

Watching over Didim's archaeological heritage: an increasing challenge

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How do we balance the preservation and protection of archaeological traces of the past with the needs of modern residents and economic interests? There are, of course, no easy answers, especially in places experiencing rapid change due to economic developments arising at national or international levels, and even more so where the population grows rapidly. The landscape of the Milesian peninsula – the modern municipality of Didim on the Aegean coast of Turkey – has transformed completely over the last 60 years, from a rural backwater to a major urban seaside town. That transformation is stark: estimated from aerial photography taken by the Turkish air forces, perhaps 170 ha of the peninsula was covered by residential areas (village houses, roads etc.) in 1972; in 2019, satellite imagery from services such as Google and Bing maps show the full built-on (or planned to be built-on) areas to be closer to 2,000 ha, which would represent a 1100% increase over 47 years. Less obviously, but still significant: on the peninsula itself (i.e., not including the Meander plain to the north), agricultural land in 1972 represented perhaps 1,600 ha; by 2019, clearance of large tracts of former maquis shrubland to create wheat fields or olive groves made the agricultural footprint closer to 4,000 ha (see photograph below). The expansion of the urban footprint has only accelerated since the coronavirus pandemic. This may seem counterintuitive given the economic effects of the pandemic restrictions, but it seems that many more people in Turkey are now seeking small-

town life and a second house by the sea. With so much change on this peninsula of perhaps 260 km², watching over archaeological heritage is an unenviable challenge and one which requires diverse methodologies and collaboration between different stakeholders.

Of primary importance in archaeological protection is, of course, knowing where the remains actually are, for which survey projects are so important. The Project Panormos Survey (PPS) began in 2015 with a pilot season around a recently excavated archaic necropolis. It was clear in this first season that there was considerable potential in the application of intensive fieldwalking to help identify remains from all periods which are more easily overlooked by extensive survey methods. External events meant that subsequent fieldwork was spaced out over more years than originally planned: survey was only possible in 2017, 2019 and finally again this year in 2022, after measures against the coronavirus pandemic finally made running the project feasible. In this fourth season of work, then, the focus was on consolidation of previous finds using microscopic recording of pottery in the depo and macroscopic study of find places and areas of landscape interest in the field using drone-based visible and infrared-spectrum cameras. As a result of this season's work, preparation of a detailed publication of the survey's results and their meaning for the history of the Milesian peninsula are now underway, to appear soon. Raw data from seasons 2015, 2017 and 2019 are already published in open format online.



A newly divided countryside: land cleared for olive plantations, divided and fenced off. Access to archaeological remains is now much harder.



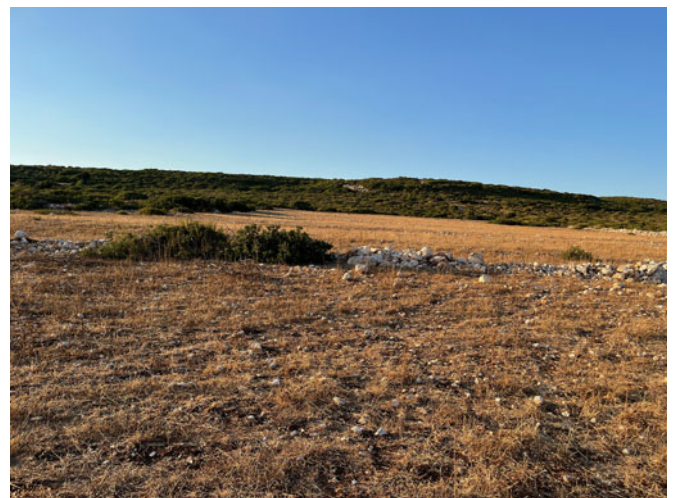
Archaeologist's gold: a scatter of pottery finds amongst broken stone.

Monitoring archaeological remains after they have first been identified is hard work. The chance to revisit areas of interest identified in previous years was therefore particularly important as we come to the end of our current cycle of research. We wanted to assess what had happened to some of these places since 2015. Many remains we have identified over the years are not particularly photogenic: they appear merely on the surface as little more than scatters of broken pottery, and/or chipped or ground stone, which to the untrained eye may all be difficult to differentiate from natural pebbles, rocks or soil (see photograph, above). Archaeologists working in Turkey, and indeed worldwide, are endlessly quizzed by the general public about whether they have ever found gold; the curious are usually disappointed or disbelieving if the archaeologist simply says 'no'. 'Rich' objects – grand buildings, wealthy tombs – still bend our histories towards top-down views of the past, built around 'great men', at the expense of bottom-up alternatives. The surface scatters found on intensive surveys such as PPS can of course indicate past occupation of many different types, both rich and poor, but their superficially unspectacular nature makes them difficult to present in these kinds of narratives and therefore protect.

Turkey has many layers of protection for its archaeological heritage, but the most fundamental is the *arkeolojik sit alanı*, part of the *Kültür Envanterlik* programme. In this system, areas of archaeological interest can be proposed using a standardised form, with evidence to include description, photographs and spatial or cadastral coordinates. This proposal is reviewed by the relevant local heritage authority, usually by staff of the *kurul* (the regional heritage protection agency). As a result of our revisits, we identified two areas, one a potential archaic station along the sacred way, and one a small Roman village, within the PPS permit area at urgent threat from the expansion of modern urbanism. If the review supports our assessments, then these areas will ultimately be entered into a central

register. For each site, a degree value defines a level of legal protection: broadly, first degree means that it is almost impossible to undertake any kind of new building work within the area; third degree requires that any proposed building works be closely reviewed and monitored. As in other parts of the world, this system places cultural heritage practitioners, particularly museum staff, at potential loggerheads with those wishing to develop land for different purposes, which can include both small and large landowners.

More difficult to incorporate into the *sit alan* system are large-scale phenomena, such as the extensive terrace and agricultural field divisions we have previously identified from aerial and satellite imagery. From the ground, these are unprepossessing structures. Their importance is only clear from the air (see photograph below). Unfortunately, due to the current ministry permit prohibition on seed, sediment and soil sampling which would otherwise allow scientific dating of the surrounding soil, we also cannot know when they were built. Since they cover an immense area of the central peninsula, how can they be suitably protected without creating massive legal problems for both landowners and cultural heritage protectors? A start would be to find out more about them, see how they fit into the history of the peninsula, and therefore convince locals that they are worth protecting whether or not they have formal recognition. Turkey's abundance of archaeological remains and speed of recent economic development inevitably makes it difficult to monitor all the registered sites, let alone protect remains which have not yet been formally incorporated or recognised. As we reach the end of our current cycle of research for the Project Panormos Survey, it becomes clearer to us that two things are essential – wider public awareness, knowledge and support for archaeology, and openness and engagement on the part of the archaeologists – if there is to be anything much left to study for future generations.



Unprepossessing history: large-scale ancient land divisions as they appear from the ground