



KERKENES DAĞ PROJECT

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Four years of intriguing excavations in the Monumental Entranceway to the Palace Complex at Kerkenes Dağ in Central Turkey came to a close during the 2005 season. What we have uncovered has significantly reshaped our vision of this massive late Iron Age city and provided insights into the people who built and once ruled it. Meanwhile geophysical investigations over a much larger area of the city continued to progress, as did work on conserving excavated portions of the city and making them more accessible to visitors. With all this work, as well as the continued development of the Kerkenes Eco-Center companion project, 2005 was a very productive thirteenth season for the ongoing work at Kerkenes Dağ.

Excavations in the Monumental Entranceway to the Palace Complex

Situated at a critical juncture in the history of the ancient Near East, from just before the fall of Nineveh and the Assyrian empire in 612 B.C. to the rise of Cyrus the Great and the Persian empire some sixty years later, this enormous ancient city was no doubt a key center during this tumultuous period. The “Father of History” Herodotus (I.76)

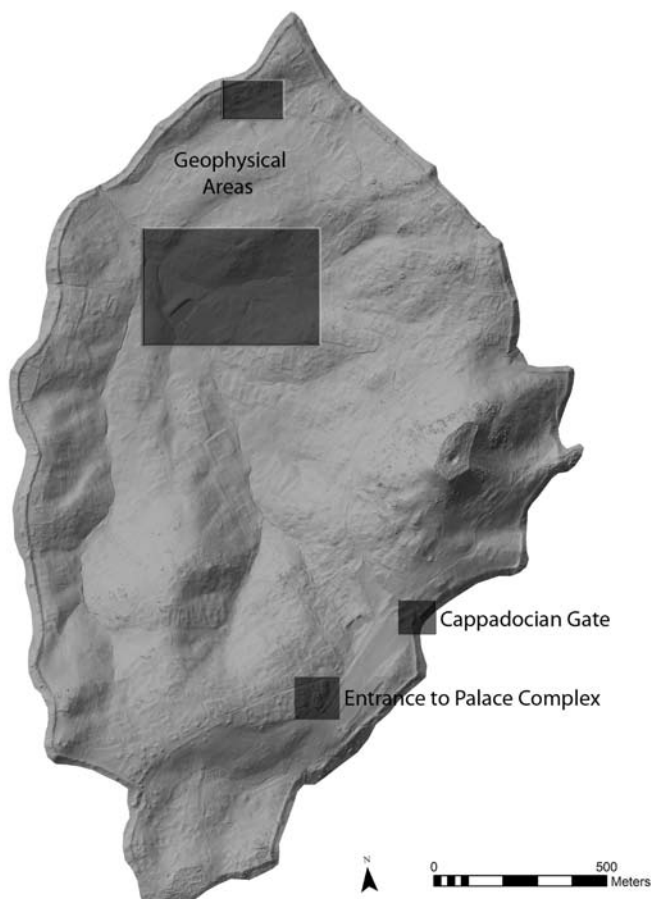


Figure 1. Locations of work within Kerkenes Dağ in 2005

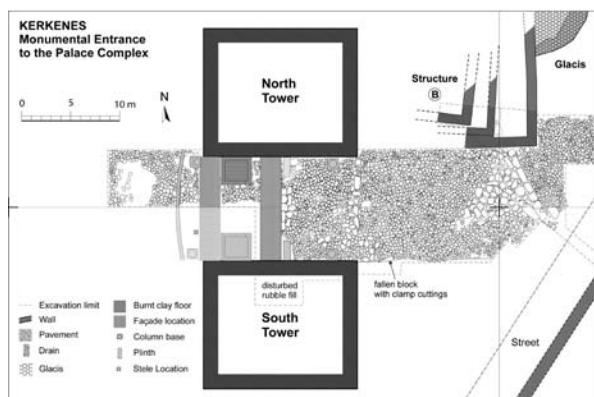


Figure 2. Plan of the entrance into the Palace Complex

ing that lay farther up upon this same pavement. By the end of 2002 we had some clues as to what we might expect, with the recovery of not only the lower halves of two bronze representations of ibex (fig. 3) that would once have likely stood proudly flanking the center of the pediment but also the interior of a wide burnt beam or wooden column containing 197 preserved tree rings.

Excavations in this area continued in 2003 as we slowly made our way up the northern side



Figure 3. One of a pair of bronze ibex recovered in the entrance

recounts the role that the city of Pteria, most likely Kerkenes Dağ, played in the early rise of Cyrus and his destruction of the Lydian empire under Croesus. Evidence from these excavations in the entranceway to the Palace Complex have helped to confirm the dating of the city to this period, while at the same time allowing the revision of some of our initial assumptions drawn from this historical passage.

In the middle of the 2002 season the first soil was removed from the entranceway into the Palace Complex (fig. 2), uncovering an impressive stone-paved surface running up into the heart of the structure. Little did we know what awaited us within the considerable mass of tumbled stone and heavy burn-

ing that lay farther up upon this same pavement. The work progressed slowly as we had to move millions of pieces of heavily burnt, and often very heavy stone by hand while dealing with the extremely dangerous tower walls that were exposed by our work on either side. The slow nature of the work became even more important when in 2003 we found the first pieces of a Phrygian inscription (fig. 4) and intricately carved reliefs of human figures, griffons, lions, winged sun disks, and other motifs (fig. 5). It continued throughout 2004 when we found joining pieces of a large freestanding statue of a person or deity (fig. 6). Each piece of stone in the entranceway had not only to be moved away but also carefully examined on all sides to make sure that no fragment of inscription, sculpture, or relief was overlooked.

In 2005 we completed these excavations in the entranceway to the Palace Complex. This included removing the remaining mass of burnt material and stone from the southern side of the pavement leading up to the gate, as well as ex-

tending the exposure of the northern half of the interior passageway all the way through the gateway and on into the complex. Just above the pavement in the core of the burnt material, a large pile of massive yet fractured architectural blocks was uncovered, some bearing carvings of large bands and cylinders (fig. 7). Others had cuttings for special dovetailed wooden clamps that once held together these architectural blocks when they formed the upper courses of the south tower and gate. One block still had preserved the charred remains of one of these wooden clamps within the clamp cutting when it was uncovered.

Among these blocks were found numerous decorative stone bolsters (fig. 8) that once would have adorned the corners and faces of some of these blocks as well as perhaps the sides of the capitals for the wide columns whose bases stand preserved within the gateway. There were also a variety of iron braces and nails for the wooden portions of the structure and even the large undecorated iron bands that once held the massive doors together. In the burnt material lying on the pavement a number of non-architectural finds were recovered, such as a lovely little bronze plaque with a bull and a griffon (fig. 9) and the golden sheath for the end of a horn or staff, which hints at the former opulence of this entranceway. Further fragments of the statue were also discovered including, quite happily, the left side of its head and eye (fig. 10).

From these excavations we can now understand the full plan of the Monumental Entranceway, which apparently was built not long before the end of the city. Lay lines in different stretches of the 10 m wide pavement rising up to the threshold reveal earlier versions of the entranceway that predate the massive towered gate that we now can see. As people ascended the rather steeply sloping stone pavement, they would have entered between the two massive flanking towers situated to the north and south of the entrance. These towers (each roughly 15 × 13 m in size) were constructed of enormous dry-laid stones with horizontal beams set between each course. The choice of stone types used to construct these towers created the effect of horizontal banding of different colors and textures. The lowest courses were all of gray granite, the middle courses of a yellowish-brown sandstone, and the upper courses were built of a chalky white sandstone. This would have produced quite visually impressive horizontal bands around the tower when viewed from any distance.



Figure 4. A section of the Phrygian inscription bearing the name of Masa (MASA is written along the top from right to left between the two marking lines)



Figure 5. A fragment of a sandstone relief of a human or human-like figure from the entrance to the Palace Complex

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Figure 6. A 1 m high statue of a person or deity found deliberately smashed in the destruction

Between these flanking towers, a person would have passed between two freestanding wooden columns (85 cm in diameter), whose bases are still preserved, and then up to what likely was an intricately carved wooden façade surrounding two huge wooden doors. Unfortunately in the massive fire that destroyed the city and the Palace, this entire wooden façade was destroyed. Just in front of the façade on either side stood two stone plinths that likely served as bases for large sculptures, perhaps lions, though later robbing pits throughout this area had removed any trace of the second plinth and all but a small portion of any potential statues. Whether or not the human-shaped statue and the inscriptions also stood here or somewhere elsewhere within the gate structure remains a mystery.

Beyond the massive doors, the interior passageway had a surprisingly symmetrical form. Pushing open the doors, a person would have crossed over a 2.1 m wide wooden threshold and onto a 4.2 m square area of stone pavement in the center of the passageway. It may also have been here, in the center of this central pavement, that the inscriptions and human-shaped statue once stood before being cast out of the entrance onto the pavement below by those who destroyed the city. Flanking this central pavement, to both the north and presumably the south, were two small equally sized rooms perhaps intended for gifts and/or for guards, though there was no evidence for either in what remained of the excavated room. Behind this central area, one would have crossed over yet another 2.1 m wide wooden threshold, and through another pair of double doors set in a wooden façade, to exit from the gate into the Palace Complex beyond. Against the back of the façade, facing into the Palace Complex, was another pair of massive freestanding columns. Beyond that ran a narrow drain, laid in the sloping stone pavement continuing up into the complex, to channel storm and snow runoff away rather than letting it flood this important entranceway.

These excavations have revealed a great deal more than just architecture and plumbing. Parallels for architectural elements, such as the wooden clamps and stone bolsters, indicate a dating in line with the known destruction date for Pteria around 547 B.C. This lends strength to the equation of the city with Pteria. However, there is much that is not directly revealed in Herodotus' brief passage. Prior to these excavations we had thought that Pteria might have been a city built by the



Figure 7. Architectural blocks that have collapsed off of the adjacent south tower during the destruction of the city

Medes as they expanded their influence into Anatolia. Herodotus, however, merely refers to the people as Pterians and clearly differentiates them from the people who lived in the surrounding countryside. With the inscription in Phrygian discovered in these excavations as well as architectural elements with affinities in the Phrygian Highlands, we can now see the prominence of Phrygian-speaking peoples among the leadership of the city. In fact from the inscription we have the actual names of some of the people that likely lived in the city, people such as Masa, Uva, Urgis, and Tata.

So what lies ahead for excavations in this remarkable ancient city? During the summer of 2006, we refrained from new excavations in order to concentrate on conservation and restoration of the large number of architectural blocks fragments that were removed from the entranceway to the Palace Complex. While many of these blocks have worked faces and carved features, we have yet to determine what they will become once they are all pieced together. It is a bit like a huge jigsaw puzzle, though admittedly one with more than a few pieces probably missing. We also worked on bringing to publication a number of volumes detailing the results from these important excavations. In the summer of 2007, we resume excavations but shift our research focus to examine more closely the city as a whole. Future seasons will see us return to the Palace, but there is still so much that we have yet to learn about the rest of this important ancient city and all of its inhabitants.



Figure 8. One of many decorative stone bolsters found in the collapse

Geophysical Investigations

While a great deal of our attention was focused on the excavations in the entranceway to the Palace Complex, our ongoing program of remote sensing, utilizing an electrical resistance meter to map structures invisible on the surface, continued in the center and northern portions of the city. Over a twenty-four day span in May, we were able to survey seven hectares of the city (figs. 11–12), revealing in remarkable detail a wide swath of the city's buildings and streets. This imagery not only helps us decide where to excavate within the city to answer particular research questions, but it also provides answers in its own right. This year's imagery, for instance, allowed us to examine patterns of organic growth within the short life-span of this city as people built new structures to meet their needs both inside and occasionally outside of the pre-planned compounds of the city.

Conservation and Restoration

Excavation always carries with it responsibility, a responsibility that does not end when the immediate research goal is met. We always need to keep an eye on the long-term preservation of what is uncovered so that it can be seen by colleagues and visitors to the site for decades to come. In the Cap-



Figure 9. A bronze plaque with a bull (upper register) and a griffon (lower register) found under the collapse of the tower

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Figure 10. The joining fragment of the statue's head back in place after being recovered this year

environmentally sustainable income generating activities to halt or even reverse migration from the village into the cities. In this, the third full year of the project, Şahmuratlı has already become quite a model for rural development. It has one thriving organic garden in the village in addition to the test garden and several test buildings, two built of straw-bales and one of mudbrick, within our excavation compound. People in the village are becoming quite excited about this project, and we are only too happy to do what little we can to help our generous hosts. In the long run it will benefit us all.

Acknowledgments



Figure 11. Looking up the pavement to where the doors and façade of the entrance once stood

padocian Gate passage, excavated in 2003, the collapse of a portion of an unexcavated section over the winter necessitated some additional work this year. We were able to ramp down some of the recently collapsed material within the passageway to make the area safer and more accessible, and to preserve the ancient passage surface down below. While we hope to do more in the future, both here and in the Palace Complex, architectural conservation and restoration can be quite expensive and significant future funding will be needed for restoration in these important monuments.

Kerkenes Eco-Center

Finally, the Kerkenes Eco-Center, a parallel project centered on our excavation compound and our host village of Şahmuratlı, really took off in the past year. Under the direction of Françoise Summers, it seeks to provide long-term sustainability for the village we live in through the introduction of renewable energy sources, environmentally friendly and efficient building designs, technologies for minimizing water usage, and a diversification of

The Kerkenes Dağ Project is a joint project between the Oriental Institute and the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara. It is co-directed by Geoffrey Summers (Middle East Technical University [METU] in Ankara), Françoise Summers (METU), and myself. In addition to the General Directorate of Cultural Assets and Museums in Turkey, we would like to thank Mehmet Sevim from the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara for serving as our official representative, Mustafa Erdoğan the acting Director of the Yozgat Museum, and Hasan Şenyurt his Assistant. This year's participants included two additional team members from the University of Chicago: G. Bike Yazıcıoğlu, who

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Figure 12. Results of the resistivity survey collected in the northern part of the city in 2005

served as one of our excavators; and Alison Whyte, the Oriental Institute's Assistant Conservator, who served as one of our two conservators.

Principal sponsors for the 2005 season included: Middle East Technical University, the Oriental Institute, the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, the Anatolian Archaeology Research Foundation, (Tyche) Archeocommunity Foundation, Charlotte Bonham Carter Trust, John Kelly Consulting, Inc., Joukowsky Family Foundation, Loeb Classical Library Foundation, Toreador Turkey, University of Melbourne, Yenigün, Yibitaş/Lafarge, and anonymous donors.

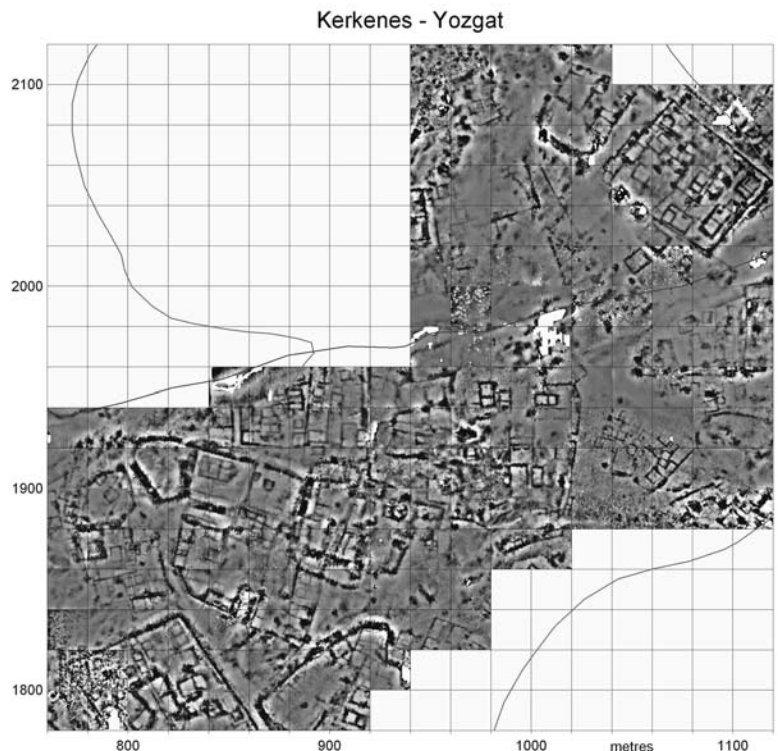


Figure 13. Results of the resistivity survey collected in the central part of the city in 2005

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A full list of participants and sponsors for both the main project as well as the eco-center can be found on our Web site, <http://www.kerkenes.metu.edu.tr>
