T.C. KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM
BAKANLIĞI

CİLT 5



45. KAZI SONUÇLARI TOPLANTISI BİLDİRİLERİ

Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü

45. Uluslararası Kazı, Araştırma ve Arkeometri Sempozyumu

45. KAZI SONUÇLARI TOPLANTISI

CİLT 5

26-30 Mayıs 2025
MERSİN

T.C. KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI ANA YAYIN NO: 3821/5
Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü Ana Yayın No: 211/5

Editör
Dr. Candaş KESKİN

26-30 Mayıs 2025 tarihlerinde Mersin'de düzenlenen 45. Uluslararası Kazı, Araştırma ve Arkeometri Sempozyumu Mersin Üniversitesinin katkılarıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir.

TK: 978-975-17-6633-5
ISBN: 978-975-17-6638-0

Grafik Tasarım
Nihal KARAPEK

Kapak Fotoğrafı
Boğazköy Kazısı, Büyükkale'nin kuzey bölümünde yapılan kazılarda ortaya çıkarılan Demir Çağı'na ait yapıların planı, Alman Arkeoloji Enstitüsü.

Not: Kazı raporları, dil ve yazım açısından Dr. Candaş KESKİN tarafından denetlenmiştir. Yayımlanan yazıların içeriğinden yazarları sorumludur.

Ankara 2026

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UŞAKLI HÖYÜK ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT THE 2024 EXCAVATIONS SEASON

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Located in the Sorgun district of Yozgat province, Uşaklı Höyük is a major multi-period settlement consisting of a high mound surrounded by a broad terrace, first identified in the 20th century as a possible Hittite site. Since 2008, systematic archaeological investigations conducted by an international team have revealed that the site was continuously occupied from the end of the 3rd millennium BCE through the Middle Ages, with substantial phases of settlement activity documented on both the mound and the terrace during the 2nd millennium BCE. Excavations and surveys have also uncovered monumental public buildings on the citadel and in the lower town, supporting the proposed identification of Uşaklı Höyük with ancient Zippalanda, a Hittite center dedicated to the Storm-God, while additional evidence attests to occupation spanning from the Early Bronze Age to the Roman-Byzantine period, as well as sporadic finds from the Chalcolithic and Ottoman eras. Against this broad historical background, the seventeenth excavation campaign, conducted between May and July 2024, focused on advancing the understanding of the settlement's development and transformations, with particular attention to its spatial organization. Building on previous results, this season's activities integrated excavation and specialized analyses, further consolidating the multidisciplinary objectives of the project. In this preliminary report, we present a summary of the main outcomes of the 2024 field season.[1] The 2024 fiel-

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1 The excavations and archaeological investigations at Uşaklı Höyük are part of an Italian-Turkish collaborative project initiated in 2008 under the direction of Stefania Mazzoni. The project is devoted to the study of a site

dwork focused on the lower terrace and the slope of the mound, providing new insights into the sequence of occupation. These investigations have further refined our understanding of the architectural remains from the Late Bronze Age, as well as of the terracing system of the höyük dating to the Iron Age. In parallel with the excavations, work continued on the study and conservation of materials stored in the excavation house depot. Flotation of soil samples collected during previous campaigns was undertaken, followed by the analysis of the resulting palaeobotanical remains, which provide new data on the ancient environment and subsistence strategies. Finally, anthropological research on human remains contributed to the reconstruction of past populations, further enriching the multidisciplinary approach adopted in the study of Uşaklı Höyük.

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on the Central Anatolian plateau and to the reconstruction of its historical development over the centuries, with particular emphasis on the levels dating to the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE. It brings together scholars and students from the Universities of Pisa, Siena, Florence, Yozgat Bozok, University College London, and ANAMED at Koç University, who contribute to the fieldwork within specialized research teams. The research teams are coordinated by the authors alongside Giulia Torri (University of Florence), Demet Taşkan (Bozok University Yozgat), and in collaboration with C. Minniti (Sapienza University of Rome), Yılmaz Selim Erdal (Hacettepe University in Ankara) and Lorenzo Castellano (New York University). The last season of work was made possible thanks to funding from the Ministry for University and Research (as part of the research project *Ancient Landscapes of Anatolia in the Bronze Age, ALandA* - Research Project of National Relevant Interest 2022, financed by the European Union-Next Generation EU, Mission 4, Component 1, CUP I53D23000120006), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic, the University of Pisa (ProArcheo 2024 funding scheme), the Municipality of Sorgun, the University of Florence and, importantly, the generous support of the Oriente Mediterraneo Foundation, whose continuous support since the inception of the project has been essential to its development and continuation. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage and Museums and its representative, Necip Becene (Museum of Yozgat), as well as to the Director of the Yozgat Museum, Cihat Çakır, and his senior colleague, Ömer Yılmaz, for their invaluable advice and support. Our sincere thanks go to to the Governor of Yozgat, Mehmet Ali Özkan, for his continued support of the project and for the visits he kindly dedicates to us each year and to the Mayor of Sorgun, Mustafa Erkut Ekinci, for supporting the excavation carried out by our colleagues from Bozok University. We are also grateful to the Embassy of Italy in Ankara and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Istanbul for their support and for the visit paid by His Excellency Ambassador Giorgio Marrapodi and director S. Schirmo which was greatly appreciated and a source of much satisfaction.

This report is the outcome of the collective efforts of all team members and staff, with the first two authors serving as joint lead authors.

For 2024, the following participated in field work: Anacleto D'Agostino (University of Pisa), Valentina Orsi (University of Siena and ANMED Koç University), Yağmur Heffron (University College London), Demet Taşkan (Yozgat Bozok University), Stefania Mazzoni (OrMe Foundation), Serkan Erdoğan (Yozgat Bozok University), Lorenzo Castellano (New York University), Yılmaz Selim Erdal (Hacettepe Ankara University), Giulia Torri (University of Florence), Giacomo Casucci (University of Pavia), Neil Erskine (University of Glasgow), Iolanda Cacozza (Pisa University), Sabina Calderone (Rome), Ylenia Pia Viggiano (University of Pisa), İrem Şükran Nogay (University College London and recipient of the 2024 BIAA Devid French Scolarship), Emanuele Taccola (University of Pisa), Ayça Dokuzboy (Yozgat Bozok University), Sergio Martelli (Pisa), Anna Maria Graziani (Rome); Pisa University students Ilaria Carboni, Cristina Naplitano, Giuseppe Facchetti; Lorenzo Biondi (University of Florence); Yozgat Bozok University students: Mustafa Bal, Aydın Karaca, Merve Akten; Neriman İpek, Nagihan Dalkılıç have done field internships and contributed to the excavation and work on preparing ceramic sherds for later recording; Betül Özcan Balkır and Aslı Karaman Çınar (Yozgat Bozok University) contributed to the formulation of new research initiatives.

2024 EXCAVATIONS

In 2024, excavations were carried out in four distinct areas of the site (Fig. 1), uncovering levels and materials from the Late Bronze Age in Areas A, F, and I; Iron Age remains in Area I; and Roman–Byzantine levels in Areas F and J, thereby refining and extending not only the site's chronological framework but also further evidence for our understanding of its settlement layout across different periods.

Area A

In the southeastern portion of the terrace, the large Building II, identified as a probable temple of the Hittite period, was first brought to light in 2013. Following the investigations carried out in 2023, which focused on clarifying the function of the northern storage rooms, two new 5×5 m squares were opened in 2024 on the western side of the structure, in order to further explore its architectural layout.

After the removal of the surface layer, at a depth of about 1.50 m from the ground level, a brown soil rich in gravel was documented near the granite blocks forming the foundation of the building's walls (US[2] 417, +1121.33 asl). Beneath it, the continuation of walls US 27 and US 67 belonging to room US 75, as well as wall US 421 to the south, were exposed. In the southernmost square, once the surface layer was removed, the continuation of wall US 67 was visible, forming a corner with another wall preserved only by two granite blocks (US 88) oriented E-W. To the west of wall US 67, a floor made of small stones (US 428, +1121.08) was uncovered (Fig. 2).

The ceramic assemblage from Area A, rather limited in quantity, is largely mixed and not very indicative. Some sherds of pseudo-sigillata type pottery (Os) from the accumulations over the cobbled surface US 420 most likely attest to soil movements that occurred after the abandonment of Building II.

Area F

In Area F, two main operations were carried out. First, excavation was extended to a new 5×5 m square (F-G17/D-A.3), located east of the area opened in 2023, with the aim of further investigating portions of the Hittite paved surface associated with the circular structure US 25. Second, work focused on the deepening of investigations below the level of the circular structure itself, in order to explore earlier phases and to reach the same elevation as the wall uncovered last year at the base of the structure, which belongs to an earlier occupation phase.

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2 In this report, the acronym US (unità stratigrafica) is maintained, following the Italian archaeological convention, instead of adopting the English equivalent SU (stratigraphic unit). This choice is intended to ensure consistency with the excavation records and field documentation.

Beneath the topsoil, the collapse (US 227, +1119.95-1119.90 asl) of a series of walls built with medium- and small-sized stones was uncovered. These walls delimit two quadrangular rooms, already partially excavated during the 2022 season: room US 235 and room US 174, both with beaten-earth floors (respectively US 240, +1119.45 asl, and US 127, +1119.28 asl) (Fig. 3). Near the southeast corner of the excavation area, the corner of another room is visible. These rooms likely belong to a building whose different parts are gradually emerging as the excavation progresses across the various squares of the area. Based on the evidence, the building can be dated to the later occupation of the site, most probably to the Roman–Byzantine period, as suggested by the considerable quantity of roof tiles and bricks recovered within the collapse layers (US 76, 227, 228) and fills (US 230, 239).

In relation to floor US 240, a stone slab (38×29 cm) was found (Fig. 4), serving as the cover of a large storage container (rim diameter 61.5 cm, top at +1119.45 asl) with a snake applied as decoration on the shoulder, set into the ground. The container, measuring 1.52 m in height and 1.08 m in internal diameter, belongs to an earlier phase, when the area was likely not yet fully built up, but remained in use at the time of the construction of room US 235. During this earlier phase, the area was probably open-air and housed a sub-rectangular plastered vat (US 243; 1.05×0.78 m internally; between +1119.524 and +1118.933 asl) with a smaller catch-basin (c. 30 cm in diameter, base at +1118.93 asl) hollowed out at its center (Figs 4 and 5). A similar, though larger, vat was discovered in 2022 in nearby Area G, just north of Area F and close to the terrace boundary, and was interpreted as part of an installation for grape processing and wine production (D'Agostino, Orsi, Heffron 2024, 143, Resim 11; 2025a, 64).

Below this level, several pits cut into the earlier layers; these too can be attributed to the late phase of the site, as indicated by the presence of tile fragments and occasional pieces of glass.

The pits cut through the paved floors contemporary with the Hittite circular structure US 25, which were exposed over wide portions of the new square. The earliest of these consists of a floor made of ceramic fragments and small stones (US 272, 4.19×1.06 m; +1118.88 asl), contemporary with the pavement uncovered in 2022 and 2023 (US 145), built instead of irregularly shaped medium-to-small stones. The floor US 272 slopes to the southwest and rises again to the south, forming a slightly concave profile (Fig. 4). Further south, another portion of a pebble-covered floor was documented (US 286; +1118.87 asl), while floor US 249 (+1119.43/26 asl), consisting of irregular medium-to-small stones, is later in date and overlies pavement US 145 excavated in 2023.

A second point of interest is the opening of the deep sounding north of the circular structure US 25, in the western portion of the square excavated in 2022 (F17/D1), where two main phases were identified on the basis of the sequence of walls and floors, along with a final phase represented by the sequence of fill layers (Fig. 5). Once the brown/reddish clayey soil US 122 (+1118.29–1118.24 asl) and a series of soil layers and trampled surfaces,

differing in compactness and inclusions (US 122, 223, 224, 237, 241 at +1117.79 asl), all sloping clearly to the west, were removed, the dark grey clayey layer US 121 (+1117.08 asl) was exposed. This layer, already identified during the 2022 season, is overlain by layers US 251 and 175 and serves as the foundation for the paved floor US 145, which is associated with the circular structure US 25. Beneath a further sequence of grey clayey deposits forming the base of the circular structure (US 276, 277, 280, 252, and 258 at +1116.42 asl), the most recent of the two phases marked by stone walls was revealed.

The large stone wall (US 264, +1117.02 asl, base at +1115.73; preserved length 2.60 m), standing to three courses, forms a corner with wall US 172 (Fig. 6). Within the space delimited by these two walls, grey soil fills were found (US 266, US 279). The associated floor consists of sand and small stones (US 281). Beneath this surface, an earlier phase is characterized by fills of grey clayey soils (US 283, US 288) and ash deposits (US 289, 292), covering an earlier wall built of smaller stones (US 293, top at +1115.29 asl; exposed for only 1.50 m). This wall encloses a small space containing clayey soils (US 298, 296, 297). Floor US 302 is a light-grey surface with patches of yellow and reddish coloration, where a complete bronze spearhead was discovered (Fig. 7).

Below floor US 302 lies a grey clayey deposit (US 303), rich in charcoal fragments, which represents the lowest level reached during the 2024 campaign.

On the basis of these results, it is possible to reconstruct that the area later occupied by the circular structure US 25 had already seen the presence of a monumental wall and earlier construction phases. The westward slope begins to be detectable from the moment of abandonment of the later phase, that of the monumental wall US 264, although it cannot be excluded that this wall itself had already been built on ground sloping westwards.

Among the contexts investigated at Uşaklı Höyük, the LBA ceramic assemblage from Area F stands out as the richest to date, distinguished by both its state of preservation and its typological range (D'Agostino, Orsi, Heffron 2024; 2025 a; 2025 b).

In the LBA deposits of the area, the presence of abundant white- or yellowish-slipped pottery is noteworthy, as this class is otherwise very rare in the LBA contexts of the site investigated so far. Both fine and common ware variants are attested, characterized by fine fabrics and carefully burnished white slips, as well as coarser and storage vessels with slips of varying quality, ranging from light to yellowish tones (Fig. 8).

Also noteworthy is the particularly high frequency of Red Lustrous Wheelmade Ware compared to other contexts at the site; this type was likely imported to Central Anatolia and is mostly associated with ritual activities (Orsi, D'Agostino forthcoming; Orsi, Kibaroğlu, D'Agostino forthcoming)

The chronology of the sequence remains imprecise, pending radiocarbon dating and detailed statistical analyses of the ceramic assemblage. Based on preliminary assessments,

and considering both the assemblage of floorings and the stratigraphic sequence from the deep sounding investigated in the western sector of the area, it is suggested that the main LBA occupation phase uncovered—associated with the use of the round structure and floorings 145+272—should be dated to the 15th-14th centuries BCE. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that the occupation in this area may have extended into the 13th century BCE.

In the eastern sector of the area, the stone- and sherd-paved surfaces (in particular stratigraphic units 145+272 and 249) yielded a very rich assemblage of LBA pottery. Most of the fragments reused in the paving are thick and large, and can be attributed to storage and cooking vessels (Fig. 9). Typical Hittite plates, characterized by a slightly curved body and a broad, banded rim, are particularly numerous. The thicker variants are especially common, frequently bearing rope impressions on the outer rim. In fact, the use of ropes emerges as a recurrent feature in the manufacture of large-sized vessels in this context (Fig. 10).

The assemblage from the latest occupation levels is largely mixed, including numerous residual sherds dating back to the Bronze Age. The most recent ceramic inventory, in addition to the large jar with applied snake decoration found set into the ground, comprises abundant storage pottery, fragments of coarse ware, and fine red-orange slipped pottery of the pseudo-sigillata type (Fig. 11).

In the western sounding, three main structural levels predating the construction of the round structure were brought to light.

The oldest of these levels, corresponding to the sequence of clay deposits beneath the small stone wall US 293 and investigated in a very restricted area, yielded a very limited ceramic assemblage, which may be attributed to a period between the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (Fig. 12).

The following level is associated with the deposits related to the small stone wall US 293 and beneath the large stone wall US 264+307. Based on a preliminary assessment, it appears to belong to a Hittite phase predating the spread of Red Lustrous Wheelmade Ware, and can therefore, on the basis of the available evidence, be tentatively placed between the 17th and 16th centuries BCE.

The third level brought to light in the western sounding comprises the deposits associated with the large stone wall US 264+307. The assemblage, which includes white- and red-slipped pottery, wheelmade common ware—especially thin- and thick-walled curved bowls—and Red Lustrous Wheelmade Ware, may be dated from the late 16th century BCE onwards.

Of particular interest is the presence, in the gray clayey layers attributable to the ancient slope of the Lower City (US 251), of a sherd with relief decoration. This adds to the collection of similar sherds from Area F, found during previous campaigns and attributable to typically ritual vessels of the Old Hittite tradition (D'Agostino, Orsi 2023: 133-134). The fragment discovered in 2024 depicts a human figure bringing a bowl to their mouth.

From the red earth fillings above them (US 252) comes another fragment of an arm-shaped vessel in Red Lustrous Wheelmade Ware.

Abundant residual sherds of handmade pottery, datable to the late 3rd millennium BCE or the transition to the 2nd millennium BCE, indicate the presence of a substantial earlier occupation phase, likely concentrated in this area.

Area I

Along the eastern slope of the höyük, excavation continued in Area I, first opened in 2023 as a long trench measuring 3×10 m (M17/18-D.3-2). The area is crossed almost entirely by a narrow, irregular wall (US 24), built of burnt bricks and stones (Fig. 13). Discovered in 2023, the wall was constructed with reused materials and it seems to have undergone various modifications over the course of its use. It was likely part of a terracing system associated with the remodelling of the citadel during the Iron Age, when earlier building materials were recycled and the remains of previous structures were cut away – most notably Building III of the Hittite period, whose southern wing was exposed in Area D on the southern slope of the mound.

On both sides of wall US 24, sequences of soils of varying composition and color were excavated. Most of these deposits are related to the construction of the wall itself and thus to the phases of terracing and its subsequent refurbishments over time. Along the southern section, for about 4 m, extends a greyish layer rich in charcoal fragments and white inclusions (US 45, +1131.55 asl), which overlies in sequence reddish soils (US 40, US 60), yellowish deposits (US 62), and another yellowish layer characterized by abundant gravel and charcoal fragments (US 63). In the center of the excavation area, starting from +1131.47 asl, alternating grey clayey layers (US 64, 66, 67, 71, 72, 75) and softer reddish to orange or red-brown soils (US 68, 69, 74) were documented, down to an elevation of +1130.56 asl. The ceramic material recovered within these deposits suggests that the former may be dated to the Iron Age, while the latter likely belong to the Late Bronze Age.

As the removal of layers proceeded south of wall US 24 (US 73, +1130.785 asl; US 74, US 76, US 78, US 80–82, base at +1130.072 asl) and to its north (US 10, +1131.562 asl, consisting of compact yellowish soil layers), fragmentary burnt bricks (US 79: +1130.512–1129.956 asl) were uncovered, together with a clayey deposit containing yellow and white inclusions and charcoal fragments (US 85), and the compacted earthen floor US 86. Adjacent to the wall, US 83 was exposed, a grey clayey soil (c. 1×0.40 m) with frequent limestone inclusions. This layer forms the base upon which a reconstruction of the wall, built with medium-sized stones, was set, itself overlying the earlier portion constructed of burnt bricks. These additions most likely represent rebuilding episodes carried out over time to reinforce the original structure.

In the northern part of the excavation area, a sequence of ashy grey soils (US 75, +1130.41 asl; US 32; US 51) was documented. These deposits cover a thick layer of fragmentary burnt bricks and friable reddish soil (US 88, +1129.91–1129.00; US 90) as well as US 51 (+1128.90 asl; extending c. 3 m W-E), a grey soil rich in charcoal fragments already identified downslope last year and likely to be considered the foundation surface of the wall.

A small test sounding (0.70 × 1.60 m, excavated to a depth of about one meter) was carried out in the western, upper portion of the slope to better understand the hard yellowish, gravel-rich layer exposed at the end of the 2023 season. Excavation revealed a sequence of clayey grey and compact gravel-rich deposits (US 62 at +1131.92, overlain by US 93) with lamellar limestone inclusions, as well as further gravel-rich deposits (US 100, +1130.69), at which point excavation was halted for this year. These layers appear sterile and most likely represent the natural deposit of the höyük.

In light of the evidence uncovered during this season, it can be confirmed that both the materials used in the construction of the wall and the soils forming the associated terracing derive from an earlier context. The structure appears to have been in use from the Middle Iron Age onwards, with several refurbishments attested by the sections built with medium-sized stones and by the sequence of overlying layers along the slope of the mound.

This original context of the construction materials of wall US 24 is also linked to an interesting discovery. Along the path leading to the excavation area, at the base of the höyük, a fragment of a cuneiform-inscribed tablet was found (I22, E.327). The text is currently under study by the project's Hittitologists, and a preliminary reading seems to reveal the name of a toponym in the area of Zippalanda.

The material from the deposits in Area I, largely mixed, can for the most part be attributed to the backfill deposits deriving from Building 3 in Area D.

The upper stratigraphic units, connected with the LBA burnt red layers, yielded very little pottery, an unusual feature especially when compared to the contexts excavated in 2014 and 2015 in the adjacent Area C. For this reason, these deposits may derive from the destruction of architectural structures belonging to Building 3. A slightly larger quantity of pottery comes from the underlying gray accumulations. The assemblage includes Early Bronze Age and Early Bronze–Middle Bronze transition wares; Late Bronze Age material; Middle Iron Age pottery, including several sherds of the Alisar 4 type; and later fragments, possibly contemporary with the construction of the glacis in Area D, between the end of the Middle Iron Age and the beginning of the Late Iron Age. Some fragments may also be attributed to the Early Iron Age.

Area J

A new 5×5 m square was opened to the north of Area A with the aim of investigating the layout and organization of the space immediately north of Building II, in order to clarify

its relation to the monumental structure and to assess the presence of associated features or activity areas

Beneath the surface soil (+1121.00 asl), a greyish-yellow layer with small gravel and tile fragments was exposed (US 3, top at +1120.68 asl), together with a wall oriented NE–SW, built of medium-sized stones (US 4; c. 1 m wide and 4 m long; top at +1120.66 asl) (Fig. 14). A small portion of a second wall, parallel to the first, was identified in the northwestern corner of the excavation area (US 10, top at +1120.68), while a layer of mudbrick debris covered the area between the two walls.

The ceramic assemblage from Area J has so far yielded mostly small-sized sherds, an indication of a long depositional process (Fig. 15). It includes a small component of residual pottery from the 2nd millennium BCE, particularly from the Late Bronze Age, but the larger component can be attributed to the late phase of the occupation of the Lower City, possibly contemporary with that brought to light on a larger scale in Area F.

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CAPTIONS

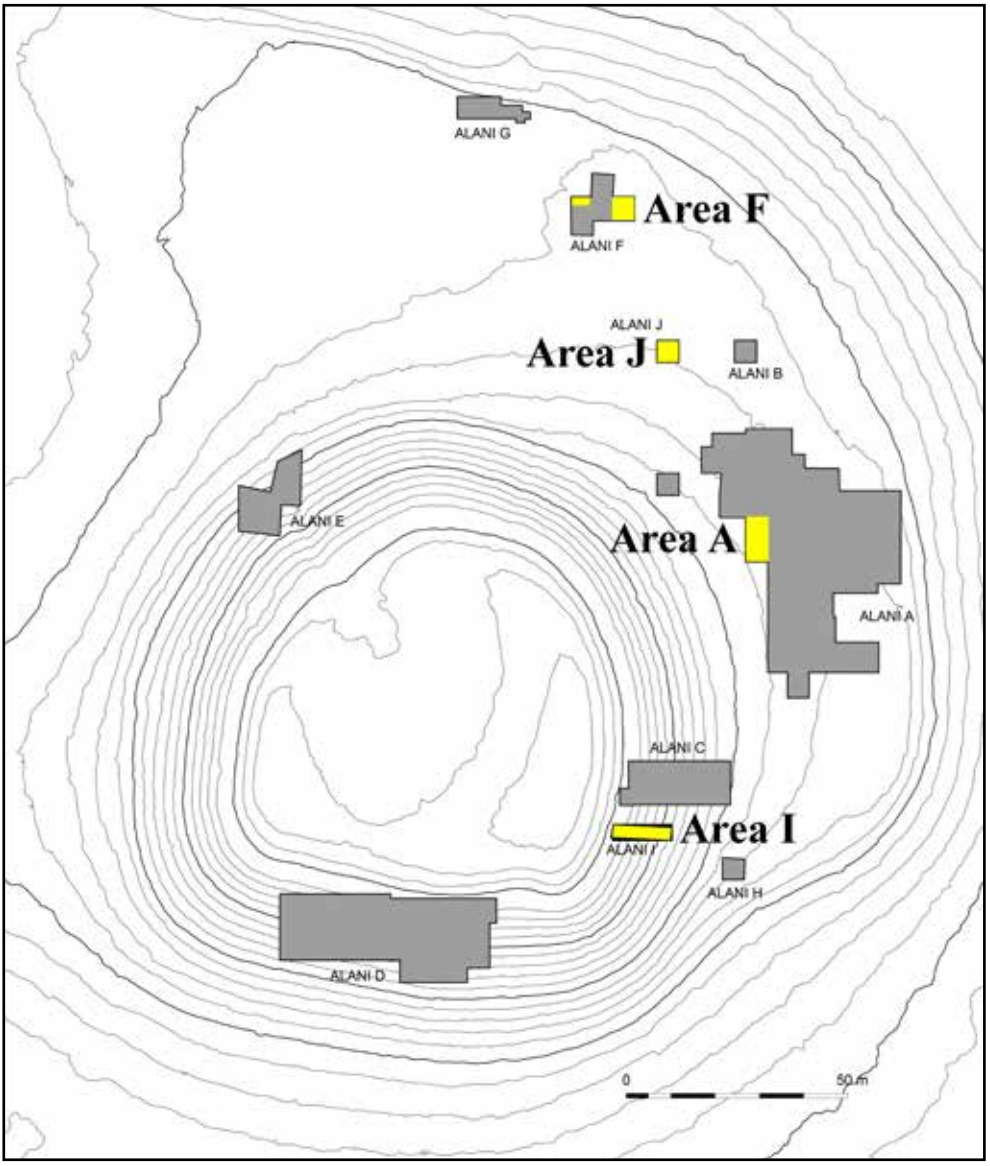


Fig. 1 – Partial plan of the site showing in yellow the areas investigated during the 2024 excavation campaign. Squares excavated in previous seasons are indicated in grey. North is at the top.



Fig. 2 – Area A, composite image: the two squares excavated in 2024 and a drone view of Building II with their location highlighted in yellow. North is at the top.



Fig. 3 – Area F: late-period walls excavated in 2024 on the left, and at a lower elevation on the right, the portion of Hittite paved floor uncovered in 2023. The flat stone near the western edge of the 2024 square, almost at the center of the photo, was used to seal the large storage container set into the ground. North is at the bottom.



Fig. 4 – Area F: the Hittite paved floors cut by several pits, the large storage jar, and the plastered vat, all of later date.



Fig. 5 – Area F: drone view showing, at the bottom left of the circular structure, the deep sounding.



Fig. 6 – Area F, sounding: at the bottom, walls US 264 and US 172; on the right, the circular structure; at the top, part of the paved floor exposed in 2023.



Fig. 7 – Area F: the bronze spearhead found on floor US 302.



Fig. 8 – Area F: large white-yellowish slipped jar employed in floors US 145+272.



Fig. 9 – Area F: pottery employed in floor US 249 (Locus 13).



Fig. 10 – Area F: fragments of storage vessels with rope impressions employed in floors US 145+272.



Fig. 11 – Area F: selection of potsherds from the latest occupation levels.



Fig. 12 – Area F: selection of potsherds from the oldest occupation phase brought to light in the western sounding (US 306 on the left, and 305 on the right).



Fig. 13 – Area I: different views with the thin wall US 24 and the associated fill deposits connected with the Iron Age terracing system.



Fig. 14 – Area J: wall US 4 at the center and, at the bottom right, wall US 10. North is at the bottom.



Fig. 15 J – Area J: selection of potsherds from US 14.