resolution digital elevation models, and extensive (car-based) and intensive (pedestrian) on-the-ground survey methods. We also rely on local knowledge to identify archaeological sites that are otherwise invisible to the techniques above. In addition to surveying the landscape, we are recording monuments, inscriptions and standing architecture with highlight-reflectance transformation imaging and 3D scanning, and through the creation of digital plans with D-GPS. These surveying and recording methodologies will continue to be used in future field seasons.



An Iron Age watchtower near the village of Adakale.

In the course of our three-week field season we recorded 57 archaeological sites; just over half are new discoveries. In addition to mounded settlements in the alluvium, we investigated a wide range of site types in the margin, including flat settlements, mortuary monuments (mostly tumuli and rock-cut tombs), an inscribed rock monument, fortified hilltops, quarries, rock shelters, concentrations of Roman/Byzantine spolia and pottery scatters. Although detailed material studies are ongoing, we are ready to make a few general observations.

Some of the most interesting results come from the interface between the cultivated area and the uplands. For example, we discovered several multi-period sites (mounds, rock shelters and slope sites) that yielded evidence for early Holocene activity, as well as later Bronze Age, Iron Age and medieval. Whether or not evidence from these later periods represents traces of mobile pastoral groups remains to be seen, but we are intrigued by the late medieval/early modern animal pens that were sometimes associated with them. The uplands also revealed a string of fortified hilltops, ranging from small watchtowers to large garrisons with extensive lower settlements. Whilst the latest phases of the fortifications are in most cases Iron Age or Hellenistic, many of them yielded evidence for Middle and/or Late Bronze Age occupation. Their location along an upland rim, flanking routes of communication into and out of the eastern Konya plain, appears linked to the territorial dynamics of early state polities. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the uplands were a focus for highly visible funerary monuments, including tumuli on ridges as well as rock-cut graves on mountain slopes. Medieval and pre-modern activities on the margin include the construction of small hilltop chapels, large terrace-agriculture systems and numerous stone-lined animal pens.

We have also investigated the reuse or spoliation of Roman and late antique monuments, aligning with our study of the 'archaeological present' of the Konya plain. We recorded a wide range of spoliation, ranging from the prosaic use of architectural elements in construction projects or sarcophagi as water troughs, to more ideologically significant

appropriations, in cemetery contexts in particular. Different architectural and sculptural elements from at least one late antique church are used as gravestones in the cemetery at İsmil. From the cemetery at Adakale, an inscribed late antique sarcophagus lid is used as part of a *musallah taşı* (the table used to display the deceased before interment).

KRASP has been systematically recording the impact of modern human activity on archaeological sites on the Konya plain via satellite imagery, assessments of earlier publications and our own fieldwork. Approximately 90% of the sites that we recorded in 2017 had been impacted by looting, agriculture, roadwork, irrigation and/or construction. Approximately 40 of these had been looted, with impacts ranging from single robber pits to massive trenches dug with mechanised excavators. We are committed to understanding this activity as part of the complex archaeological palimpsest of the area, and are particularly interested in the economy and ideology of looting, and how looting, evidently, forms part of the everyday fabric of these farming communities.

In 2018 we plan to develop both our palaeoenvironmental and ethnographic sub-projects. Building on the palaeoenvironmental methodologies and data of previous work on the Konya plain, we plan to initiate a programme of geological coring and palynology and isotope analyses. Additional palaeoenvironmental work is needed to fill large gaps in our understanding of this region, particularly of the later (mid to late Holocene) sequence. We aim to create a high-resolution chronological framework of changes in the climate, hydrology and vegetation cover on the Konya plain, and to relate these results to the broadest settlement patterns in the region. We also plan to begin a formal ethnographic study in 2018. Ultimately, we hope to understand how the people who inhabit this landscape relate to archaeology and could potentially benefit from it in a non-destructive way. Lastly, we plan to record oral histories on traditional agricultural and pastoral industries, production technologies and social memories of archaeological landscapes, and relate these qualitative data to our broadest understanding of the archaeology of the Konya plain.



A sarcophagus spoliated from a grave and reused as a water trough in a garden in Adakale.