



KERKENES DAĞ

Scott Branting

<http://www.kerkenes.metu.edu.tr/>

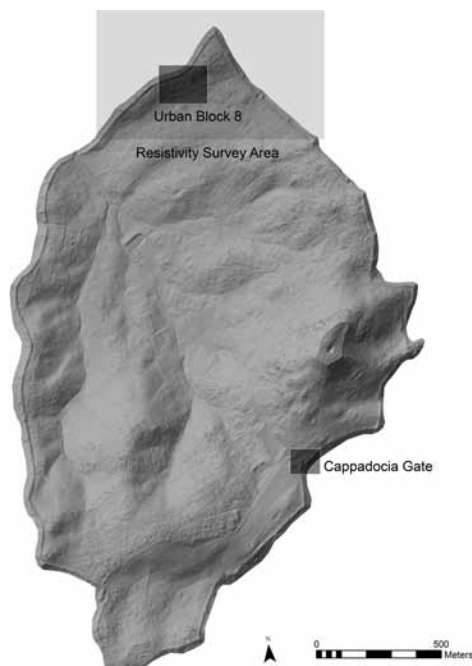


Figure 1. Locations of research at Kerkenes Dağ in 2011

The 2011 season at Kerkenes Dağ was a season of milestones. It marked the nineteenth continuous season of research by the project at this important Iron Age city in central Turkey, as well as the last season of active excavation under the directorship of Geoffrey Summers. During this season, the resistivity survey in the northern portion of the city covered a record amount of area for a single season (fig. 1). Excavations in the Cappadocia Gate were brought to an exciting conclusion, along with continued restoration of the gate. New long-term excavations were also begun in the northern portion of the city. Complementing these key milestones were ongoing ethnographic and paleoenvironmental research, as well as the work of the Kerkenes Eco-Center. Finally, the season was capped off by a Kerkenes Festival on October 1st to thank local leaders and dignitaries for their firm and continuous support of the project.

Geophysical Investigations

Weather can be both a blessing and a curse. The 2011 season for the resistivity survey began among snowflakes at the beginning of May, but it benefited greatly from the exceptionally wet spring through May and June. In most years, the heavy clay soil at Kerkenes becomes too hard and dry by the start of June to get the machine's metal probes easily into the ground or to get useful readings of the electrical current. The wetness of this spring allowed the resistivity survey to continue with ease well into the month of June, and an astounding 142,400 m² (14.2 ha) were surveyed.

The area of focus for the survey this year was the far northern portion of the city (fig. 2). This entire area was surveyed with magnetometry in the 1990s. However, the resistivity survey, while slower, provides much clearer imagery in most areas of the walls and structures buried under the surface of the ground. This is also the area of the city where excavations will be undertaken for the next six years, and so understanding the context of the city around the urban block that is set to be completely excavated is essential.

A number of interesting elements emerged from the survey in this area. First, special attention was paid to the area just within the northern point of the city. It has been speculated that such a key location within the city might be a likely location for a military installation,

KERKENES DAĞ

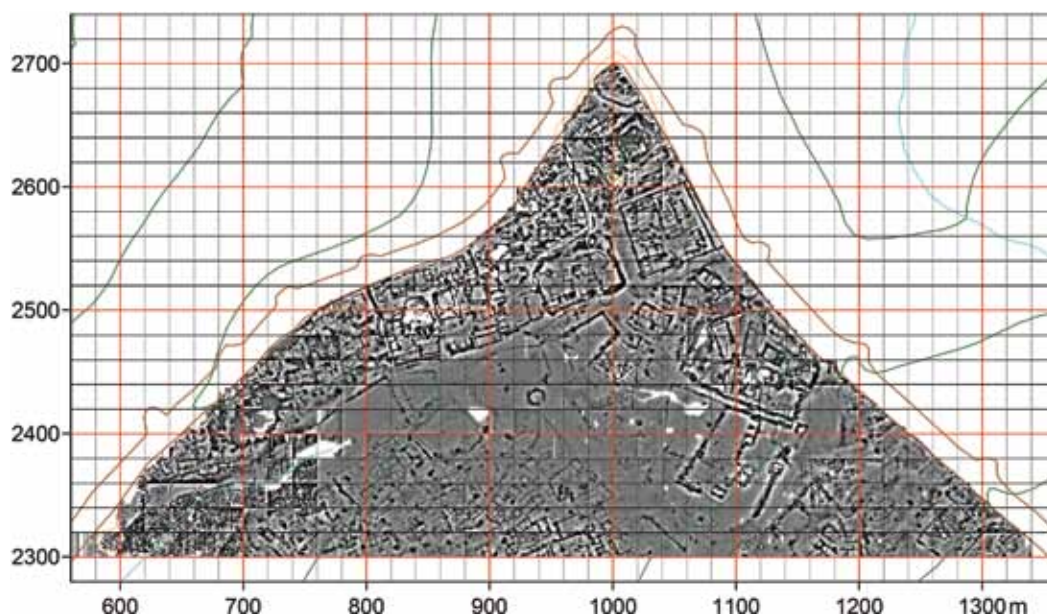


Figure 2. Resistivity survey data collected in 2011 in the northern part of the city

overlooking the approaching valley down below. The survey shows a small area enclosed by a curving wall at the extreme northern end of the city, although no structures are to be found inside this area. It likely encloses an area directly adjacent to the large stone tower at the northern tip of the city wall. Urban blocks surrounding this enclosed area show no obvious indications of military use. Second, a better picture of the water management features and strategies in this area, interconnected pools and channels for moving and storing runoff water, were revealed by the survey. Third, an interesting picture of less well-regulated construction during the life of the city can be seen in the southern portions of the area surveyed. Elsewhere in the city the original walled urban blocks laid out shortly after the foundation of the city were filled over time by their inhabitants with different configurations of buildings and open spaces. In excavating the “Temple” structure last year, we found an example of a large building built between urban blocks late in the short-lived life of the city. In the resistivity survey data collected this year, the southern portion of the area exhibits a range of smaller informal structures built in and between the possibly altered lines of the original urban blocks. Could this be an area where poorer inhabitants of the city lived? Its appearance is certainly quite different from both the urban blocks closer to the wall and from those in the vicinity of the Palatial Complex surveyed the past few years. Further expansion of the resistivity survey into this area to the south in the years ahead is eagerly anticipated.

Excavations in Urban Block 8

Urban Block 8, so named in our modern numbering of the roughly 757 walled urban blocks spread across the city, has been the object of limited excavations since 1996. Excavations to test the results of the magnetometry survey in 1996 revealed both a large hall supported by columns and half of a single room of a multi-roomed structure behind the hall. Within this room was found the impressive ivory plaque, likely part of the back of a chair, adorned with



Figure 3. The ivory plaque excavated from the floor of Room 1 in 1996

amber and gold (fig. 3). It is currently on display in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara and has been described as “one of the most remarkable objects to be found in central Anatolia in recent years” (Greaves 2010, p. 205). It has been suggested that the plaque demonstrates potential stylistic connections with Lydia, far to the west, connections that have been noticeably absent elsewhere in the city (Dusinberre 2002).

Over the following six years of work the project will clear the entire ca. 6,000 m² area encompassed by this urban block. Extensive excavations elsewhere in the city over the last decade have primarily cleared portions of the city wall, the Cappadocia Gate, and the entranceway to the Palatial Complex. However, we still know very little about how people actually lived within the city. Did one household inhabit each urban block? Or were there multiple households present within its buildings? In addition, we don’t even know in many cases what the typical uses were of particular types of buildings that we can see in the geophysical data. What buildings are typically used as houses, or for storage, or as outhouses? Was cooking undertaken within the house, or outside it, or in separate structures nearby? How was the production of other types of goods undertaken? By excavating a complete urban block, particularly one that has a range of different building types present, we will be able to leverage the information gained there across the breadth of the city using the geophysical data. This will allow us to generate preliminary models of social organization with the city.

Excavations in 2011 were designed to expose more of the multi-room structure in the northeastern corner of Urban Block 8, in which the ivory plaque was found, and to field test new sampling methodologies. Trench 29 (TR29) measured 20 m in length and 7.7 m in

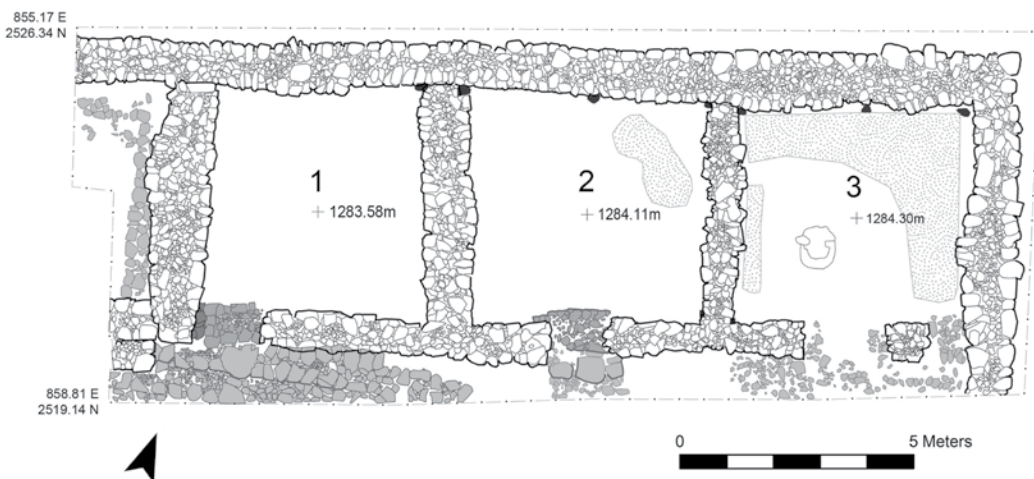


Figure 4. Plan of Trench 29 (TR29)

KERKENES DAĞ



Figure 5. Photograph of TR29 after excavation

plaster floor was best preserved, the charred remains of a portion of one of the supporting vertical support posts was found lying upon the floor pointing back to the post base that it once stood upon.

Each room excavated so far within this building seems to have been dedicated to different activities and functions. Previous excavations suggested that Room 1 was used for the

width with a small extension to the west for a total area of 159.33 m² (fig. 4). It exposed the full extents of two additional rooms of this structure (Rooms 2 and 3), removed the considerable backfill from the room in which the ivory was found (Room 1), and sampled a small portion of a fourth room or roofed porch to the west. Thresholds and doorways to each of the first three rooms were also exposed, as were portions of external pavements leading up to the structure (fig. 5).

The entire building was a single-story structure with the lower courses of the walls constructed of dry-laid stone. Slots and simple post bases within and in front of these lower courses of the wall once held the vertical posts supporting the timber-framed superstructure and hypothesized thatched roof. Each room has also displayed some evidence for internal plastering, with portions of preserved plaster floors found in each of the three main rooms along with traces of plain wall plaster on the preserved lower walls in all four rooms. In Room 3, where the

plaster floor was best preserved, the charred remains of a portion of one of the supporting vertical support posts was found lying upon the floor pointing back to the post base that it once stood upon. Each room excavated so far within this building seems to have been dedicated to different activities and functions. Previous excavations suggested that Room 1 was used for the storage of high-value items, such as the chair from which the ivory plaque was broken. Of the three rooms examined so far, only Room 1 had a well-preserved stone socket for the pivot of the door. This, along with a better constructed threshold and the presence of the laid stone pavement leading up to the door, shows more investment of labor in the means of access to this room. Room 2 was also likely used for storage, though of a more common sort. Near the center of the room a higher concentration of large pottery sherds were detected, including one sherd that bore an incised mark (fig. 6). Subsequent analysis of the ceramics identified six larger storage vessels within this distribution, which most likely were located on or near the floor



Figure 6. The sherd with an incised mark found in Room 2 of TR29

of the room at the time it was destroyed. A significant amount of carbonized wheat was recovered as well from this context, suggesting that the room and the vessels may have been used for grain storage. The function of Room 3 seems to be more closely tied to food preparation activities. A U-shaped hearth was found in the southwestern quadrant of the room. Flotation of the contexts within and around the hearth once again revealed relatively high quantities of carbonized wheat. Other finds from the room included an iron knife blade, which may have been used in food preparation activities, as well as a beautiful blue and yellow colored glass bead (fig. 7) and a part of a copper alloy pin, which may have been worn by the people who once used the room.



Figure 7. Six views of the blue and yellow colored glass bead found in Room 3 of TR29

As in years past, following excavation and recording, the fragile floors and interior surface of each room were covered in geotextile and backfilled to a protective depth. The walls were rebuilt as necessary and capped with a leveled course of stone in order to allow visitors to the site to see the location of the buildings within this ancient urban block. This provides a nice balance between preserving the excavated remains while also allowing visitors to understand what has been excavated. Signs depicting plans and descriptions of what was found will be added once the entire urban block has been excavated and conserved.

Paleoenvironmental Research

Complementing the ongoing excavations within Urban Block 8 was the paleoenvironmental research directed by Mac Marston of Brown University. This season the focus of this research was both on the construction of our own SMAP-style flotation machine and on implementing the proposed sampling strategies to aid in the identification of activity areas within the urban block. Our new flotation machine, directly patterned on a flotation machine generously provided to us by the nearby Çadır Höyük Project the previous year, incorporated an extensive recycling system to minimize the amount of water that the flotation machine requires for operation (fig. 8). This was a critical need given the meager water resources in the village during the summer months. Funding for the new flotation machine was generously provided by Catherine Novotny-Brehm.



Figure 8. The new flotation machine all set up. This machine incorporates multiple water settling tanks to minimize overall water usage

Excavations and Restoration in the Cappadocia Gate

The 2011 season brought to a spectacular close the excavations undertaken by Geoffrey Summers within the Cappadocia Gate (fig. 9). Initial clearance of this major gate within the city started as far back as the 1999 season, while focused excavations to complete this work were started in 2009 (see *2009–2010 Annual Report*, pp. 67–69). Going hand in hand with the excavations has been an impressive restoration effort of the nearly 4 m high glacis and freestanding walls.

Excavation focused on the rear section of the gate between the West and North Towers, the last section of the gate to remain unexcavated (fig. 10). Starting at a point almost in line with the back of the semi-ionic stela's stepped platform and continuing to just beyond the end of the projecting West and North Towers, the excavations uncovered a large central stone pavement, flanking rooms, and the negative remains of wooden thresholds for a pair of monumental doorways. As in the entranceway to the Palatial Complex, the wooden thresholds and doors had completely burned away in the massive fire, leaving behind only the heavily burnt rubble fill just below the level of the threshold and iron bands and nails that once held the doors together (fig. 11).

Between the two thresholds, on opposite sides of the central stone pavement, three rooms were identified. Against the face of the West Tower were uncovered two small rooms,

perhaps for guards or storage. Opposite these rooms a single long room was discovered. It was built against both the face of the North Tower and the back of the stela platform. This room was largely devoid of finds other than a remarkable carved stone plinth set at an angle to the northern corner of the room and part of the remains of a unique limestone sculpture scattered around it. A central tenon for securing the sculpture was still to be found broken off in a slot in the top of the plinth. Apparently as the gate collapsed during the final destruction of the city the sculpture was broken by falling stones and timbers. Much of what remained was then taken away by someone unknown at some point after the destruction of the city. Having carefully examined numerous fragments of the sculpture that remained in the room it is apparent that the great majority of it is missing. Yet that is not the only

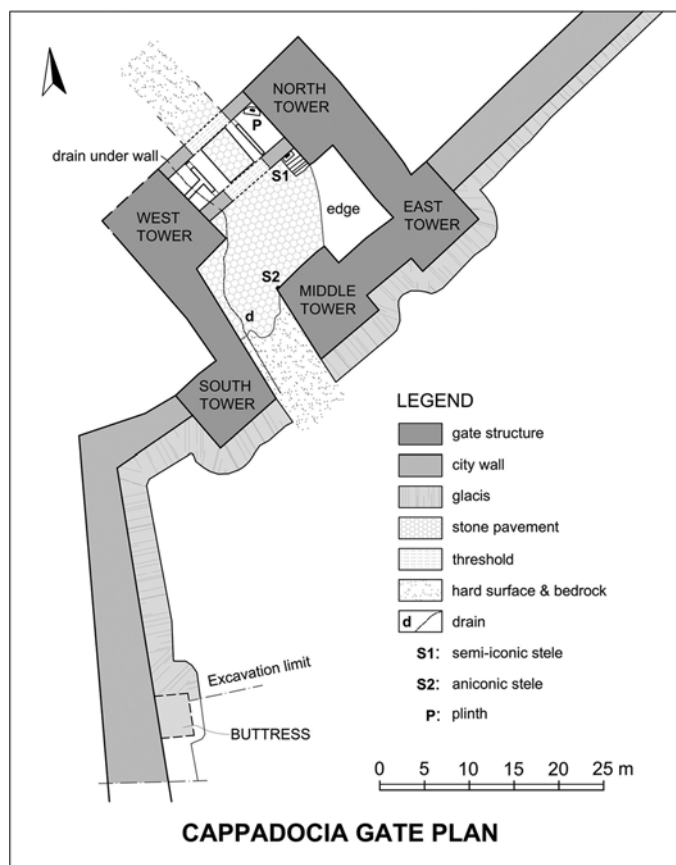


Figure 9. Final plan of the Cappadocia Gate following the 2011 excavations

mystery that this room held. It appears that originally the long side of the room facing the central pavement lacked a wall, allowing people entering the city to perhaps view the plinth and sculpture. At some point the opening was walled up from the outside, as evidenced by the poor construction of the wall's inner face. The preserved extents of this wall are not sufficient to determine if this wall completely blocked the view into the room of those walking past. However, it is a significant and somewhat perplexing event that must relate in some way to the sculpture within the room.

The sandstone plinth is about 1.5 m long and just over 0.5 m in height (fig. 12). The front of the plinth is carved with two well-executed sphinxes facing one another, their outstretched paws touching and their tails curling back around their bodies. Pieces from the upper half of the carving exhibit more wear than those below, indicating that after the destruction of the gate at least part of the plinth was still exposed to the



Figure 10. Area of excavations in 2011 within the Cappadocia Gate



Figure 11. View of the excavation area including one of the burnt thresholds, central pavement, and the stone plinth after excavation

KERKENES DAĞ



Figure 12. The stone plinth, as excavated, with the broken limestone tenon still within the slot on the top of the plinth



Figure 13. A few of the remaining fragments of the limestone sculpture that once stood on top of the plinth. It is unknown how the represented scales are incorporated into the composition of the sculpture



Figure 14. The front and back of the gold and electrum ornament discovered in the rear doorway of the Cappadocia Gate

elements. It obviously suffered damage during the destruction, with the face cracked and barely adhering to the main block. As it was excavated, very careful recording was undertaken to allow its subsequent cleaning and reconstruction. The pieces of the sculpture on top of the plinth (fig. 13), meanwhile, exhibit a range of different elements such as braids of hair or mane, scales from an animal or armor, and smooth curving surfaces. No adequate parallels have been found for the sculpture, making identification of its subject matter largely speculative at this time.

One other exceptional object was uncovered at the rear doorway of the gate. This gold and electrum ornamental piece shows exquisite craftsmanship, despite being crushed in the destruction (fig. 14). Whether it originally belonged to one of the two individuals whose crushed skeletons were found in the collapse of the gate we will never know. However, with the expert assistance of Dr. Yılmaz Erdal and his team from Hacettepe University in Ankara, the second of these skeletons was removed and identified as male. Could he and the woman found earlier in the gate have been together? Were they separated in the dense smoke and chaos as the gate burned and collapsed? Or were they merely two separate individuals who both met their end in the same unfortunate location? Some questions archaeology may never be able to answer.

While excavations were completed in the Cappadocia Gate,

restoration efforts continued in 2011 and are expected to continue into future seasons (figs. 15 and 16). This work was once again directed by two restoration architects from Istanbul Technical University (ITU), Erkan Kambek and Dr. Nilufer Yöneş. They were assisted in the work this year by stone masons from Uşak, Turkey. Work focused on the collapsing corners and walls of the Middle, North, and West Towers within the gate. The Middle Tower has proved particularly complicated being more susceptible to heavy rains. However, more experimental work on the North and West Towers, where the walls were stabilized internally with new timber beams, proved quite successful. Future attempts with these same techniques on the wall of the Middle Tower should prove more successful.

Community Outreach and Ethnographic Studies

A key facet of the Kerkenes Dağ Project over the years has been our commitment to working with and engaging the local village on a number of levels. Through sister initiatives, such as the Kerkenes Eco-Center, we have implemented ways to positively impact the sustainability of rural life in villages such as Şahmurath. It also provides a means by



Figure 15. Restoration efforts of the North and West Towers involved incorporation of new wooden beams behind the facing stones in order to replace the beams that burned out in the final destruction of the city



Figure 16. The central court of the Cappadocia Gate following restoration efforts on the three towers

KERKENES DAĞ

which we can give back to the village for their generous hospitality. The support of the local community for an archaeological project is absolutely essential for its success, it is also essential to the long-term protection of the site.

Beginning in 2010 and continuing last year, Assistant Director Dr. Sevil Baltalı Tırpan of Istanbul Technical University has been developing a joint archaeological outreach and ethnographic project within the village. A key component of the work in 2011 was to begin to understand how the landscapes of Kerkenes, including the archaeological project ongoing within its walls, are conceptualized by the people of Şahmuratlı. Maps were created of over twenty areas in and around the site that can then be related to different stories, knowledge, and experiences that are being recorded and explored in interviews with people from across the village. Such work will strengthen our understanding of the site and of our neighbors, who will live with and protect the site for decades to come.

Acknowledgments

The Kerkenes Dağ Project is a joint project between the Oriental Institute and the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara. It is co-directed by Dr. Geoffrey Summers of Middle East Technical University (METU) and myself. Dr. Sevil Baltalı Tırpan of Istanbul Technical University (ITU) is the project's Assistant Director. The Kerkenes Eco-Center Project is directed by Françoise Summers of METU. Restoration work in the Cappadocia Gate has been overseen by Erkan Kambek and Nilüfer Baturayoğlu Yöney of ITU.

Our thanks for a successful 2011 season go to the General Director, Murat Süslü, and staff of the General Directorate of Cultural Property and Museums. Our representatives this year were Çiğdem Demiroğlu from the General Directorate and Serpil Ölmez from the Yozgat Museum. Our thanks also go to the Yozgat Director of Culture and Tourism, Lütfi İbiş, and to the staff of the Yozgat Museum, especially Museum Director Hasan Şenyurt. We are grateful to the Governor of Yozgat Necati Şentürk, the Yozgat Mayor Yusuf Başer, the Directors of the Provincial Authority, TEDAŞ, Türk Telekom, the Sorgun District Governor Levent Kılıç, and Sorgun Mayor Ahmet Şimşek who along with their staffs provided continued critical support for numerous aspects of the project.

Principal sponsors in 2011 were the Loeb Classical Library Foundation, the Oriental Institute, the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, the Archaeocommunity Foundation, Andrea Dudek, Catherine Novotny Brehm, an anonymous American donor, John Kelly, John Notz, Hazel Bertz, the AICC, the Anglo-Turkish Society, the Binks Trust, the Charlotte Bonham-Carter Trust, Çimpor Yibitaş Yozgat Çimento, AKG Gazbeton, MESA, Peter Sommer Travels, UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, and Yenigün. A full list of all participants and sponsors can be found on our website.

References

Dusinberre, Elspeth R. M.

- 2002 "An Excavated Ivory from Kerkenes Dağ, Turkey: Transcultural Fluidities, Significations of Collective Identity, and the Problem of Median Art." *Ars Orientalis* 32: 17–54.

Greaves, Alan M.

- 2010 *The Land of Ionia: Society and Economy in the Archaic Period*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.