

EXCAVATIONS AT ZINCIRLI HÖYÜK IN TURKEY: 2015 SEASON

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Introduction

Since 2006, the Oriental Institute has been excavating the Bronze and Iron Age site of Zincirli Höyük in Turkey, the ancient walled city of Sam'al, under the direction of David Schloen. The 2015 excavation season inaugurated a new phase of the excavations, which are now being conducted in partnership with the Institute for Ancient Near Eastern Studies of the University of Tübingen in Germany. The 2015 excavations at Zincirli were co-directed by David Schloen (Chicago) and Virginia Herrmann (Tübingen). In previous seasons, nine excavation areas (on the citadel, in the lower town, in the outer fortifications, and in two extramural buildings) had been opened (Schloen and Fink 2009a, 2009b; Herrmann and Schloen 2016), and a magnetometry survey of all accessible areas of the lower town and some extramural areas had been carried out in 2007 and 2009 (Casana and Herrmann 2010). In the 2015 season (July 20 to September 6), four areas (three existing and one new) were excavated by a team of eighteen archaeologists and students, supported by twenty-five local workers and fourteen specialists in ceramics, animal bones, plant remains, mapping, illustration, photography, and conservation (fig. 1). Previous seasons had concentrated on the period of Neo-Assyrian domination in the eighth and seventh centuries BC that is easily accessible in many places on the mound, but the current focus of excavations is the earliest Iron Age settlement. The aim is to investigate the process of Iron Age urbanization from a more holistic perspective that includes both elite/monumental and non-elite/non-monumental contexts. Unanticipated progress was also made this season on the long-term goal of tracing the full settlement history of Zincirli, back into the Bronze Age.

Eastern Citadel: Area 2

Area 2 on the eastern side of the mound was previously excavated in 2012 and 2013. It is a narrow, 4 × 20 m step trench that runs northwest-southeast from the highest point of the mound down to the lower terrace to the south (fig. 2). In 2015, work in this area was supervised by Kate Morgan (PhD candidate, University of Pennsylvania), assisted by Olivia Hayden and Jane Gordon, and focused on a 3 × 7 m area in the center of this step trench (square 46.0). The goal was to reach below the Iron Age occupation to find out whether there were any Middle or Late Bronze Age levels above the Early Bronze Age occupation.

It was found that some fragmentary Iron Age II walls uncovered in 2013 were resting immediately on a thick layer of burnt destruction debris. When this destruction debris was excavated, parts of two rooms of a Middle Bronze Age building with mudbrick walls on stone foundations were uncovered. The building was terraced down the ancient slope, so that the floor of the lower room was ca. 60 cm below the floor of the upper room. The rooms were filled with intensely burnt debris and smashed pottery. The upper room contained fragments of

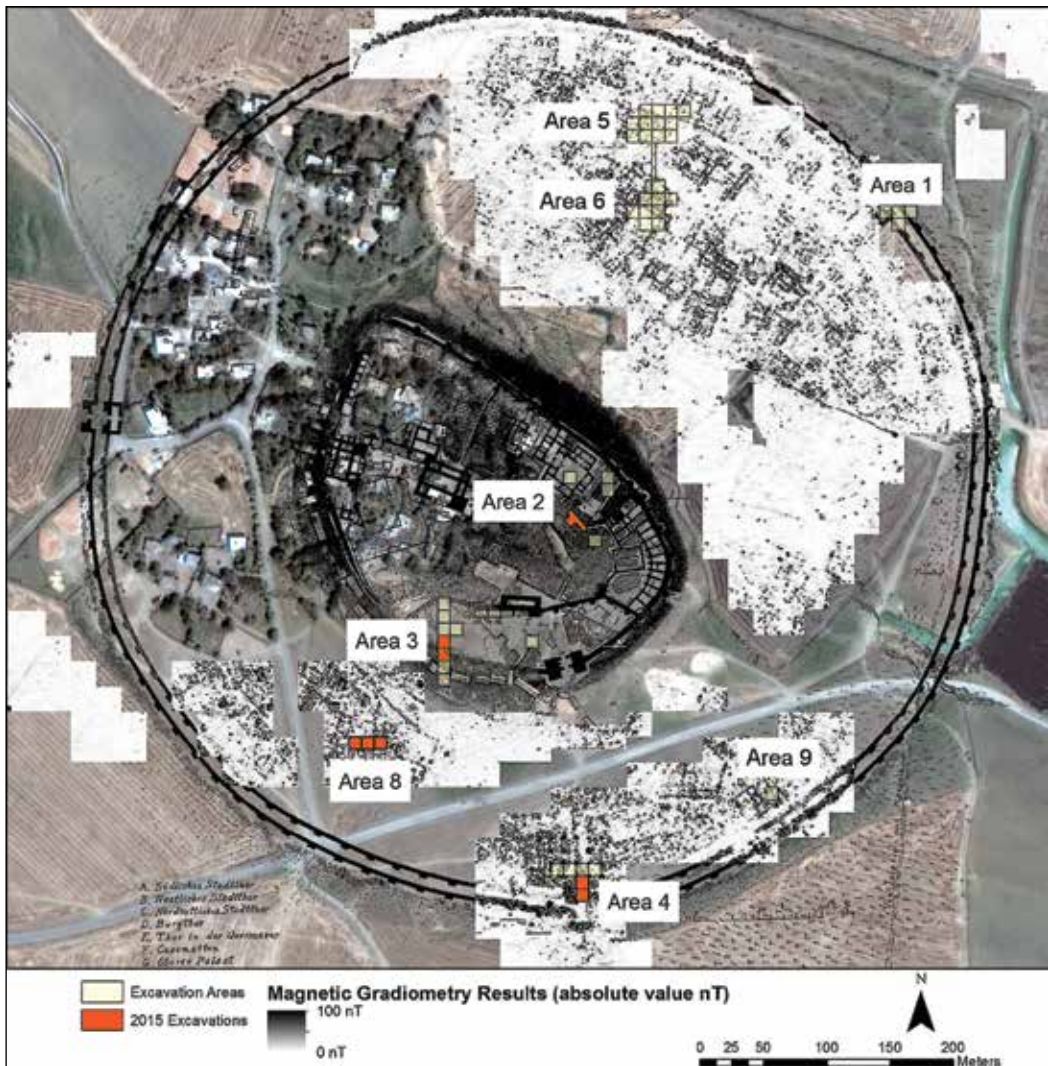


Figure 1. Zincirli Höyük, showing excavation areas, magnetic gradiometry results, and excavated architecture from the late nineteenth-century excavations (after von Luschan, Humann, and Koldewey 1898, pl. 29)

more than forty different vessels, including six storage jars, several jugs and juglets, several bowls, a flat baking tray, a lid, and a funnel (fig. 3). The lower room was greatly disturbed by a trench from the late nineteenth-century German excavations at Zincirli, but it also contained one storage jar that was full of burnt seeds of bitter vetch. Many of these vessels can be restored to a complete or nearly complete condition (fig. 4). They have parallels especially at nearby Tilmen Höyük (Duru 2003), but a particular painted jug type (fig. 5) has also been found at Middle Bronze Age Kültepe Stratum Ib (Emre 1995) and Tarsus (Goldman 1956, fig. 377). A mud-plastered feature that may have been an oven was also found in the upper room. Nearby were a stone hammer head, a bronze pin, a clay bulla with a stamp seal impression, and a clay figurine of a nude woman wearing a headdress and a necklace. This type of figurine

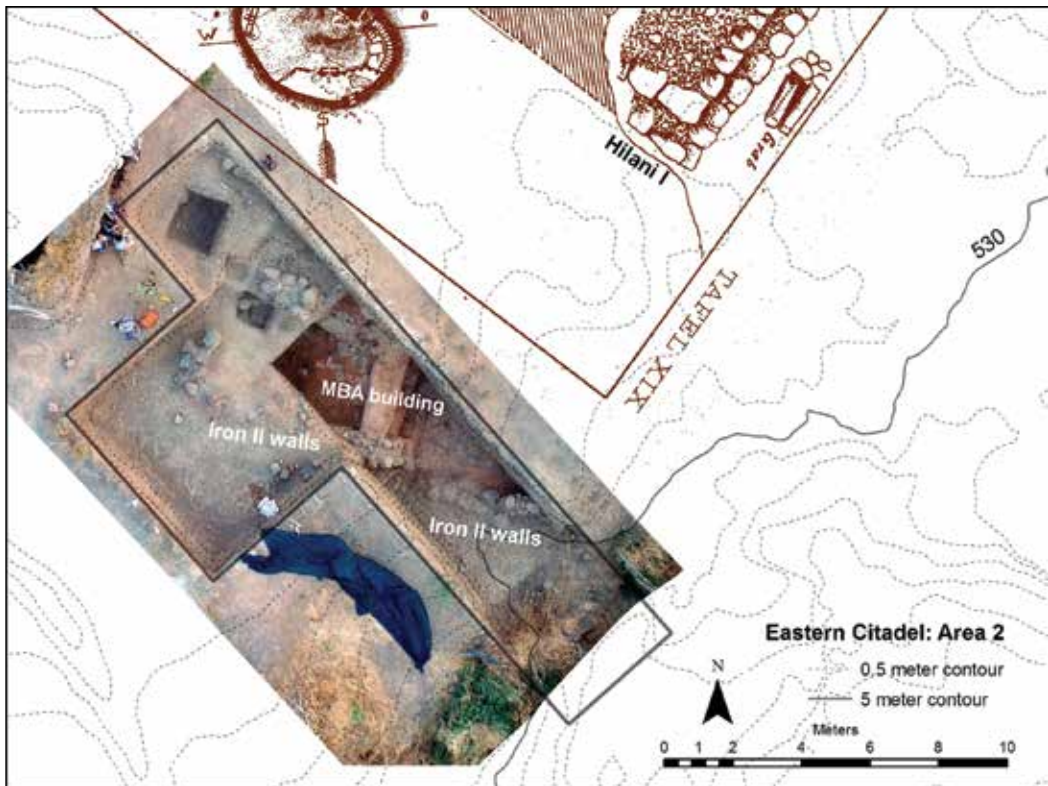


Figure 2. Area 2 on the Eastern Citadel, showing its proximity to Hilani I excavated in the late nineteenth century (von Luschan, Humann, and Koldewey 1898, pl. 19). Stone wall foundations of the Iron Age cut and covered a terraced Middle Bronze Age building that had been destroyed by fire

is found throughout the Levant in the Middle and Late Bronze Age. Two of the storage jars in the upper room bore cylinder seal impressions from the same seal, rolled along the rim before firing.

The burnt Middle Bronze Age building must have been eroding out of the slope of the mound for the centuries during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age when the mound was unoccupied. In the Iron Age II, a stepped stone retaining wall was cut into the burnt debris in order to stop the erosion (fig. 2). At the base of the retaining wall, a 2-m wide level foundation of cobblestones was laid, perhaps as a base for a fortification wall. Parts of both of these stone walls were cut by the nineteenth-century German trench. This makes it difficult to know whether the two stone walls were contemporary, or if one was built after the other.



Figure 3. The upper room of the destroyed Middle Bronze Age building in Area 2. A number of smaller vessels fell on, in, and around a group of four storage jars in one corner



Figure 4. Cooking vessels from the Middle Bronze Age building in Area 2



Figure 5. A bichrome painted barrel jug from the Middle Bronze Age building in Area 2

The excavations in Area 2 this season revealed a Middle Bronze Age occupation of Zincirli that was previously unknown. Furthermore, the preservation of the contents of these rooms due to their violent destruction promises to reveal much new information about the Middle Bronze Age of this region in future seasons.

Southern Citadel: Area 3

Area 3 is a long step trench down the southern edge of the citadel mound. It has been excavated every year since 2007 (except 2009 and 2014). In 2015, only squares 55.68 and 55.78 on the edge of the mound were excavated, supervised by Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (St. Joseph's University), assisted by Austin Terry, Martin Weber, Tuğba Gencer, and Barbara Bolognani. This season's goals were to better understand the dating and construction of the citadel fortifications and to expose occupation predating the Iron Age II–III citadel wall and relating to the earth rampart. The most significant result this season is that the Local Phase 5 citadel wall was constructed relatively late in the Iron Age (after ca. 750 BC), replacing an earlier fortification system. The remains excavated this season are described below from earliest to latest.

Local Phase (LP) 7 (Iron Age II) consists of an earthen rampart with a flat top ca. 4 m wide. It slopes down to the south on the edge of the mound and begins to slope down to the north as well, under the LP 6 occupation layers excavated this season. The top of the rampart was exposed beneath the later (LP 5) citadel wall, and a probe was made into it in the northeastern part of square 55.78. The rampart is constructed of layers of red, brown, and yellow clay and mudbrick containing Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age pottery, alternating with layers of gravel containing a mix of Iron Age II–III and Early and Middle Bronze Age pottery (fig. 6a–b).

Local Phase 6 (Iron Age II) consists of buildings and occupation layers constructed after the rampart but before the later (LP 5) citadel wall (fig. 6a). Two walls with single-course stone foundations run up onto the Phase 7 rampart, but were cut by the LP 5 citadel wall foundation. They must have originally abutted an earlier fortification wall on top of the rampart



a



b

Figure 6a-b. (a) Area 3 on the Southern Citadel, showing LP 6 walls running up to the LP 7 earthen rampart. They may have once connected to an LP 6 fortification wall on top of the rampart, but were cut by the LP 5 citadel wall; (b) east section of square 55.78 in Area 3, showing the LP 5 citadel wall foundation cutting a wall foundation of LP 6 and the LP 7 earth rampart below

that was also removed by the construction of the LP 5 wall. Though it only has one course of stones, the eastern wall foundation is quite wide (1.5 m) and may have formed part of the fortifications — either part of a fortress on the edge of the mound, or one side of a casemate wall that ran along an earlier mound edge oriented northeast–southwest. The small area of beaten-earth floor exposed between these two walls produced no finds and very little pottery, but was covered with white decayed organic remains (phytoliths), probably from the collapse of the ceiling onto the floor. To the north, several mudbrick walls were outlined, and one room was partially excavated, though without reaching the floor. There may be two subphases of mudbrick walls. A large sherd of imported Cypriot Bichrome IV painted pottery was found in the green clay surface east of the wide stone wall foundation and below the LP 5 foundation trench. This suggests a date for the end of LP 6 no earlier than ca. 750 BC. Other Cypriot imports in this phase include sherds of Black-on-Red and White Painted wares, which can date to the ninth and eighth centuries BC.

Local Phase 5 consists of the Iron Age II–III citadel wall and associated architecture. The citadel wall with two courses of stone foundation below a course of timber beams was already exposed in 2007. The timber beams were no longer preserved, but were evident as linear spaces with cobblestone filling between them. This is the equivalent of the “Burgmauer” or “Rostmauer” excavated by the nineteenth-century German expedition (von Luschan, Humann, and Koldewey 1898, pp. 116–21). This season it was clear that the two foundation courses were laid in a foundation trench cut into the top of the earlier rampart (fig. 6b). As described above, this foundation trench also cut the earlier LP 6 walls and floors. The timber beams would have been at ground level when the wall was constructed. Inside the citadel, the LP 6 mudbrick walls were shaved down flat to form a floor for several LP 5 walls revealed already in 2013 in the northern half of the square. A grinding installation was found on this floor.

Local Phase 4 consists of Iron Age III occupation associated with the LP 5 citadel wall. The architecture of this phase was previously excavated in the 2010 and 2012 seasons. The only new LP 4 feature in 2015 was a large circular pit in the northeast corner of 55.68, cutting LP 5 and 6 walls (fig. 6a). Inside this pit were found a nearly complete painted juglet (probably a Cypriot import of the seventh century BC) and a stone spindle whorl.

South City Gate: Area 4

Area 4 is located on the north side of the South Gate of the lower town wall, which was the main entrance to the city. It was previously excavated in 2007, and on a smaller scale in 2012 and 2013. This season, only square 76.59 just inside the entrance to the Gate from the lower town was excavated by Marina Pucci (University of Florence), with the assistance of Axel Bauron, Josif Atanasov, and Martina Candela. In 2013, several paving layers of the street leading into the town from the gate had been revealed. The goal for this season was to reach the earliest occupation layers in the south lower town and to understand whether the South Gate was constructed before or after the earliest occupation of the lower town.

Below the earliest street pavement connected to the Gate threshold, several stone wall foundations were uncovered (fig. 7). These ran at a different orientation than the Gate and below its foundation level, so they clearly predated the Gate’s construction. No floors were found with these walls, which were partially robbed when the Gate was built. A couple of Iron Age sherds were found in the foundations, suggesting that they were built in this period, sometime before the Gate, but it is not yet possible to be more specific about their date. Regardless, this

is the first indication of Iron Age occupation of the lower town prior to the construction of the circular double fortification wall with its three gates. Whether this was an earlier lower town or an isolated group of buildings is yet undetermined.

In one corner of the trench, a human burial was found in a pit that may have cut through a poorly preserved area of the later Iron Age street pavements, but was previously unidentified. The burial was of a single individual with the skull toward the east and facing south. The arm bones, the pelvis, and the leg bones were found in their correct anatomical positions, indicating primary burial, but the hands, ribs, and vertebrae were not preserved. As burial gifts, a bronze bowl, iron fibula, iron dagger, and several iron arrowheads were found placed at the waist. These are still undergoing conservation treatment and need further study.

The above-mentioned walls were set into a layer of burnt mudbrick debris. Below this debris were the smashed remains of several ceramic vessels of Early Bronze Age date lying on or set into a pebble floor (fig. 7). No associated architecture was found, but elsewhere in the trench a partially cobble-paved floor clearly ran below the walls that predated the Gate. While Early Bronze Age material was known already from the high central mound of Zincirli, this is the first evidence of a lower town occupation of this period. Two radiocarbon dates from the burnt debris confirm a date for this destruction in the mid-third millennium BC (personal communication, Sturt Manning).



Figure 7. Area 4 by the South City Gate. A sounding below the Iron Age II and III South Gate and associated street revealed wall foundations of an earlier Iron Age phase, set into a destruction layer of the Early Bronze Age

Southwest Lower Town: Area 8

Area 8 is a new excavation area of 30 × 10 m in the southwest lower town of Zincirli (squares 64.41, 42, and 43) (fig. 8). In 2015, it was supervised by Laura Malric-Smith (Cambridge University), assisted by Nicole Herzog, Sarah Lange, Ebubekir Bayram, Marta Fernández-Poza, and Seda Sönmez. The geomagnetic map shows one or two buildings and an open area in this space. One goal of this new area is eventually to produce a full Iron Age occupation sequence for the south lower town and compare it to the occupation sequence already excavated in the north lower town. Another aim is to expand and diversify our picture of the social and economic organization of Sam'al's first Iron Age inhabitants.

The latest phase of architecture was not very well preserved, with areas of subsidence and some late robbing of stones and disturbance by plows. In the center of the area (square 65.42) was a large walled courtyard partially paved with pebbles and containing also some enigmatic stone features with depressions, possibly for liquid processing or drainage. A silver



Figure 8. Area 8 in the Southwest Lower Town, showing the latest two architectural phases dating to the Iron Age III and the probe in the central square that revealed an Early Bronze Age destruction layer below the Iron Age occupation

ring attached to a pinkish stone scaraboid seal, inscribed in Aramaic script with the name of the owner, was found in this courtyard. To the west (square 65.41), two semi-enclosed spaces each contained a bench with a lower grinding stone, and a variety of small hammerstones and pestles was found in the vicinity (fig. 9). A stamp seal was found in this area. To the east (square 65.43), a small building or portico was bordered by two walls with a post base in between. A sherd of an imported Ionian cup dates this phase to the late seventh century BC.

The earlier phase of architecture encountered this season was not fully excavated, but two elongated rooms on the same orientation as the later courtyard were beginning to emerge. To the west (square 65.41) was an open, external area that seems to have been used for trash disposal and produced a lot of pottery and bone. To the east (square 65.43) was an earth floor with several storage jars and smaller vessels embedded in it. On this surface were scattered more than a dozen clay loom weights. These probably fell from a higher level onto the floor.



Figure 9. A selection of grinding and pounding stones found near two grinding installations in the latest Iron Age III occupational phase of Area 8

An oval feature built from baked mudbricks may have been a washing basin, but it was very disturbed. This space seems to have been an unroofed interior courtyard.

In the southwest corner of square 65.42, a small probe of 2 × 2 m was excavated in order to get a preliminary view of the depth of the earliest occupation in this area and its date. The probe revealed at least one earlier surface belonging to the Iron Age II/III, but immediately below this phase another Early Bronze Age destruction layer was revealed. As in Area 4, burnt mudbrick debris covered several vessels smashed in situ. This suggests that the Early Bronze Age lower town occupation encountered in Area 4 was quite extensive. However, previous excavations to virgin soil in the north lower town produced no trace of Early Bronze Age occupation, indicating that the third-millennium settlement was confined to the south and southwest of the high mound.

Three significant conclusions can be drawn from the first season of excavations in Area 8. First, the open plan and “industrial” installations of the latest Iron Age phase show quite a different character than the contemporary seventh-century domestic occupation in the north lower town (Areas 5 and 6). Second, the Iron Age occupation of this part of the city consists of ca. three architectural phases over only 1.2 m depth from the surface, comparable to the results from Areas 5 and 6 in the north. Though the stratigraphic sequences of the northern and southwestern areas cannot yet be closely correlated, this suggests preliminarily that the entire lower town was settled at around the same time and continued to be occupied until the end of the Neo-Assyrian provincial period. Finally, the discovery of an Early Bronze Age destruction layer that seems to extend over a wide area (at least between Areas 4 and 8) immediately below the Iron Age occupation shows that Zincirli was a more significant settlement in this period than previously realized.

Work by Specialists

In the 2015 season, ceramicist Sebastiano Soldi (National Museum of Florence), assisted by Benedetta Fiorelli, Guido Guidiccioni, and Livia Tirabassi, prepared previously excavated pottery from Areas 3A and 6 for publication, made preliminary observations of pottery excavated in 2015, and worked to document and begin restoration of the many vessels found in Area 2 this season, together with conservators Evren Kivançer and Güneş Acur. Zooarchaeologists Dr. Nimrod Marom (University of Haifa) and Laurel Poolman finished the recording of the animal bones excavated in the 2013 season and began the analysis of 2015 material. Special finds included a lion bone from Area 2 and a bear bone from Area 3. Archaeobotanist Doğa Karakaya (University of Tübingen) carried out water flotation of soil samples from the 2012–2015 seasons, producing many carbonized botanical remains for the study of environment and diet. Oriental Institute Museum conservator Alison Whyte performed exploratory analysis of the composition of numerous ceramic, metal, and stone artifacts excavated in previous seasons using the museum’s portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) machine. The documentation of the excavation trenches and finds was further supported by Jason Herrmann (spatial data manager, University of Tübingen), Lucas Stephens (field photographer), Leann Pace and Teagan Wolter (registrars), Karen Parker (illustrator), and Roberto Ceccacci (object photographer).

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