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New researches in the Hittite heartland: the Italian archaeological survey at Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük (Yozgat - Central Anatolian Plateau)

S. Mazzoni, A. D'Agostino & V. Orsi

Introduction

In 2008 the University of Florence began a new archaeological survey on the site of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük and its surrounding area, a wide plain north-west of the Kerkenes Dağ watered by the Egri Öz Su (Figure 1). The site (Figure 2), clearly visible from the route connecting Yozgat and Sivas, had already been visited by Forrer in 1926 (Forrer 1927: 33), by von der Osten (1929: 37-8, figs. 31 & 32) in the following year, and later by Meriggi (1971: 62, pl. X.1 & X.2), and recorded under different names: Kusachakly (Forrer), Kuşaklı (von der Osten) and Uçaklı (Meriggi). On the old maps of the land register of Sorgun the site is marked as Uşaklıhöyük.

The first archaeological survey of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı was carried out by G.D. and M.E.F. Summers in 1993-4 within the framework of the Kerkenes Project (Summers *et al.* 1995: 53-5). Gurney (1995: 69-71) suggested that this settlement could be the ancient city of Zippalanda.

Against this background, the new survey is primarily directed towards intensively exploring the site and its catchment area and obtaining clear information on its historical development. At the same time, it aims to gather evidence on the settlement pattern of the plain over a long duration and examine its environment and economic background. Consequently, distinct and coordinated archaeological, topographic, geophysical and geological surveying operations have been organised in the first two years of the research.

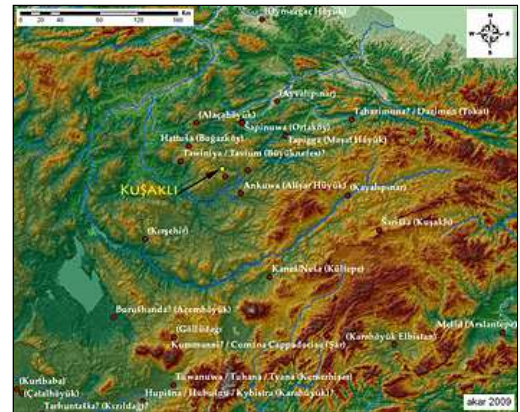


Figure 1. Map of the Central Anatolian Plateau showing the location of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük and other sites (by M. Akar).
[Click to enlarge.](#)



Figure 2. View of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük, from the north (Kerkenes Dağ in the background, on the left).
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First results of geophysical survey

The site consists of a high mound and a large extended terrace with a low, slightly sloping base (Figures 3 & 4). The extent of the site is about 10ha, while the central mound covers an area of 2ha (elevation: 1116-36m asl). The first two campaigns of geophysical prospection concerned the lower plateau at Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük. The geomagnetic and geoelectric surveys (Figure 5) provided evidence for large buildings on the terrace and its adjacent edges (probably also a casemate wall); their plans and regular walls. The size of these buildings and their division into different units of rooms can best be compared with ceremonial and institutional buildings of the Late Hittite period.

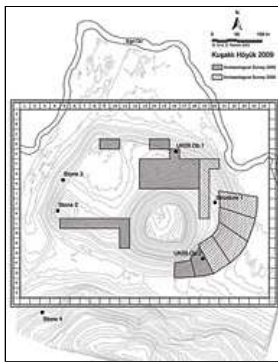


Figure 3. Topographic map of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük (by E. Mariotti) with archaeological survey units and the location of worked stone blocks and objects found on the surface (by B. Chiti).
Click to enlarge.

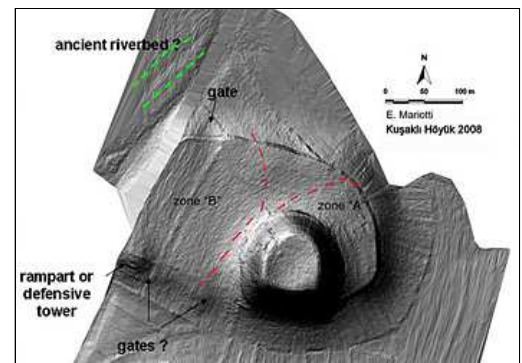


Figure 4. 3-Dimensional model of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük (by E. Mariotti).
Click to enlarge.



Figure 5. Results of the geophysical survey: a) geomagnetic map; b) electrical resistance map (by G. Carpentiero).
Click to enlarge.

Surface collecting

The first aim of an intensive sampling strategy of all the artefacts relating to the main topographical or surveyed areas was to achieve precise spreadsheets of the different categories of finds. Our field method involved sampling survey units established on the basis of morphological characteristics and following, on the flat areas, the general topographical grid. In each of surveyed units all the artefacts were marked, mapped and picked up. In the course of the two campaigns carried out in 2008 and 2009, a total number of 17 880 potsherds has been collected; 3335 are diagnostic and valuable in chronological terms.

Pottery assemblage

Traces of pre-Hittite occupation at the site are constituted by a few hand-made and 'Cappadocian' painted sherds, dating to the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age. They have been found mainly on the terrace with a noteworthy concentration at the foot of the high mound.

Sherds dating to the second millennium BC are abundant. Carinated bowls, usually Red Slipped, often with vertical V-shaped handles; spouted jars, beak spouts with tip curved downwards, with a good red polished glossy surface; vertical jar handles and fragments of body with stamp impressions on them, are all generally good markers of the *karum* and Old-Hittite periods. Curved and shallow bowls, generally buff to brown in colour, mostly distributed on the terrace, constitute our Drab repertoire: comparison with published assemblages establishes a close similarity with wares and shapes of the Hittite repertoire. Near the base of the high mound, and on different points of the terrace, painted sherds with black colour dating to the Middle/Late Iron Age have been found.

According to the distribution of diagnostic sherds, the second millennium occupation appears to be concentrated mostly on the low slopes of the terrace. The correspondence of second millennium sherds and some buried structures identified by the geomagnetic survey can hardly be considered fortuitous. In particular, the density of Drab ware diagnostic sherds over a limited area of the northern and eastern slopes, may suggest that some architecture appearing in the geophysical prospection might belong to the Late Bronze Age period. Red Slipped wares were found evenly across the entire mound with a major density on the south-eastern slopes of the terrace, where a fair number of diagnostic sherds, probably dating to the *karum* period, are also mainly distributed.

Other artefacts

A clay bulla (UK09.Ob.1) with two sealed impressions was found on the northern outer slope of the terrace. The readable impression was made by a circular stamp: the field is framed by an arc of a guilloche and an arc of spirals; in the middle there is a motif, partially eroded, probably a double-headed eagle with spiralled body and open wings, but the quite different rendering of the motif on the top right could indicate a different animal's head (lion?). The seals of this group are attributed to the Old Hittite period, around the seventeenth-sixteenth century BC.



Figure 6. Obverse, reverse and edge of the tablet UK09.Ob.2.
[Click to enlarge.](#)

On the surface of the southern area on the slope of the plateau a fragment of a Hittite cuneiform tablet (UK09.Ob.2, Figure 6), extremely burned and vitrified, presenting writing on both sides, was found. The fragment has been preliminarily dated between the fourteenth and the thirteenth centuries BC.

Concluding remarks

The survey of Uşaklı/Kuşaklı Höyük and its adjacent area gives evidence of a continuous occupation of this sector of the plain from the second millennium BC to the medieval period, with a major occupation probably during the Late Roman/Byzantine period. In the Iron Age and Phrygian period the area was apparently little settled. The lower terrace is marked by a settlement of both the Imperial Hittite and the Old Hittite phases covered by a thin deposit belonging mainly to the 'later' periods. The *floruit* phase of the site was reached over the entire second millennium BC. The fact that most of the Hittite and even earlier materials, such as Red Slipped sherds dating to the *karum* period, were found on the outskirts of the terrace substantiates the hypothesis that there was already a large settlement consisting of a lower town and an acropolis during this older phase.

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