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Volume 2

Field and Lab Reports



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Ingolf Thuesen, Scott Haddow,  
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## Chapter 5

# Uşaklı Höyük: New Results from a Site in the Heart of the Anatolian Plateau

*Anacleto D'Agostino<sup>1</sup>, Valentina Orsi<sup>2</sup> and Yağmur Heffron<sup>3</sup>*

### Abstract

Uşaklı Höyük is the largest archaeological mound visible across the countryside between the cities of Yozgat and Sorgun in northcentral Anatolia, at the center of the territory defined in Hittite texts as the 'Upper Land'. The excavations, which began in 2013, brought to light a long sequence of occupation extending from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE to the Byzantine period. In recent years, the main focus of the Uşaklı Höyük Archaeological Project has been to reconstruct the history of the settlement during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE and understand the form and extent of the site. Excavations so far document the presence of monumental architecture dated to the Hittite period in the lower town, as well as a stone glacis and fortifications of probable Iron Age date surrounding the high mound.

### Introduction

Located in the province of Yozgat, Uşaklı Höyük is a multi-period site composed of a high mound and a lower terrace covering an area of nearly 10 hectares, first identified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a possible Hittite settlement (Fig. 1). This hypothesis was confirmed by the intensive survey we carried out (D'Agostino and Orsi 2015) and then by the results of excavations (D'Agostino *et al.* 2021; D'Agostino 2022).

Since 2008 an international team of researchers has been exploring different parts of the site. This work has revealed that Uşaklı was occupied from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE to the Common Era, undergoing multiple construction and destruction events at different scales. Ongoing work at the site continues to add to our understanding about the sequences of occupation and settlement from its initial phase of urbanisation to its transformations during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages.

This paper will present the main outcomes from recent excavation seasons (2021 and 2022), when field activities comprised excavation both on the lower terrace as well as the slope of the high mound (Fig. 2), geophysics prospection and finds analyses. The main focus of the following discussion will be on architectural features, stratigraphic sequence, and a brief overview of the pottery repertoire.

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## Geophysical Survey

A geoelectric survey using Direct Current Resistivity with 28 electrodes spaced at 1.5m was conducted on two portions of the site to assess the potential for architectural remains in preparation for opening new trenches during the 2021-2022 field seasons. The results revealed interesting anomalies, suggesting the presence of a possible structure that deserved to be investigated in the lower terrace, and a substantial wall at the base of the main mound.

Additionally, magnetic surveying using a GEM-19G magnetic gradiometer was carried out in a field south of Uşaklı. This area had previously revealed cist graves during the installation of an irrigation pipe from the new dam near the village of Taşlık (Taşlık Köyü). Two graves had been exposed by an excavator machine during the course of this work. Upon our arrival, it became apparent that the graves had been cut into virgin soil and covered with one or two large stone slabs, but we could not gather any more information regarding the burials and their contents. The anomalies detected by the magnetic gradiometer suggest the presence of other graves which may well belong to a cemetery associated with the settlement on the höyük, especially considering the absence of other sites or villages in the vicinity. This being said, the chronological period of use for the cemetery remains undetermined due to the lack of evidence.

## Excavations

### *Area A*

In the lower terrace, excavations carried out between 2013 and 2022 in Area A exposed architectural remains of Building II, an imposing structure with a complex layout with different units, dating to the Hittite period (Mazzoni *et al.* 2019: 58-61, 70-71; D'Agostino *et al.* 2021: 61-63). We have reached about 1000m<sup>2</sup> of horizontal exposure in this area. Building II has an irregular perimeter, characterised by clusters of non-symmetrical rooms projecting from the main body, and a courtyard on the eastern edge. Excavations in the northern and north-eastern squares brought to light a room probably marking the northern limit of the building, characterised here by two symmetrical projections (Fig. 2).

The irregular perimeter of Building II, and the discovery of miniature vessels, often associated with ritual contexts, were the main reasons for identifying it as a possible temple, already at the very beginning of our work at Uşaklı (D'Agostino, Orsi, Torri 2020: 136-138).

The shape and size of the building, as far as can be reconstructed at the moment, certainly suggest comparison with both older Hittite temples (Müller-Karpe 2003: 389, fig. 7) and the monumental building found at Maşat Höyük (Özgüç 1982: 73-79, plans 1-4). As for positioning, Building II's location near the south-eastern edge of the lower town is reminiscent of the location of Temple 1 at Kuşaklı/Sarissa (Müller-Karpe 1995: fig. 2 and 9-21). It is, however, difficult to determine the function of Building II with certainty, based on its ground plan alone. It is also the case that some of the characteristics of the layout of Building II can be shared by structures on tops of citadels or in other parts of Hittite settlements, variously identified as temples or palaces.

The only preserved part of the structure consisted of the groundwork, reached immediately below topsoil. The foundation walls were made up of large granite boulders laid over a substructure of mid-sized stones. No trace of the wall superstructures has been recovered; floors have been identified only in small patches of beaten earth in two rooms and in the

form of the previously reported (D'Agostino 2019) polychrome surface composed of pebbles and crushed stones, representing the earliest attested 'mosaic' floor, dating to the Hittite period (Fig. 6). The pebbled surface floor probably marks a court. Not far from the mosaic floor are what may be the remains of a supporting structure for pillars, detected in relation to a wall separating the court from an adjacent room (Fig. 4). The remains in question are two clusters of flat stones (US341), one below a square base (Fig. 5). The pillars would have been embedded in the compacted soil, inside which the subterranean wall foundations were also set.

The pottery repertoire from the deposits above the building is mixed, including not only the expected 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium types, but also those of later periods due to proximity to the mound surface, which had remained in use as a cultivated plough zone until the beginning of our project (Mazzoni, D'Agostino, Orsi 2019: 97-111; Orsi 2018; Orsi 2020: 276-278; D'Agostino, Mazzoni, Orsi 2021: 68-70). Agricultural activity has also partially obliterated the Roman and Medieval layers, scattering potsherds and stones from walls all around the late period houses. Fortunately, this has not affected, except in a very small part, the large granite boulders of Building II and its associated contextual archaeological units. While archaeological material here originates from between foundation walls and not floors – the latter being only minimally preserved as mentioned above – this does not rule out the possibility that some of this material may have been contemporaneous with the use-life of Building II.

### *Area E*

The second area excavated in 2021 is located on the west-north-western slope of the mound, initially measuring 10 x 10m and later enlarged in 2022 and named Area E. The presence of a large anomaly that crosses this part of the slope, visible in the results of the geo-electrical survey, prompted us to open up this new excavation area here to investigate. Here excavations revealed the remains of a large structure made of medium-sized rough stones, covered by several layers of compacted soils. As far as we can tell, this represents collapsed debris from a large wall (or other features uphill) which was reused at some point as a sloping revetment of the höyük, a kind of *glacis*. Towards the west, in the lower part of the excavation area, a portion of a revetment wall seems to be *in situ* (US 9) and shows some regular rows of stones leading down to the base of the slope (Fig. 7). For the moment, the evidence is not sufficient to establish a direct stratigraphic relationship between this alignment of inclined stones (*glacis*) with the wall or other structures further uphill at the summit of the mound, which have not yet been reached through excavations and only partially identified by geophysics. The current hypothesis is that the stones of an original wall enclosing the höyük were reused over the centuries for the arrangement of the höyük slope. It can be speculated that Area E contained the remains of several structures (represented by a large wall, collapse, material from the top of the höyük, *glacis*), the most recent of which (the *glacis*?) may have been constructed over the stone collapse of earlier structures, which in this way was reused as building material. The picture from the excavations in Area E for the moment is that we have a large accumulation of stones with some probable alignments, to be investigated in future seasons.

In Area D on the southern slope, we certainly have evidence of reuse of debris from an earlier wall (D'Agostino *et al.* 2021: 61) – probably a wall surrounding the höyük – and a

new arrangement of earlier structures to reinforce the slopes and strengthen the citadel of the Iron Age and later periods, as noted also in Area C, on the eastern slope (Mazzoni *et al.* 2019: 62-62, 71-72). At the end of the 2021 season, some things became clearer. For instance, a small rectangular test trench allowed us to identify the outer façade of the wall. The wall in question is a stone structure with a stepped profile, slightly sloping inward. By overlaying the plan of this wall on the geoelectric plot (Fig. 8), we can see that the large anomaly crossing the entire surveyed area matches with our wall. An unclear issue is the meaning of the curvature of this anomaly: it is not straight, nor does it form an inward-facing arc, as one would expect from wall encompassing the citadel for example, but it extends in an irregular fashion, curving outward and a somewhat out of keep with the current topography of base of the höyük. The reason for this remains undetermined for now.

We are not able to say much about the dating of the sequence exposed in Area E. The evidence available to us is represented by a limited repertoire of pottery sherds from the superficial layer of compact soil (US 2) and the underlying layer (US 8). No significant diagnostic sherds have been found within the collapse debris or in the soil layer below the stone collapse (in the small test trench where the façade of the wall was exposed), so we can only provide a general Late Iron Age date and also a later, perhaps Hellenistic date for the layers covering our collapse (D'Agostino and Orsi 2023: 131; D'Agostino *et al.* 2024: 140-141). It means that the *glacis* could be dated to these periods while the stepped wall must be older. As far as possible comparisons are concerned, it must be said that retaining walls or *glacis* made of irregular stones are documented in the area (Summers *et al.* 1995: 46-53) such as at Tilkigediği Tepe, Keykavus Tepe and the Göz Baba tumulus dated between the late Iron Age and the Achaemenid period. A monumental version is found at Kerkenes in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. As already reported elsewhere (Mazzoni *et al.* 2019: 72) stone *glacis* covering the slope of the mound, with the function of protecting against erosion and strengthening the summit, are documented in the area where Uşaklı is located (D'Agostino and Orsi 2015: 179, n.300). A similar structure dating between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries has been exposed also at Boğazköy, in Büyükkale, apparently imitating Late Bronze Age stone-paved *glacis* prototypes (Bittel 1970: 147-148 and plate 27b). The step façade of the wall, on the other hand, finds generic comparison in the stepped *glacis* of the Middle Phrygian Gordion dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Rose 2017: 162-166), although the construction technique is different (at Uşaklı rough stones of medium size, at Gordion square blocks grouped by colour, light and dark).

### *Area F*

To the north of the höyük is a second area in which we have concentrated our work in the last two seasons with the aim of verifying the results of geoelectric survey and identifying possible structures representing the main phase of occupation for this part of the site, as documented by excavations in Area A and also suggested by the distribution of surface potsherds. Here the Late Bronze Age exhibits the most significant development in settlement. Immediately below topsoil is a level, characterised by multiple layers, dating to what we could define generically as Roman/Late Roman from the presence of roof tiles and a ceramic repertoire including a certain amount of Hellenistic painted sherds and some so-called 'Galatian ware' specimens. It is unclear if these are residual from an earlier level or in context. Removal of the remains of later structures revealed a very distinctive feature: a

curved wall (US 25) made up of small stones and large cobbles, delimiting a circular area where two superimposed but not well-preserved earthen floors have been found; in the eastern portion, outside the space delimited by the wall, remains of a surface made up of potsherd and small stones embedded in a layer of beaten earth (Fig. 9). The earliest floor features some stake-holes. The surface on which the circular structure was built is not flat but inclined westward, and the wall rests on underlying soil deposits. The north-western part reaches a greater depth than the southern part, suggesting an irregular, sloping surface. It would seem that once the lower courses of stones of the curved wall were put in place, the circular inner space bounded by the wall was filled until pre-existing irregularities were levelled out and a sufficiently flat surface achieved. At this point, the circular structure came into use. Whatever function it served, the interior space of the structure was gradually filled, and the top of the wall was used as a walking surface, perhaps to perform actions that concerned the centre of the structure. To the north of the structure is a cobble-paved outdoor space connected with it (Fig. 10).

The round structure and its associated paved surface represent a unique feature, with no known parallels at other contemporary sites, or from other periods in Anatolia generally. It is difficult, at present, to interpret its precise meaning and function. The peculiarity is that its inner space was filled with successive accumulations of earth containing a large quantity of animal bones and fragments of pottery, while on the outside, a gradual reconstruction of paving stones and sections of beaten earth floor in relation to the curved wall indicate a long period of use. The top of the wall is covered with cobblestones like other floors of the same period found in other contexts of Hittite date at the site (e.g. in the deep sounding of Area A and some floors of Building III in Area D) and cannot be interpreted as the remains of a higher wall that supported the roof. There is no evidence of waste product accumulation or traces of water drainage installations associated with the beaten earth floor inside the circular structure or the paved outdoor space outside, which could otherwise have suggested a craft-related function. Additionally, the wide opening to the south-east precludes the presence of a door, as the two ends of the curved wall are rounded and unsuitable for the installation of doorjambes. The impression is that this is simply a space bounded by a low wide wall, the surface of which was probably used for walking.

Ruling out the possibility that it might be a dwelling or a silo due to the peculiarities of construction and especially the absence of real compacted floors in the interior space, all that remains is to speculate that it may have served as a ritual area. Our hypothesis is that it may have been a *bothros* designed to receive offerings, or at least a special area delimited by the curved wall. It is conspicuous that the circular structure is not far from the building in Area A, the public function of which (perhaps a temple or a palace) is emphasized by its shape and the use of large granite blocks, and its distinctiveness by the presence of a stone mosaic floor. By extending the excavation area, continuing to examine the context in which the circular structure is located, and studying the animal bones found inside, we will have more information to build a clearer picture and formulate a more accurate interpretation of this discovery.

The pottery repertoire found in relation to the round structure and the open court is typical of the local Late Bronze Age and connected with the Hittite tradition (D'Agostino and Orsi 2023: 132-134). Some representative potsherds are highly significant for providing a preliminary framework of supporting information for dating the sequence. A few fragments of

'Eggshell Ware', Red Lustrous Wheelmade Ware specimens, two fragments with relief decoration in red and yellow colours, a yellow slip sherd with an incised imitation of a stamped *signe royal* were found in the deposits outside the opening of the round structure, together with an equally peculiar footed tankard found north of the structure and a pilgrim flask in relation to the paved outer court. Not only do these pieces tell us that we are securely in the Hittite period, but also that their context probably served a particular function. Based on the ceramic materials, the Hittite phase uncovered so far is likely to date from the 15th century BCE onwards. A more thorough and complete analysis of the repertoire will tell us how the sequence of soil accumulations was formed and whether the apparently older materials are actually residual from earlier phases of occupation.

### *Area G*

At the edge of the lower terrace, the new Area G was opened in 2022 in a 10 x 5m trench where graves uncovered in the north-east indicate the later use of this area. No grave goods have been recovered to help dating. Two graves yielded *in situ* individuals (US17 and US18) (Fig. 11) and a third individual was found inside a cist pit (US 21) constructed as a secondary burial while another secondary burial (US18b) was scattered in other graves.

Also exposed in Area G is a Late Roman level, damaged by later pits and agricultural activities, characterised by the presence of a structure associated with wine production (Fig. 12). Built on the current slope of the lower terrace, which probably corresponds to the limit of the site at the time, a sub-rectangular installation (1.65 x 1m), which was presumably a kind of basin, is delimited by three walls whose inner surfaces were plastered with hard and rough white lime plaster that also covers the floor (D'Agostino *et al.* 2024). The plaster covering the floor and walls was intended for waterproofing. The floor sloped slightly downwards from the edges to a central small hollow (a drain hole?), also plastered. This was probably a collection tank belonging to a wine press, where the liquid would have been collected. The upper part of the installation, where a treading floor for pressing the grapes would have been, is lost due to its proximity to the topsoil.

An earlier phase is represented by two larger stone walls resting on clayey soil. In order to determine whether the latter was naturally occurring or transported from elsewhere and deposited to consolidate the foundations, it was decided to open a deep sounding in the north-eastern corner of the excavation area. This operation was also intended to observe the stratigraphic sequence and decide accordingly whether and how to proceed with the excavation further. A 1.5 x 1.5m sounding documented the accumulation of meters of debris, with alternating burnt reddish, blackish, and greyish soils, that must be part of the rampart of the Hittite period. It cannot be ruled out that the two partially preserved walls mentioned above can also be dated to this phase and related to the rampart construction.

At the base of the deep sounding (about 5m below the top), potsherds, a hearth, and remains of wall of probable Middle Bronze Age date have been found.

## Research on Ancient Foodways

The archaeology of food is one of the research trajectories that we have been prioritising now for several years.<sup>4</sup> Food is an essential component of daily life, and aspects of food, such as the sourcing, processing and consumption, shape modern societies just as much as those from the past; thus, marking the rhythms and dynamics of daily life and ritual. Since it is so deeply interwoven with multiple facets of human living, the study of food customs, food-related behaviours, diet, and culinary practices can provide an exceptional volume of knowledge and understanding of both ancient and modern societies (Orsi *et al.* 2023). Work conducted at the excavation house included the study of artifacts and ecofacts by specialists. In addition, a team of ceramic specialists worked on the materials excavated from the last two seasons, which included the analysis and registration of all objects and sherds in accordance with the codes and procedures of our excavation. Particular attention was given to evidence of ancient foodways. Here, we highlight the work we are conducting on a particular category of Late Bronze Age vessels related to food production—a typical Hittite category of plates used for cooking.

During the 2021 season, we concentrated on the analysis of technological markers related to these plates. For the 2022 season, we focused on experimentation, according to a program aimed at reconstructing their assembly and usage. Starting with the archaeometric analysis of a sample of plates, and on the basis of mineralogical and petrographic composition of said samples, we collected the clays and inclusions and reproduced the clay fabrics compatible with archaeological samples. Subsequently, we tested different techniques to shape the plates, in order to reconstruct the potential operational chain of production. Eventually, we fired the replica plates inside a rudimentary kiln, consistent with a process comparable to traditional pottery firing. We obtained an open-fire, lit with two bags of firewood collected by our site guard, which reached a temperature between 600–800 °C. Once the replica plates had completed the firing process, we tested their use in line with data collected from the residue analyses. The first results of our food archaeology research program are forthcoming (Orsi and Casucci, in preparation).

## Some Concluding Remarks

The work carried out so far has made it possible to document a sequence of buildings and artefacts that tell the story of the settlement during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE contributing to our knowledge of this region of the Central Anatolian plateau, for which Uşaklı is now a reference site.

Extensive remains of monumental buildings uncovered during excavations (Mazzoni *et al.* 2019) identify the Late Bronze Age occupation phase and, together with several fragments of clay tablets with cuneiform inscriptions (Archi *et al.* 2015), a cretula (Poetto 2015), and an extensive distribution of pottery on the surface of the site (D'Agostino and Orsi 2015), date the main urban development phase of the site to the Hittite period (D'Agostino *et al.* 2021). Buildings II and III identify two poles of reference within the built space of the Hittite period. They are two buildings of great importance, occupying a dominant position in the

4 The activities currently underway on this topic include an experimental archaeology research programme (in collaboration with N. Volante, Siena University), doctoral research (G. Casucci, Pavia University), a program of archaeometric and residue analyses (in collaboration with the Bioscience Research Centre, Talamone; the University of Tübingen, and the Selçuk University, Konya (for which see Orsi *et al.* 2023: 77).

urban context, located at key points of the settlement: the citadel and the lower town area along the stream, in an elevated position with respect to the rest of the settlement. Both are elevated and display characteristics common to the official architecture of the Hittite period, such as the use of large granite blocks, the irregular perimeter and the presence of painted plasterwork.

It is difficult to define the exact function of the buildings, which in our case are only partially exposed. The characteristics of the buildings and their layout are in keeping with either a temple or a palace typology; a more precise determination is not possible at the moment, especially in the case of Building III. Characteristic elements such as pillars, the gate or the cella are missing because they have not yet been identified in the excavated area. In addition, we have not recovered any significant finds in the primary site. We do not know if this is a coincidence, but the location of Building II is not dissimilar to that of Temple 1 at Kuşaklı/Sarissa in relation to the north-east gate, just as Building III recalls the position occupied by Building C at the top of the mound on the same site (Müller-Karpe 2017: abb 26).

In addition to the public architecture represented by the remains of the two large buildings in Areas A and D, other data help define a broad picture of the settlement in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. The abundant pottery, faunal and palaeobotanical remains allow us to shed light on daily life, practices related to the preparation and consumption of food and drink, the type of society that used them, and provide elements for reconstructing the social and environmental changes that affected the region over time.

In addition to Building II (fig. 5-6) in area A and Building III in area D, it is worth mentioning the peculiar circular structure uncovered during the 2021 campaign in area F, which has no equivalent in the region and could be interpreted as a ritual-like installation.

Recent excavations have also shed new light on the new shape of the settlement during the Iron Age. There are no traces of dwellings in the lower town, but only in the citadel, which is surrounded by a wall that takes the form of a *glacis* in the Late Iron Age (Mazzoni *et al.* 2019: 62-63, 71-73). This arrangement of the citadel must be dated to the Middle Iron Age. The wall, according to the geomagnetic anomaly detected, surrounds the entire citadel, and the two sections that have come to light in Area D, on the southern slope of the höyük, and more recently in Area E, although we cannot yet establish the stratigraphic relationship between them, are evidence of this project aimed at the reorganisation of the citadel and its fortification.

The change in the ceramic repertoire in relation to the contexts described above adds a final consideration. The typical Hittite pottery tradition is replaced, in the layers immediately above the burnt remains of Building III, on the citadel, by a handmade production that refers to local experiences and, maybe, to the northern territories (Orsi 2020). This tradition is then replaced by a largely painted pottery repertoire resuming the use of wheel-throwing techniques, in which the appearance of geometric and figurative patterns defines the establishment of a new tradition that continues until the most recent, Hellenistic-Roman levels. This change reveals new regional contacts and new functions assumed by vessels in Iron Age societies (D'Agostino *et al.* 2021: 63-68; Doglio and Orsi 2023).

Recent research has confirmed the relevance of Uşaklı for the reconstruction of the settlement of the Hittite period and the dynamics surrounding the Iron Age in this part of the Central Anatolian plateau. The presence of significant architectural remains dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BCE, together with a well-preserved archaeological stratification on

the höyük, offers reference points for defining a chrono-typological sequence of artefacts and ecofacts for the region.

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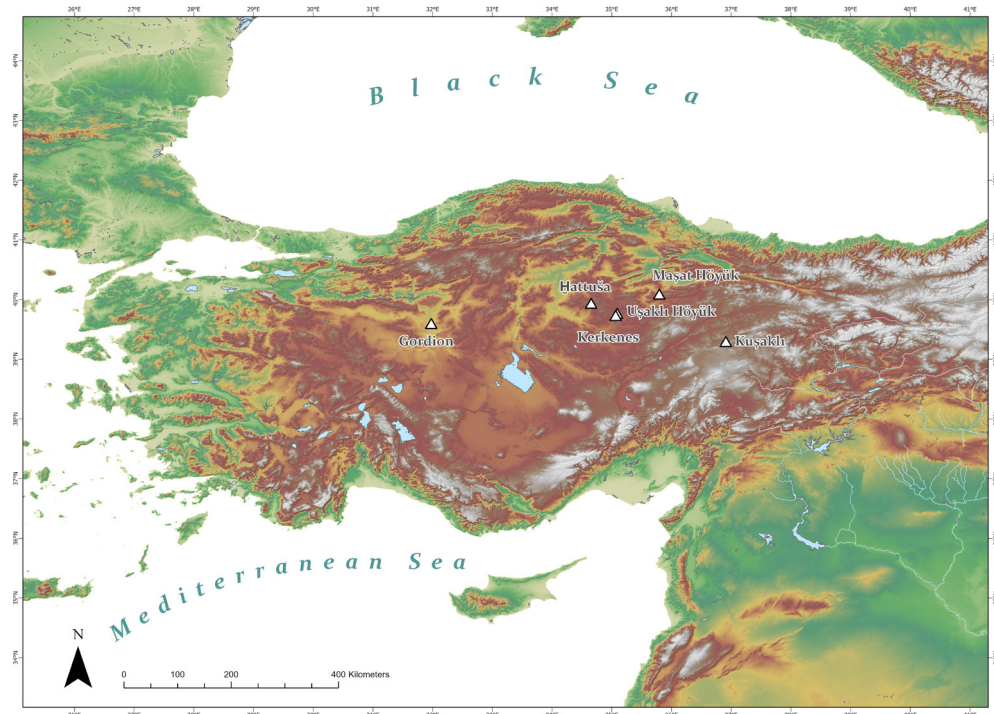
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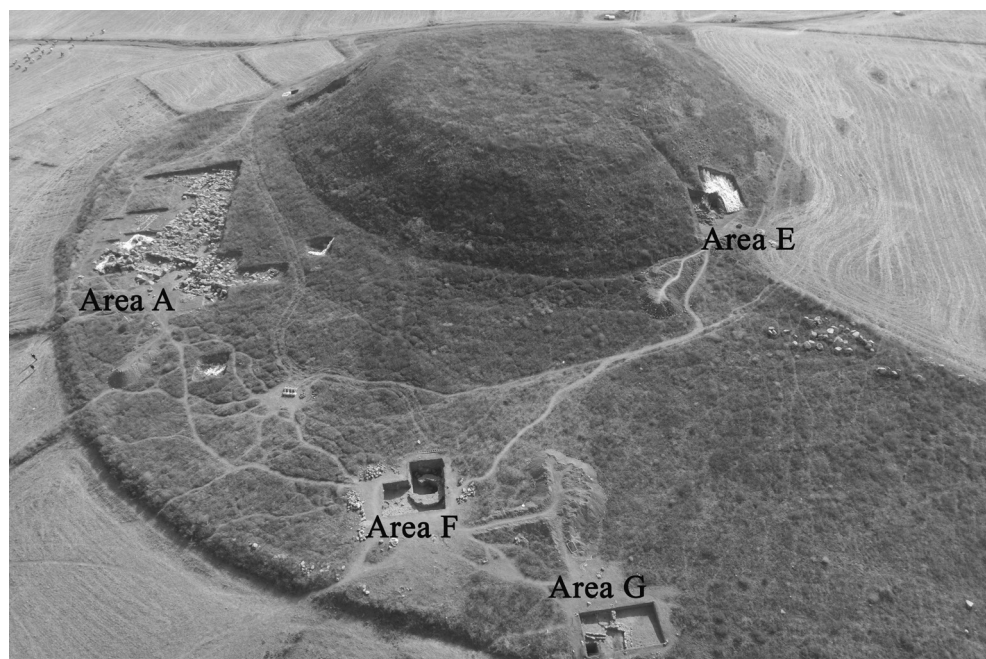
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**Figure 1** Map showing the location of the main sites mentioned in the text (by M. Doglio).



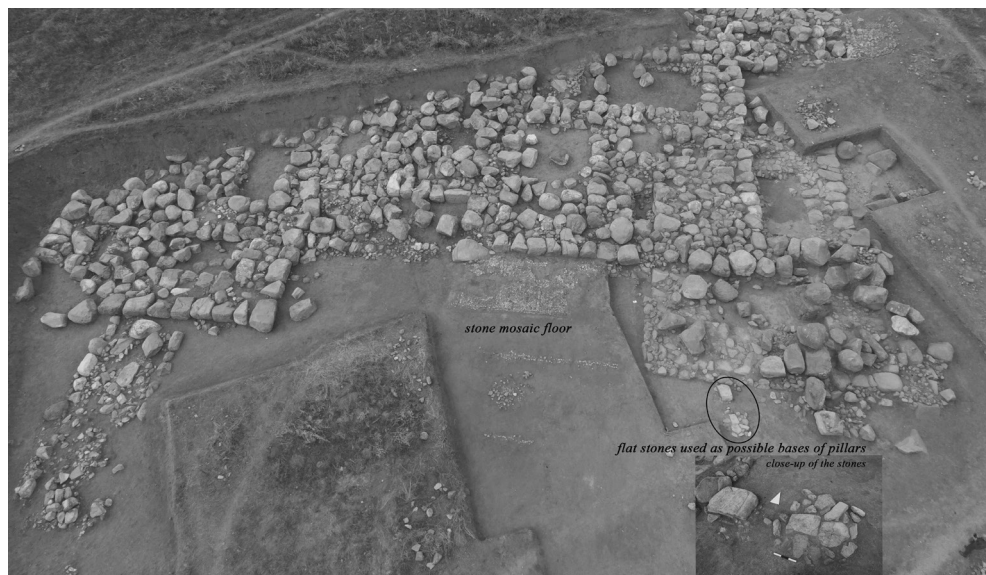
**Figure 2.** General view of the site from north, and the excavations area. Drone photo (2022).

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**Figure 3.** Area A, from the east. Squares dug in 2021-2022 can be seen on the right. At the bottom, close-up of the flat stones likely serving as bases for pillars. Drone photo (2021).



**Figure 4.** Orthoimage of Area A, Building II: draft with the results of the 2021 and 2023 excavation added to the general plan. In the upper right part of the picture, narrow walls adjoining the northern wall of the Building II and around collapsed boulders, as well as the floor, are from the late (probably Hellenistic/Late Roman) period (2022).

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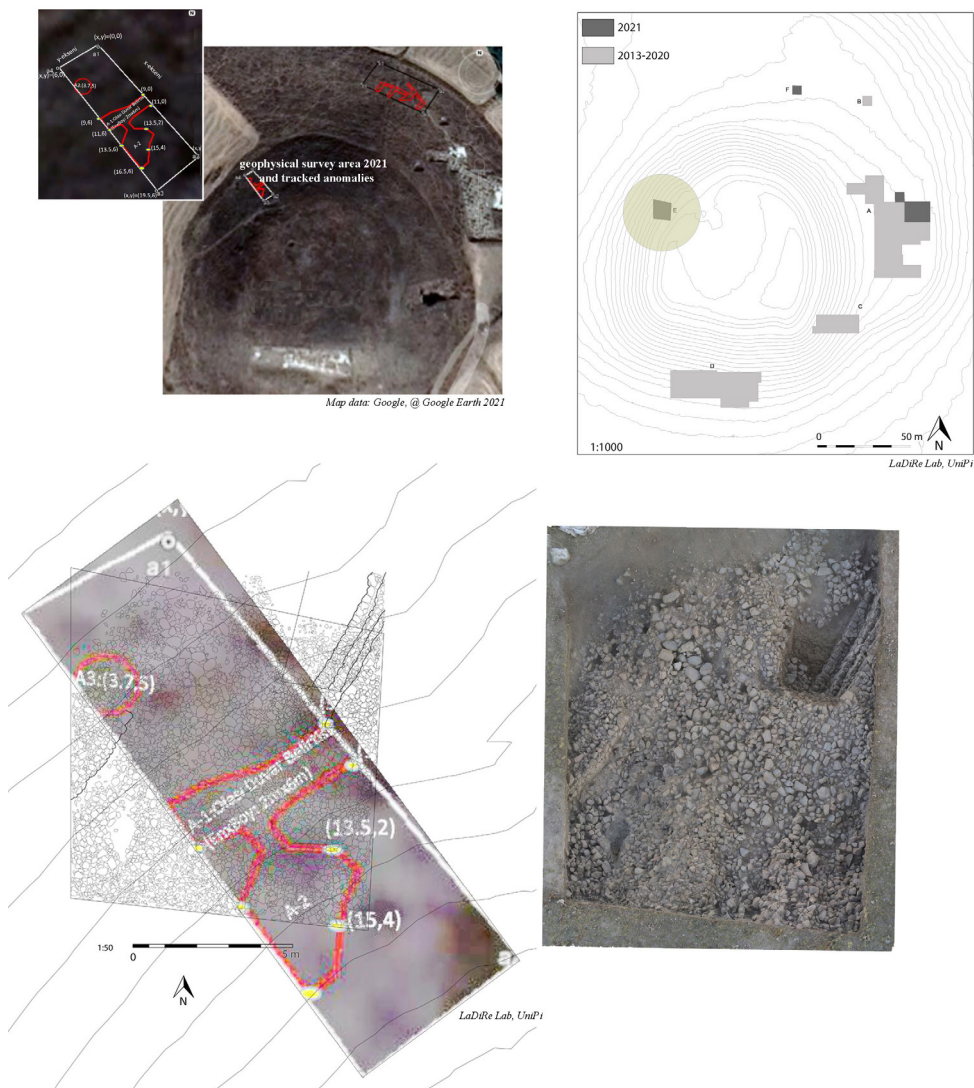
**Figure 5.** Detail of stones (US341) used as possible bases for pillars.



**Figure 6.** The mosaic floor made of coloured stones.



**Figure 7.** Area E, view on the lower slope of the mound from the north, collapsed debris (US 11) covering the entire trench; part of the stepped wall (US14) freed from the debris on the left; and, on the right, at the western limit, a small portion of a possible *glacis* (US9). Drone photo (2021).



**Figure 8.** Area E. The results of the geophysical survey and its juxtaposition with the excavated portion of the stepped wall 14.



**Figure 9.** Curved wall US 25 found in Area F and patches of beaten earthen floor. View from the south-east (2021).

**Figure 10.** Area F, the open paved courtyard in relation to the circular structure. View from south-east (2022).



**Figure 11.** Area G. In the centre lies the cist grave US 17 containing a complete skeleton and at its base, the small cist where the bones of US 21 are gathered. View from the east (2022).



**Figure 12.** Area G, view from the north-east. In the lower corner is positioned the deep trench and along the southern long side of the area is the installation for wine production. The larger walls in the centre of the photo are older than the wine-making installation. Drone photo (2022).

