The Hirbemerdon Tepe Archaeological Project 2008: A Preliminary Report

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T.C.
KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI
KÜLTÜR VARLIKLARI VE MÜZELER GENEL MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

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The Hirbemerdon Tepe Archaeological Project 2008: A Preliminary Report

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AYRI BASIM
In 2008, the archaeological work at Hibernemeron Tappe continued following...

...and though the site is characterized by multiple phases, its major archaeological features and potential hunting activities were prominent, even subsistence economy that includes agricultural activities along the river rises towards the Tu‘r Abdin, creating a perfect landscape for a combined southeastern limit of the river valley where the natural limestone formation

Hibernemeron Tappe is a site located along the left bank of the upper Tigris.
the premises traced in the previous six years of work and have been based upon a broader understanding of the role the site had in the history of the upper Tigris river valley. During this archaeological campaign, the Hirbemerdon Tepe Archaeological Project was focused on defining and further investigating the following points:

1) To enlarge the exposure of the area of the architectural complex dating to the Middle Bronze Age in the High Mound (Area A). In particular, archaeological excavation was performed in the public/ceremonial sector located in the southern part of the complex.

2) To begin with the excavation of the Step Trench AB-AC that will cut through the whole High Mound and guarantee a better understanding of the chronological phases of occupation in this area of the site. In so doing, we decided to first test the area north of the architectural complex to better define the phases of occupation occurring before the construction of the architectural complex at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

3) To continue with the regional survey of the area surrounding the site of Hirbemerdon Tepe.

*Excavation on the High Mound*

The investigation on the High Mound aimed at extending the eastern limit of the architectural complex of the Middle Bronze Age. In so doing, we excavated a 20x10 m. trench positioned along the main E-W section (Fig. 1). As noticed in the previous archaeological campaigns, the latest archaeological loci correspond to a series of badly disturbed architectural features belonging to the Medieval/Islamic period and the Iron Age phase. While the Medieval/Islamic is recognizable only in a few patches of walls and little material culture (e.g., Glazed Ware), the levels belonging to the Iron Age phase are more complex to identify and are comprised of an Early

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2 For a better understanding of these later phases, we are planning the excavation of a step trench starting from the 2009 season.

With these premises in mind, our main scientific efforts have been dedicated

Ware (Laneri et al. 2008).

numerous other settlements of the region, the so-called Red Brown Wash
evident from the pottery assemblage that characterizes the site as well as
millennium B.C. that is the Middle Bronze Age (Figs. 2 and 3). This is especially
phase of occupation of this small-sized site was the first half of the second
of Hibis Perimene Tepe in 2003 (Laneri 2003), it has been clear that the main
Starting from the first work of archaeological reconnaissance at the site

The Archaeological Complex of the Middle Bronze Age

presence of a large architectural complex.

However, the most important archaeological phase at Hibis Perimene Tepe

This region (Maloney et al. 2007: 43-44).

a broad post-Assyrian horizon visible at numerous other sites of the upper
area with long painted Iranshahr-inspired by horizontal lines) that belong to
this later phase is represented by different variations of painted ware (e.g.
the one found at Ziyaret Tepe (Maloney et al. 2007: Figs. 20-21); while the latest part
has shown a few architectural features, pottery and in Iron Dagger similar to
and Common Ware of the Neo-Assyrian Period: the Late Assyrian phase
and Common Ware of the Neo-Assyrian period, a Late Assyrian and a post-Assyrian phase

Iron Age / Neo-Assyrian Period; a Late Assyrian and a post-Assyrian (i.e.,
The archaeological work has confirmed the premises and a series of radiocarbon dates have further demonstrated that this architectural complex chronologically ranges between ca. 2064 and 1416 B.C. (Laneri et al. 2006). The architectural complex can be possibly divided into three main sectors (Fig. 2): one central sector dedicated to more public/ceremonial activities; another area, separated from the central one by a long alley, that is marked by the presence of long narrow buildings built in an agglutinated manner and that show clear signs of working activities, such as mortars, pestles, grinding stones and hydraulic facilities found in situ; and finally, a third sector located in the southwest corner with an unclear function.

In particular, the archaeological work of last summer concentrated on investigating the southeastern part of the public/ceremonial sector (Fig. 3). This section of the architectural complex is composed of at least two large outdoor spaces, in one of which the archaeologists have discovered numerous unique objects whose function was ceremonial. Moreover, most of these objects, such as highly decorated ceramic vessels, human and animal clay figurines, and clay votive plaques (Fig. 4), were recovered nearby a stone basin located along the southwestern edge of the piazza.

Next to the piazza lays a monumental building that has only one entrance from the main alley and is based on an antechamber and a series of rooms. Among these rooms, a long room appears as the most important one. It is directly accessible from the antechamber through a door that is in axis with the main door serving the whole building and is marked by a stone altar and two perpendicular drains located behind it (Fig. 3). This room was monumental as is demonstrated by its size, the thickness of the outer walls and the large flagstones paving it. Moreover, a foundation deposit, consisting of a piglet inserted in a fine cup of the Red Brown Wash Ware assemblage, was found in the northeastern corner of this room and further emphasizes its importance. During the excavation of 2008, our main goal has been to bring to light the room lying directly east of the long-room, that is room 52. This room has its entrance from a vestibule located next to the antechamber and was sealed
in which the ubiquitous presence of the red brown wash appears.

concomitantly, Middle Bronze Age sites of the upper Tigris valley, within the architectural complex, have clear parallels with Repositories from within the pottery assemblage, most of the pottery categories found

sized stones and fragmented storage jars.

and broken vessels were found, whereas the other one was filled with mid-late architectural complex. Moreover, in one of these rooms numerous whole

were accessible from the plaza and the monumentality of the whole facade

between the floors of the uppermost building and the plaza's floor. The rooms

at a lower level. Four measures of difference in elevations are recognizable

case make the manner in order to connect this higher building to the plaza located

a mud-brick superstructure and a series of small rooms constructed in an

an extraordinary retaining construction consisting of a wide stone wall built

To further emphasize its monumentality, the western side was built on top of

almost total lack of working logs suggests a public purpose for this sector, with

location and monumentality both in plan and archtilecture together with an

the function and the distinctive features of this building. However, its central

Due to its poor state of preservation, it is very difficult to recognize both

consists of a series of outdoor and indoor rooms and wide external walls.
because of later pits and of the slope, this building is poorly preserved and

The function of these ceremonial spaces prior to their abandonment. The

of a square bench of stone foundation and mud-brick superstructure. A few

by the collapse of the roof. Along the western wall the archaeologists found

main plaza.

ceremonial objects were probably disposed of and purposely broken in the
as a marker for the first half of the second millennium B.C. whereas the painted ware (that we named Pseudo-Khabur Ware) forms a clear link with northeastern Syria (Laneri et al. 2008).

In terms of paleobotanical analysis carried out at the site by Matte Held, the assemblage of crops is quite typical for the Middle Bronze Age in this region as well as at other northern Syrian and southeastern Anatolian sites (Laneri et al. 2008). However, the presence of grapes and other remains of *Vitis Vinifera* within some of the rooms of the ‘architectural complex’ appears of great importance for a better understanding of the socioeconomic landscape of the region during the Middle Bronze Age.

For the faunal remains, the analysis has been initiated by Remi Berthon who has included in his study both the Middle and Late Bronze Age levels (Laneri et al. 2008). The first data show a subsistence based on domestic animals. According to Berthon, cattle were of great importance in the food supply at the site during these archaeological phases. The high number of pigs and caprines bones also suggests that both had an important role in the economy of the site. While pigs were a good meat supplier, sheep and goat could have been used also for secondary products as indicated by the relative high number of old individuals. Hunting was also an important factor at Hirbmerdon Tepe during the second millennium B.C. as has been demonstrated by the presence of antler and deer bones.

*The Step Trench AB-AC*

Another important step towards a better understanding of the chronological sequence at Hirbmerdon Tepe is the excavation of a long step trench of about 3 meters wide and 50 meters long that will further investigate the northern sector of the High Mound (Fig. 1). As a preliminary step in this direction, last summer we decided to investigate the area north of the architectural complex (the AB section). In so doing, we have been able to define a few disturbed floors directly underneath the complex’s architecture. In particular, Locus 12

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suitable for agriculture. Because of its agricultural potential the terraces
unsettlement for agriculture. Because of its agricultural potential the terraces
2002, Kuznetsova 2002), and in eastern zone of dry eroded uplands that are
areas a western zone of cultivated terraces and low hills (Dogan
The survey region can be roughly divided into two geomorphological
millennium or more.
faces of pastoral nomadic groups that have settled in the region over the last
patterns of MBA settlement complementarily with Himemerdjon, and also the
use and modification beyond the sites. We are particularly interested in the
human occupation of the region and to identify various forms of human land
(use Fig. 5). Our goals are to document traces of secondary and non-secondary
June 2008. Our survey region is a 48 km² area on the right bank of the Tigris
The Himemerdjon Typo-Regional Survey (HTRS) conducted its second season in

Himemerdjon Typo-Regional Survey

Further confirmation of a possible occupation at the site during these periods,
earlier archaeological concepts not recognizable by the excavation, but due
above the natural bedrock. These sherds are probably part of a washing of
fragments of Churrace IV ware of the Chalcolithic period were found directly
B.C. Pottery assemblages (e.g., Fine Ware and Metallic Ware) and a few
addition to these data, fragments of the first half of the third millennium
between the late third and early second millennium B.C.

Thus, these data confirm a cultural continuity at this site
scattered and badly disturbed phase of architecture belonging to the late third
emerging from this section of the steppe, Fresh Wash Ware, the element that is
together with earlier types of Red Brown Wash Ware. The excavated area is
brought to light in layers directly underneath Middle Bronze Age levels and
survey. Moreover, in the outer town Dark Rimmed Orange Bowls were
Rimmed Orange Bowls were found out of context during the excavation and
that are typical of a late third millennium B.C. Horizon. Other samples of Dark
has brought to our attention a high density of Dark Rimmed Orange Bowls
are where most sedentary settlement is found. The eastern uplands have very limited pockets of cultivatable soil and have been used primarily as pasture.

In the 2007 season, most of our efforts were in the western cultivated terraces. The largest sites (tepes) were defined by the edges of mounding and collected in sub-areas. These sites were only a small portion of the total archaeological landscape, however. Elsewhere, fieldwalkers made transects at 25 m. intervals across harvested agricultural fields. Artifacts were marked with color coded flags (red for lithics, blue for ceramics) and collected. The positions of the flags were then recorded via a GPS-enabled mobile computer. Sites were defined by interpolating the density of surface scatters in a GIS framework. The eastern uplands, which were subjected to a brief reconnaissance that was guided by high resolution Ikonos satellite imagery in 2007, were the primary focus of survey in the 2008 season. A range of sedentary sites, campsites, and various landscape features were identified (discussed below). In total, we recovered 92 places that were termed “sites,” although they vary from multi-hectare mounded tepes to light scatters of Paleolithic tools. The general classes of site types are described below.

Tepes. The HMTS region has three mounded sites. Hırbemerdon Tepe (Site 1) and Kavuşak Tepe (Site 4) were already identified by Algaze during his survey of the Batman-Bismil region (Algaze 1989, Algaze et al. 1991). Other mounded sites exist to the south (Güzel Köy, Site 34) and southwest (Ahmetli Tepe, beyond the survey limits). Mounded sites in the Upper Tigris region are small compared to those found in the broad alluvial plains in adjacent areas of northern Mesopotamia, mostly under 5 hectares. All of the mounded sites in the HMTS region had MBA occupation.

Unmounded Ceramic Scatters. The cultivated fields in the HMTS region are characterized by an almost continuous scatter of small artifacts at a low density, a phenomenon known throughout the Near East and Mediterranean (Wilkinson 1982, Bintliff and Snodgrass 1988). Transect walking in the area immediately around Hırbemerdon Tepe revealed elevated concentrations of artifacts that represent sites (Fig. 6). Two of them (Sites 19 and 22) were
surface survey alone. They may mark the burials of pastoral nomads, or
they might represent some other form of symbolic or ritual activity. Because
they have little associated material culture, they are difficult to date without
excavation.

Campsites. The Upper Tigris region as been the location of winter pasture
grounds (kişlak) since at least the 15th century, when tribes of the Akkoyunlu
confederacy controlled the area (Woods 1999). In more recent times,
transhumant Kurdish tribes have migrated between the Taurus mountains
in the summer and descended into the Tigris valley and foothills during the
winter months (Cribb 1991:196-207, based on the work of Beşikçi, Hütteroth
1959). In the 2008 field season, several campsites in the eastern uplands were
visited and planned (reported in detail in Ur and Hammer 2009). Site 18 is
a 20th century camp consisting of stone built rectangular animal enclosures
and cleared spaces where tents were erected (Fig. 9). Further down the wadi,
an older and more disturbed campsite (Site 26) is probably far older, but had
little surface artifacts in association. The archaeology of pastoral nomads has
been understudied in the Near East, and the eastern uplands offer important
new empirical evidence for them.

Cisterns and Other Water Catchment Features. Near the campsites in the
eastern uplands were found several features for capturing and storing runoff
rainfall. These features would have been critical for providing drinking water
for people and animals in this otherwise dry zone. Southeast of the Site 18
campsite, a cistern (sarnuş) was cut into the side of a wadi (Site 24). It was fed
by two small channels carved into a large area of exposed bedrock. Rainfall
would have flowed across the bedrock, into the channels, and then into the
tank of the cistern, which could have held 9 m³ of water. Another method
of water capture was found at Site 28, where a circular stone structure was
built in the base of a wadi. Water flowing down the wadi would have been
redirected and held in the structure. This feature was probably intended
for watering animals. These water catchment features demonstrate the
modifications and adaptations of human groups to the otherwise inhospitable
During both ancient and more recent times, the relationship to the relationship between pastoralists and agricultural communities allowed us to further investigate a fundamental topic for archaeological studies, the Fertile Crescent. The survey of the Tell el-Far'ah North and South sites will allow us to determine the chronological and cultural landscape of the interaction between the Middle Bronze Age and the Iron Age. In addition, the survey allowed us to discern the importance of the site in the surrounding region and show that the landscapes of pastoral nomads can be eastern uplands.

Conclusions
(Southeastern Turkey) as Documented by Archaeological Data. *Quaternary International* 129: 75-86.


Fig. 1: Map of Hörişmerdön Tepê

To Be Excavated Areas

Excavated Areas

Hörişmerdön Tepê 2008
Fig. 2: The architectural complex of the Middle Bronze Age

Fig. 3: View of the ceremonial/public sector of the Middle Bronze Age architectural complex
complex
architectural
in the plaza of the
reconstructed day

Fig. 4: A partially
reconstructed day
Fig. 6: Surface artifact concentrations in the area around Hirbemerdon Tepe

Fig. 7: Lower Paleolithic hand axes from the Tigris terrace NE of Hirbemerdon Tepe
Fig. 9: The pastoral nomadic campsite at Site 18.

Fig. 8: The cairn field at Site 16.