



KERKENES DAĞ PROJECT

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The past year was the first in two decades that we were not physically in the field at Kerkenes Dağ. Yet the year was hardly uneventful. It was a year of political intrigue and high-level diplomacy. It was a year in which new collaborations and connections were formed and old ones renewed, which will sustain the research of the project for decades to come. It grew out of a chaotic transition of project directors, starting in 2012, as a team with no previous experience at the site used political connections to work there. It has ended in 2014 with a return to the field and a renewed vision of a bright future of research at this important ancient city.

The true strength of the project over these past twenty years has been the breadth and diversity of our collaborations. Universities, researchers, and students from across Turkey and around the world have participated and contributed to the pioneering methods employed by the project. The results achieved have not only been archaeological, but also have been in partnering areas of ethnography, ecology, and sustainability studies. Teamwork has long been a hallmark of archaeological fieldwork, but with a site the size and scope of Kerkenes Dağ it is absolutely essential. Initially, the primary organizations involved in the project were the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara (BIAA) and Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. The University of Chicago has been involved at Kerkenes Dağ since I joined the project in 1995, reprising its initial survey and excavations at the site in the 1920s under the direction of H. H. von der Osten and Erich Schmidt. The University of California, Berkeley, was a partner for several years in the early 2000s, while other partner institutions such as Istanbul Technical University (ITU) and Abdullah Gül University (AGU) in Kayseri have joined more recently. Going forward, our partnerships with ITU and AGU will be broadened and deepened as we jointly move forward with all aspects of our ambitious research program.

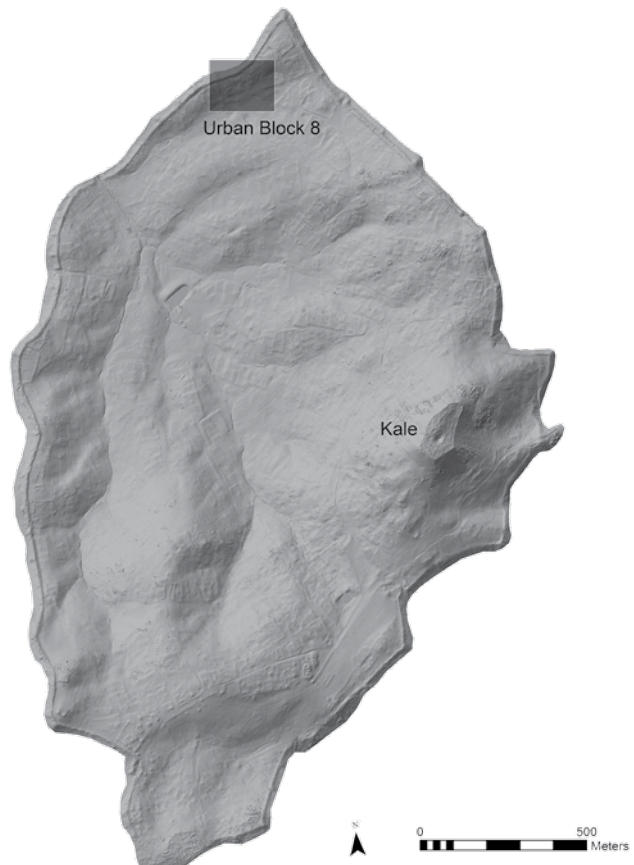


Figure 1. Map of Kerkenes Dağ showing Urban Block 8, the site of future work intended to better understand the people that lived in this important late Iron Age city



Figure 2. The central portion of the city as seen in September 2011 from Digital Globe's WorldView 2 satellite. This is one of the time series of satellite images of the city acquired in 2013 to monitor changes to the site from space

Typifying the politics and diplomacy that characterized this year was an interesting invitation that I received while in Ankara in May 2013. I had arrived in Ankara from Chicago a week earlier to meet with our collaborators and the General Directorate that oversees archaeological excavations in Turkey, in order to press our permit application during a particularly critical part of the lengthy process. Returning to my room after a long day of meetings and a late dinner, I found an odd e-mail purportedly from the vice president of the United States, or at least his office, on my computer. I went to bed that night almost certainly convinced that it was some sort of e-mail scam. Calls to the American Embassy and the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT) the next morning revealed, to my amazement, that the e-mail was legitimate. The Turkish prime minister was visiting Washington, D.C., and our efforts had led to an invitation being issued to me to join the state luncheon for the prime minister, hosted by the Vice President Biden and the secretary of state. I was left with seventy-two hours to schedule a flight back to Washington, D.C., from Ankara and to find appropriate attire along the way. The luncheon proved invaluable to our political efforts to press for the archaeological permit. The sudden and unforeseen arrival of the invitation was quite emblematic of how fortuitous events and assistance from all quarters worked together to lead us through this very difficult period. Things were never easy, but they all worked together beautifully in the end to help reach our goal of returning to Kerkenes Dağ.

Yet while the permit was in limbo during this year, aspects of the project continued unabated. One consequence of the uncertainty over the permit at Kerkenes Dağ was the presence of a looters' hole discovered in late 2012 near the area that we were working in 2011. While it was just a small area of illegal excavation, certainly not on par with the larger-scale looting of tumuli in the area that has been increasing over the past decade, it was certainly troubling to see. We therefore took the opportunity in 2013 to acquire multiple satellite

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images of the site in order to monitor from space any additional looting at the site. Thanks in large part to a fortuitous sale on satellite imagery that the Digital Globe company was running at the time, we were able to use the funds set aside for the Kerkenes Dağ monitoring project to also procure satellite images of the looted tumuli fields. Both efforts will form an important baseline survey against which we can continue to vigilantly monitor the area and hopefully assist the local museum and police to curtail future looting across the region. Work also continued during this year on the publication of the results of prior years of survey and excavation. Two monographs were submitted to the Oriental Institute for publication and a third is well underway.



Figure 3. A view of the city in early June looking north from its southernmost extents. The large hill to the right of center is the site of the later Byzantine Kale marked in figure 1

While political events sometimes prevent the best laid plans of archaeologists, years like this also afford an opportunity to strengthen collaborations and reassess future goals. Ahead of us lie many more years of work, and an ambitious program of excavation within the urban blocks of the city in order to better understand the people and households that inhabited it and the range of activities that they undertook in their daily lives. Renewed excavations within one of the most interesting urban blocks, Urban Block 8, are scheduled to start in a few weeks. The thrill of discovery will soon blunt the disappointment of a lost year in the field. While at the same time, the connections made during this difficult year and the ties to collaborators that were strengthened will help form a stronger foundation for the entire project moving forward.

Acknowledgments

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