TÜRKMEN-KARAHÖYÜK ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

MICHELE MASSA AND JAMES OSBORNE

After several seasons of survey (see previous annual reports on James Osborne's individual research), in July and August 2024 the large mound of Türkmen-Karahöyük witnessed the inaugural excavation season of the Türkmen-Karahöyük Archaeological Project (TKAP), ISAC's first excavation on the Anatolian plateau directed or codirected by an ISAC faculty member since the famous excavations of Alişar Höyük in the 1920s and 1930s. TKAP is a long-term excavation project codirected by ISAC faculty member James Osborne and Bilkent University faculty member Michele Massa. The site of Türkmen-Karahöyük (fig. 1) is located in the Konya Plain, one of Türkiye's most agriculturally productive regions due to the alluvium that formed from the Çarşamba River. Today the plain is most famous for the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Çatalhöyük, the Neolithic site that is so well known for its rich domestic symbolism at the dawn of agriculture. But as documented by Massa's survey (the Konya Regional Archaeological Survey Project, operational from 2017 to 2022), the plain hosts hundreds of archaeological sites from all periods, including the historical Bronze and Iron Ages. To date, these periods have been all but unexplored in this part of Türkiye.

As previous annual reports and publications have described, Türkmen-Karahöyük is a 30 ha, 35 m tall *höyük*, making it one of the largest mounds in Türkiye. In addition, there are indications of outer-town occupation during several periods. Surface collections indicate a more or less continuous occupation from the start of the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 BCE) until the Late Hellenistic period (ca. 50 BCE). This impressive sequence promises to make Türkmen-Karahöyük a "type site" for southern Anatolia, one that will complement the much more comprehensively understood archaeology of northern Anatolia. Anatolian archaeology has also grown deeply interested in the site thanks to our discovery during the survey in 2019 of the

Figure 1. The mound of Türkmen-Karahöyük, viewed from the west.

inscription now known as TÜRKMEN-KARAHÖYÜK 1—a royal inscription composed in Hieroglyphic Luwian that was translated by ISAC colleagues Petra Goedegebuure and Theo van den Hout. In this text, the author, known as "Great King Hartapu," claims to have defeated the kingdom of Mushki (using the ancient Near Eastern term for the state better known as Phrygia), ruled in the late eighth century BCE by the famous King Midas. Hartapu, therefore, was the ruler of a hitherto unknown Iron Age kingdom, and Türkmen-Karahöyük appears to be a newly discovered Iron Age capital city—and was likely equally significant during periods of its occupation before and after the Iron Age.

With indicators of a large Hellenistic lower town underneath the modern village of Türkmenkarahüyük immediately south of the mound, it is actually during the Hellenistic period that the site seems to have reached its fullest extent. During this era, this part of Anatolia was known as Lycaonia, which, like southern Anatolia during the Bronze and Iron Ages, is almost completely unknown archaeologically. Here, too, Türkmen-Karahöyük promises to make significant contributions to the cultural history of Anatolia.

In 2024, the excavation license for Türkmen-Karahöyük was generously granted by Türkiye's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and TKAP had its inaugural five-week excavation season in July and August. TKAP selected three main areas, or "fields," to excavate, each one chosen on the basis of its unique morphological positioning on the site (fig. 2). For example, the eastern side of the mound is characterized by deep erosional gulleys that have been created by millennia of winter rains gouging out the soft mudbrick detritus that forms the bulk of the mound's soil matrix. We placed Field 3, supervised by Nathan Lovejoy (Università Ca'Foscari Venezia), in the bottom of one of these gulleys as a methodological experiment that would allow us to learn more about gulley formation and the viability of excavating in these parts of the site; in theory, the gulleys' bottoms offer an opportunity to easily excavate the site's earliest periods of occupation without having to spend years carefully removing earlier levels. Unfortunately, we learned that erosional debris in the gulleys is much deeper than we anticipated, with very little preserved in situ until one moves up the slopes of the gulleys' edges. On these slopes, TKAP found fragments of a mid-second millennium BCE industrial area that was presumably on the city's outer edge, but the lack of associated contexts renders the area highly difficult to understand. Although learning about the nature of the gulleys' bottoms was valuable scientific information, it means that excavating in these parts of the site will always be a challenge.

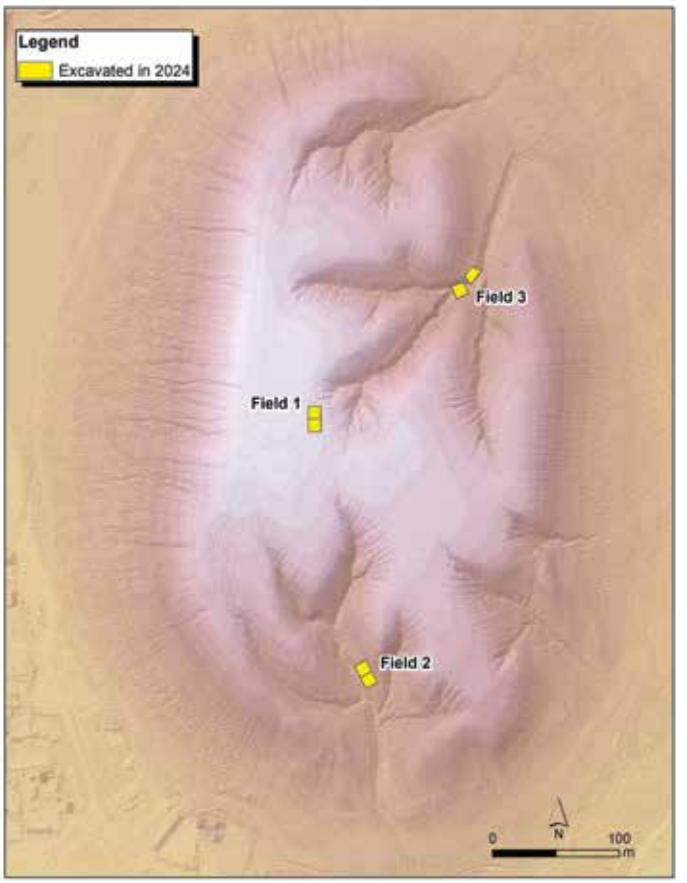

Figure 2. Map of the mound of Türkmen-Karahöyük showing TKAP's 2024 excavation areas.

Field 2, supervised by Alvise Matessi (Universita di Verona), was placed on a terrace on the southern slopes of the mound, where surface ceramic collections indicated that Bronze Age remains would be right under the surface—unlike the site's uppermost layers, which date as late as the late Hellenistic period. This prediction proved correct when the Field 2 excavations promptly revealed well-preserved mudbrick buildings dated tentatively to the late Middle Bronze Age, roughly the eighteenth century BCE (fig. 3), a phase that was followed by pitting belonging to the early Late Bronze Age, roughly the seventeenth century BCE. These centuries are a critical turning point in Anatolian history, one that marks the plateau's transition from a city-state level of organization to the Hittite kingdom that politically controlled most of the plateau

Figure 3. TKAP excavation area Field 2: plan of buildings dating roughly to the end of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. eighteenth century BCE).

Figure 4. Partially excavated Middle Bronze Age houses in Field 2.

and eventually evolved into a full-blown imperial formation. With just five weeks of excavation, most of these pits and the rooms of the buildings they cut into were not excavated to completion (fig. 4). Nevertheless, the discovery of stamps and sealings alongside large numbers of loom weights in these spaces hint at a larger-than-household level of administration over a political economy characterized by textile production.

Field 1, supervised by Nancy Highcock (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford), was placed at the mound's summit. This location was chosen for two reasons. First, a magnetometry survey had indicated that this area was occupied by large-scale public buildings lying immediately under the surface. Second, it is here that villagers described finding the TÜRKMEN-KARAHÖYÜK 1 inscription, suggesting the area might be characterized by public architecture during many consecutive levels of occupation. Our excavations confirmed the presence of the large building that magnetometry had predicted (fig. 5) and dated the remains to the late Hellenistic period, or early to mid-first century BCE. Most excitingly, underneath the walls of the uppermost

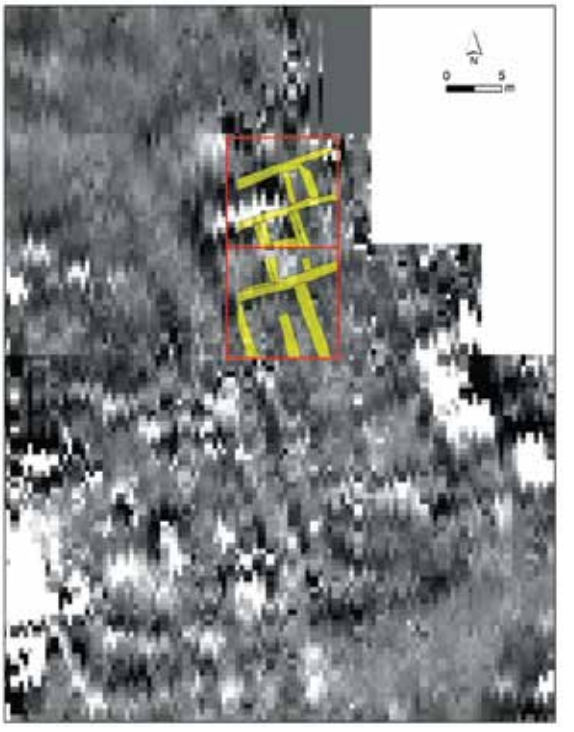

Figure 5. TKAP excavation area Field 1, with excavated architecture overlaid on previous results of a magnetometry survey.

Figure 6. Hellenistic destruction layer discovered in Field 1, with highly burned soil deposits being fine-gridded.

building in Field 1 lies an earlier structure that experienced an intense conflagration, which baked its walls and filled its rooms with burned collapse, organic remains for radiocarbon dating and rich botanical analysis, and whole or reconstructible vessels (fig. 6). In this first season, TKAP exposed the destruction layer in only two small locations—and even in these areas, the floor level of the destroyed building was not reached. All these findings suggest that the 2025 excavations in Field 1 will be enormously rich in artifacts.

The 2024 TKAP excavations have begun exposing this archaeological site for the first time, in the process allowing us to understand the material record of southern Anatolia, with remains so far dating to the mid-second millennium and late first millennium BCE. There is much left to learn about Türkmen-Karahöyük. In fact, TKAP has yet to start exploring most periods of the site's occupation, including the early first millennium BCE—the Iron Age period when Hartapu reigned, and the era that drew us to the site in the first place. This work will begin in our 2025 season and, with a site as large as Türkmen-Karahöyük, will continue for many seasons thereafter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism for giving us permission to excavate Türkmen-Karahöyük and for providing support in all matters of bureaucracy and administration related to the project. We are grateful to the Ministry's representative Nedime Özçalık Yılmaz (Konya Museum) for her kindness and support during the field season.

The 2024 TKAP excavation season was sponsored by the University of Chicago, Bilkent University, the British Institute at Ankara, the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, the Archaeological Institute of America's Richard C. MacDonald Iliad Endowment for Archaeological Research, and a generous contribution of Catherine Novotny.