

Emerging patterns on the Konya plain: the second season of KRASP

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Since 2016 the Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project (KRASP) has been generating and collating data from previous projects focused on the Konya plain, from satellite imagery and from our own pedestrian survey that we initiated in the Çumra and Karatay districts in the eastern region of the plain in 2017. In this report we will mostly discuss activities and results from our 2018 field season, and how these new data are fitting into the larger picture of settlement and land-use in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods (ca 8500–300 BC).

So far, KRASP's fieldwork has prioritised the 'marginal' landscapes of the Konya plain, including the steppe region that surrounds the alluvial plains and lakes, and a highland landscape defined principally by the arch of the Boz mountains. Historically, much less survey has been undertaken in the steppe and the highlands compared to the well-trodden Çarşamba alluvium, the home of well-known sites such as Çatalhöyük and Boncuklu. KRASP is necessarily examining the relationship between the margin and the alluvial/lacustrine landscapes of the plain in different historical periods. Likewise, it is examining both historically contingent settlement in the margin and the economic, political and ideological motivations to interact with these landscapes.

Our 2018 fieldwork in the margin was driven by two primary aims: to complete an extensive survey of the mounded settlements in the northern steppe area of the Konya plain and to initiate intensive surveys of fortified hilltops, focusing on Kane Kalesi, which crowns a volcano at the northern rim of the plain. The results from both survey activities have added much to our understanding of the marginal landscapes of the plain.

The steppe is the driest ecozone of the KRASP survey area, with an average rainfall of 240mm/year, which is below the minimum for rain-fed agriculture. Today, farming and settlement on the steppe relies entirely on irrigation. With the exception of late prehistoric sites located near water springs at the piedmonts of the Taurus and Boz mountains, sedentary (farming) settlement in this landscape did not begin until the Late Bronze Age. Douglas Baird has already raised the possibility that late antique settlement in this region was dependent upon irrigation. The results from the KRASP survey suggest that similar strategies were already in place on the steppe in the Late Bronze Age (and no earlier), with implications that are addressed below.

In the 2018 field season we initiated a programme of digital architectural recording of Kane Kalesi. This site, built on the peak of a volcano, is the largest fortified hilltop in our survey area and is located at a major north-south passage onto the Konya plain (today this is the motorway that

connects Konya with Aksaray). A preliminary plan of the site created with a total station shows a defensive wall with at least two phases of reuse, as well as an extensive settlement around the lower slopes that may have served as a garrison. A preliminary study of the pottery collected this year shows that the hilltop site was first occupied in the Middle Bronze Age and continued to function as a fortress in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. We also identified a village built on terraces at the base of the northern slopes of the volcano with Middle/Late Bronze and Iron Age pottery, possibly providing for the garrison.

The biggest surprise of our 2018 season was a discovery we made at the base of this volcano, near the terraces mentioned above. Here we identified large quantities of early prehistoric chipped stone (mostly obsidian) on a site called Beşağıl divided by a small stream. The scatter, which includes spearheads, arrowheads, scrapers and microliths, points to a seasonal hunting encampment that we can tentatively date to the late Aceramic Neolithic. Beşağıl joins a growing number of small sites and artefact scatters on the steppe and highlands that demonstrate regular (hunting) forays into these marginal landscapes during the tenth to eighth millennium BC, roughly contemporary with Pınarbaşı and Boncuklu.

Following the extensive survey results of our 2017 field season and the results of earlier surveys in the region, this year we prioritised two large settlement mounds in the cultivated alluvium: Sarlak Höyük and Türkmen-Karahöyük. Sarlak Höyük, occupied between the Late Chalcolithic and the Late Iron Age, is a key site to understand the emergence of the first large-scale settlements on the Konya plain (after the Neolithic), between the late fourth and early third millennia BC. Our intensive survey revealed that the site reached its maximum spatial extent of 20ha during this period, making it one of the largest-known sites from this time period in western and central Anatolia. The settlement contracted considerably following a site-wide conflagration in the mid- to late Early Bronze Age, visible in the sections of several looting pits.

We collected radiocarbon samples from the destruction horizon at Sarlak Höyük and from two additional large settlement mounds that show a contemporary violent destruction and subsequent abandonment (Samılı Höyük and Emirler Höyük; samples from all the sites were extracted from looters' pits). James Mellaart was the first to recognise this pattern of destruction and abandonment in the Early Bronze Age, but the cause and consequences of this regional phenomenon remain far from understood. KRASP aims to provide greater chronological resolution on these destructions and abandonments, including through radiocarbon dating of the samples we have extracted.



View of Türkmen-Karahöyük from the northwest.

We also turned our attention to the gargantuan settlement mound at Türkmen-Karahöyük. With an upper mound of 35ha that rises 35m above the plain and a lower town that expanded in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age to perhaps as much as 80–100ha, it is the largest mounded settlement on the Konya plain from these periods. The upper citadel was rung by a massive circuit wall that is visible on satellite imagery and probably Iron Age in date. In 2018 we initiated a preliminary survey on the mound and in the lower town. On the mound we prioritised several erosional channels that cut up to 12–15m deep into the mound. From these channels and other areas of the upper mound we collected very finely made pottery representing all periods between the latter half of the Early Bronze Age through to the Hellenistic, as well as large quantities of loomweights and spindle-whorls. We also identified at least two phases of citadel fortification in the section profiles.

Preliminary surveys on the lower mound and in the lower town focused on several small satellite mound features. All the material we collected from these features and from the lower mound/lower town dates to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. We determined that the site reached its maximum horizontal extent during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, after which the lower town of the settlement appears to have been abandoned.

A few meaningful patterns

The Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project is developing a political-economic approach to understanding the archaeological landscapes of the Konya plain. Thus far, some of our most salient results relate to the Bronze Age and Iron Age. During the 2017 and 2018 field seasons we have prioritised four features of the archaeological landscape of these periods.

The first is the violent destruction and abandonment of several sites in the Early Bronze Age I–II (ca 2800–2600 BC). We revisited several of the sites that Mellaart recorded as destroyed and abandoned in the Early Bronze II late

period. We observed violent conflagrations in destruction layers visible in the sections of looters' pits. Our assessment of large amounts of surface pottery confirms that the settlements were either abandoned or contracted considerably after the conflagrations around 2600–2300 BC. The radiocarbon samples that we collected from three of these sites will hopefully provide chronological resolution on this 'destruction horizon'.

The second feature is the presence of a number of fortified hilltops surrounding the Konya plain (see map below), including Kane Kalesi which we intensively surveyed in 2018. Some of these are dateable already to the late third millennium BC, but most show Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age and Iron Age occupations. The defensive network that KRASP has identified strongly suggests an intention to control strategic access points onto the Konya plain, hinting at a process of territorial state formation that had reached a mature stage already in the early second millennium BC.

The third feature is the colonisation of the steppe landscapes in the northern region of the Konya plain beginning in the Late Bronze Age. While more analysis is needed (in particular with geoarchaeological and remote-sensing investigations), we are developing a hypothesis that unprecedented settlement in these marginal landscapes beginning in the late second millennium BC may have been associated with a coordinated (state-sponsored) effort to irrigate the plain with a canal system beyond the fertile delta of the Çarşamba river.

The fourth feature is the likely candidate for a regional capital of a state-like polity on the Konya plain at Türkmen-Karahöyük. Our working hypothesis is that its rise as a central place of the plain is closely associated with the initiative to irrigate the steppe in the Late Bronze Age, the maintenance and expansion of the fortification network around the Konya plain and the commissioning of Luwian-inscribed monuments at Kızıldağ and Karadağ at the southeastern margin of the plain. Many more years of research, including excavation, are needed to test and develop further this hypothesis.

