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Rolf A. Stucky – Oskar Kaelin – Hans-Peter Mathys

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Reports



Contents

Iraq	11
Giacomo Benati – Camille Lecompte New Light on the Early Archives from Ur: The «Ancient Room» Tablet Hoard	13
Eloisa Casadei Southern Mesopotamian Contexts and a Reevaluation of the Ur III Pottery. Reconsidering a Chronological Periodization	31
Franco D'Agostino – Ali Khadem Ghanim – Licia Romano Abu Tbeirah. Preliminary Report of the 2012–2013 Campaigns	45
Paul Zimansky – Elizabeth Stone Tell Sakhariya and Gaeš	57
Iraq (Kurdistan)	67
Kyra Kaercher A Preliminary Assessment of the Ceramic Sequence of Northeastern Iraqi Kurdistan	69
John MacGinnis – Timothy Matney – Kemalettin Koroğlu Excavations in the Lower Town of Ziyaret Tepe 2012 and 2013	83
Karel Nováček – Miroslav Melčák The Medieval Urban Landscape in Northeastern Mesopotamia (MULINEM): First Two Years of the Project	95
Maria Grazia Masetti-Rouault – Olivier Rouault French Excavations in Qasr Shemamok, Iraqi Kurdistan (2013 and 2014 campaigns): the Assyrian Town and Beyond	107
Tevfik Emre Şerifoğlu – Jesse Casana – Claudia Glatz – Shwkr Muhammed Haydar Initial Results of the Sirwan (Upper Diyala) Regional Project	119
Tim B. B. Skuldbøl – Carlo Colantoni First Results of the Rania Plain Survey. Salvage Operations in the Dokan Dam Inundation Zone	131
Aline Tenu – Christine Kepinski Kunara, a Bronze Age City on the Upper Tanjaro (Iraq)	147

Syria	161
Cristina Baccarin Consumption in a Temple? An Interpretation of the Ceramic Repertoire of the Early Bronze Age Temple at Tell Ahmar (North Syria)	163
Anna Gómez Bach Characterizing <i>Red Ware</i> : More than a Single Production at Tell Halula (Syria) at the End of the Halaf Period	177
Guy Bunnens A 3rd Millennium Temple at Tell Ahmar (Syria)	187
Marta D'Andrea New Data from Old Excavations: Preliminary Study of the EB IVB Pottery from Area H at Tell Mardikh/Ebla, Syria	199
Stephanie Döpper The LBA pottery of Area BU in the Royal Palace of Qatna, Syria	217
Frank Hole Historical Processes on the Middle Khabur River, Syria, during the Late Ubaid: Intrusion, Attenuation and Divergence	231
Béatrice Muller Panneaux d'incrustation en coquille de Mari, Ville II: implications des matériaux et des techniques	243
Paola Poli Seals and Sealings from Tell Masaikh–Kar-Assurnasirpal. Some New Results	257
Agnese Vacca New Data on the EB III–IVA1 of North-Western Syria in the light of Old and Recent Excavations at Tell Mardikh/Ebla and Tell Tuqan	269
Turkey	283
Gulan Ayaz The Early Iron Age Jewellery from the Karagündüz Necropolis in Eastern Anatolia and Its Relationship to Southern Caucasia	285
Alice Boccia Paterakis – Sachihiro Omura Gold Cloisonné from the Assyrian Colony Period in Central Anatolia	293
Müge Bulu An Intact Palace Kitchen Context from Middle Bronze Age Alalakh: Organization and Function	301
Nilgün Coşkun Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods of the Harran Plain in Light of a Survey	315

Contents	7
Anacleto D'Agostino – Valentina Orsi Researches at Uşaklı Höyük (Central Turkey): Survey, Surface Scraping and First Digging Operations	333
Sevinç Günel A New Centre of Intercultural Relations in Western Anatolia during the Late Bronze Age: Çine-Tepecik	347
Sara Pizzimenti – Federico Zaina The Iron Age at Karkemish between Tradition and Innovation. The Case Study of the Pottery Assemblage from Area C	361
Iran	377
Rasoul Seyedin Boroujeni – Saman Hamzavi Zarghani – Mohsen Zeidi Discovery of Long Term Occupation in the Saimarreh River Valley, Western Iran (Report on the Archaeological Survey)	379
Enzo Cocca – Andrea Genito – Bruno Genito – Giulio Maresca A WebGIS about the Italian Archaeological Activities in Sistan, Iran (60s–70s of the 20th century): Archaeo.Pro.Di.Mu.S.	393
Nicolas Assur Corfù Esotericism at Persepolis – Really?	405
Ata Hasanpur – Zahra Hashemi A Comparative Study of the New Sassanid's Stuccos from Qela Gowri, Ramavand, Lorestan, Iran	417
Najmeh Hassas An Introduction to the Traditional Arch and Vault from the Elamite (1250 BC. M.) to the Qajar period (1925) in Iran	429
Vito Messina – Jafar Mehr Kian The Religious Complex at Shami. Preliminary Report on the Research of the Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan at Kal-e Chendar	439
Israel – Lebanon – Levant	449
Eva Katarina Glazer Sedentary and Nomadic Population during Bronze Age Southern Levant: An Example of Cultural Contacts	451
Aaron Greener Analyzing the Late Bronze Age Imported Pottery Distribution in the Southern Levant: Overcoming Methodological Challenges	463
Haskel J. Greenfield – Itzhaq Shai – Aren M. Maeir Understanding Early Bronze Age Urban Patterns from the Perspective of Non-Elite Neighbourhood: The Excavations at Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel	475

Ann E. Killebrew – Jamie Quartermaine Total Archaeology@Tel Akko (The 2013 and 2014 Seasons): Excavation, Survey, Community Outreach and New Approaches to Landscape Archaeology in 3D	491
Florine Marchand L'industrie lithique de Tell 'Arqa (Plaine du Akkar, Liban Nord)	503
Jordan	515
Don Boyer Aqueducts and Birkets: New Evidence of the Water Management System Servicing Gerasa (Jarash), Jordan	517
Marta D'Andrea Pottery Production at Khirbat Iskandar, Jordan. Preliminary Results of the Technological Study of EB IV Pottery from the Site	533
Sumio Fujii Slab-lined Feline Representations: New Finding at 'Awja 1, a Late Neolithic Open-air Sanctuary in Southernmost Jordan	549
Lucas Petit Tell Damiyah. A Small Settlement Mound with a Remarkable International Role	561
Andrea Polcaro – Juan Muñiz – Valentín Alvarez The New Spanish-Italian Expedition to the EB I site of Jebel al-Mutawwaq, Middle Wadi az-Zarqa, Jordan: Preliminary Results of the 2012–2013 Campaigns	571
Suzanne Richard Recent Excavations at Khirbat Iskandar, Jordan. The EB III/IV Fortifications.	585
Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan – Afghanistan	599
Joaquín María Córdoba – Muhammed Mamedov L'âge du fer au Dehistan. Nouvelles recherches archéologiques turkmènes et espagnoles sur les sites de Geoktchik Depe et Izat Kuli (Province de Balkan, Turkménistan)	601
Fabiana Raiano Pottery from the joint Uzbek-Italian Archaeological Mission at Kojtepa (Samarkand Area – Uzbekistan)	615
Victor Sarianidi – Nadezhda Dubova Types of Graves at Gonur Depe Bronze Age Site in Turkmenistan	631
Liliya Sataeva – Robert Sataev Wood Using at the Bronze Age Site Gonur-Depe (Ancient Margiana, South Turkmenistan)	643
Judith Thomalsky Afghanistan: Ancient Mining and Metallurgy: Initial Project Stage	647

Contents	9
Oman	663
Michele Degli Esposti Excavations at the Early Bronze Age Site «ST1» near Bisya (Sultanate of Oman): Notes on the Architecture and Material Culture	665
Stephanie Döpfer Expressions of Collective Memory – The Reuse of EBA Tombs in the Necropolis of Bāt, Sultanate of Oman	679
Conrad Schmidt Mobile Pastoralists as Global Players: Excavations at Al-Zebah, Sultanate of Oman	689
Azerbaijan – Georgia – Caucasus-Region	697
Jeyhun Eminli – Emil Iskenderov Archaeological Investigations at Piboz Tapa Necropolis. Lerik, Southern Azerbaijan (Preliminary Report 2012–2013)	699
Seiji Kadowaki – Farhad Guliyev – Yoshihiro Nishiaki Chipped Stone Technology of the Earliest Agricultural Village in the Southern Caucasus: Hacı Elamxanlı Tepe (the Beginning of the 6th Millennium BC)	709
René Kunze Interdisciplinary Studies on the Small Finds from the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age Settlements of Udabno I–III (Eastern Georgia)	723
General Topics	735
Silvia Alaura – Davide Nadali Researching the Archives: A Shared Past for the Future. The GRISSO Project	737
Gino Caspari Ein Inventar der Hügelgräber im Altaigebirge. Kulturgüterschutz durch Fernerkundung	741
Fabrice De Backer La construction d'un char de guerre néo-assyrien	751
Rita Gautschy Astronomical Data and their Potential for Chronological Purposes	763
Krzysztof Hipp Šamši-Adad V's Campaigns into the Zagros Revisited	769
Chamsia Sadozai – David Gandreau Conserver après la fouille: la question des structures en terre crue à partir d'exemples en Asie centrale	781

Anacleto D'Agostino – Valentina Orsi

Researches at Uşaklı Höyük (Central Turkey): Survey, Surface Scraping and first Digging Operations

The Italian Archaeological Expedition in Central Anatolia has carried out a multidisciplinary research on the site of Uşaklı Höyük and its territory in the years 2008–2013. This paper will present an overview of the results obtained by the survey and 2013 season of excavations.¹

1. From Survey to Excavations: Context, Methods and Results of the Research

The research project of the University of Florence at the site of Uşaklı Höyük has been active for the last seven years under the direction of Stefania Mazzoni. Between 2008 and 2013, the Italian Archaeological Expedition in Central Anatolia has carried out an intensive survey of the site and its territory, producing a rich corpus of materials and information that allows the investigation of the landscape and settlement pattern of this distinct and partially under-explored area of the plateau. This paper will present a summary of the archaeological results obtained from the survey and a preliminary overview of the 2013 excavation season.²

Uşaklı Höyük lies on the southern bank of the Egri Öz Dere, at about 1120 m above sea level, in a land characterised by plains and low hills delimited to the south by the high profile of the Kerkenes Dağ and to the northwest by the mountains of Yozgat (**fig. 1**). The site is clearly visible from the route connecting Yozgat and Sivas, and its position along one of the main E–W roads crossing the plateau favoured visits by travellers and scholars since the first half of 20th century. In the reports of the first western visitors about the area of

1 A. D'Agostino is the author of section 1; V. Orsi of section 2; the conclusion has been co-written.

2 Further details and information on the results of the project are available in the preliminary reports published regularly during the last years. In particular see Mazzoni 2012; Mazzoni et al. 2011; 2014; Pecchioli et al. 2014.

Sorgun, the site is referred to also as Uşaklı, Kuşaklı and Kusachakly (Mazzoni et al. 2011: 91; Summers et al. 1995: 53–59).

The importance of this area within the regional road network is undeniable, since ancient periods when the visibility from the bottom of the valley of the Eğri Öz Dere of important landmarks, such as the Kerkenes Dağ (Summers 2014: 41–44), as well as the mountains surrounding Yozgat the north Pontic chains represented valid visual supports along the itinerary from north-western and northern areas of the plateau towards Kayseri. The position of the site along the route probably linking the Hittite capital Boğazköy/Khattusa to Alişar Höyük/Ankuwa, its distance from these two sites and its visual relation with the imposing high granitic peak of the Kerkenes Dağ were some of the elements that supported the identification of Uşaklı Höyük with the holy city of Zippalanda, mentioned in the textual sources as an important cult centre of the Storm God Tahawašezzu, son of the Storm God of Hatti.³

Uşaklı consists of a somewhat oval flat mound named the terrace, with an extent of around 10 ha, at the south-eastern edge of which rises an approximately circular high mound covering an area of about 2 ha (**fig. 2a**). The mound has steep slopes covered by vegetation and used for grazing cows. The terrace and its slightly sloping sides have been cultivated, until recent times. The resulting periodic ploughing activity, that inevitably disturbed the buried strata, brought to light a variety of archaeological materials that attracted our interest.

The Uşaklı Höyük Archaeological Project included different field activities, to which the different seasons of work were dedicated. The survey focused on the mound of Uşaklı and a small area immediately around the site, with a range of ca. 5/6 km. This surrounding area represents the hinterland of the site, a variegated environment encompassing hilly lands and rocky outcrops, where streams and springs, field and pasturelands are the main components of the physical landscapes. Firstly a team of archaeologists and geologists examined the territory of Uşaklı, their work aimed at understanding the anthropic and physical landscape. Consequently an integrated and multidisciplinary prospection has been planned and carried out on the field, including geomorphological and geophysics researches addressing different questions.

The archaeological survey of the surrounding area was primarily intended to illustrate its long-term settlement pattern and the development of its occupation. Through using satellite imagery and topographic purpose-built maps, in addition to walking among fields and hills, 18 sites of archaeological interest have been found. Only two mounded sites gave back a discrete collection of sherds: site 3, close to the village of Büyük Taşlık and site 9, close to Aşağı Karakaya Köy, dating respectively to the Late Chalcolithic and Late Roman/Byzantine periods. Most of the sites were identified due to the occurrence of few pottery sherds scattered over a field or flanks of hills (sites 2, 5–7, 11–12, 14); in some cases due to the concentration of some stone blocks and sherds (site 2) or the presence of small *silos* and

3 See Mazzoni/Pecchioli 2011 for arguments and bibliography concerning the proposed identification.

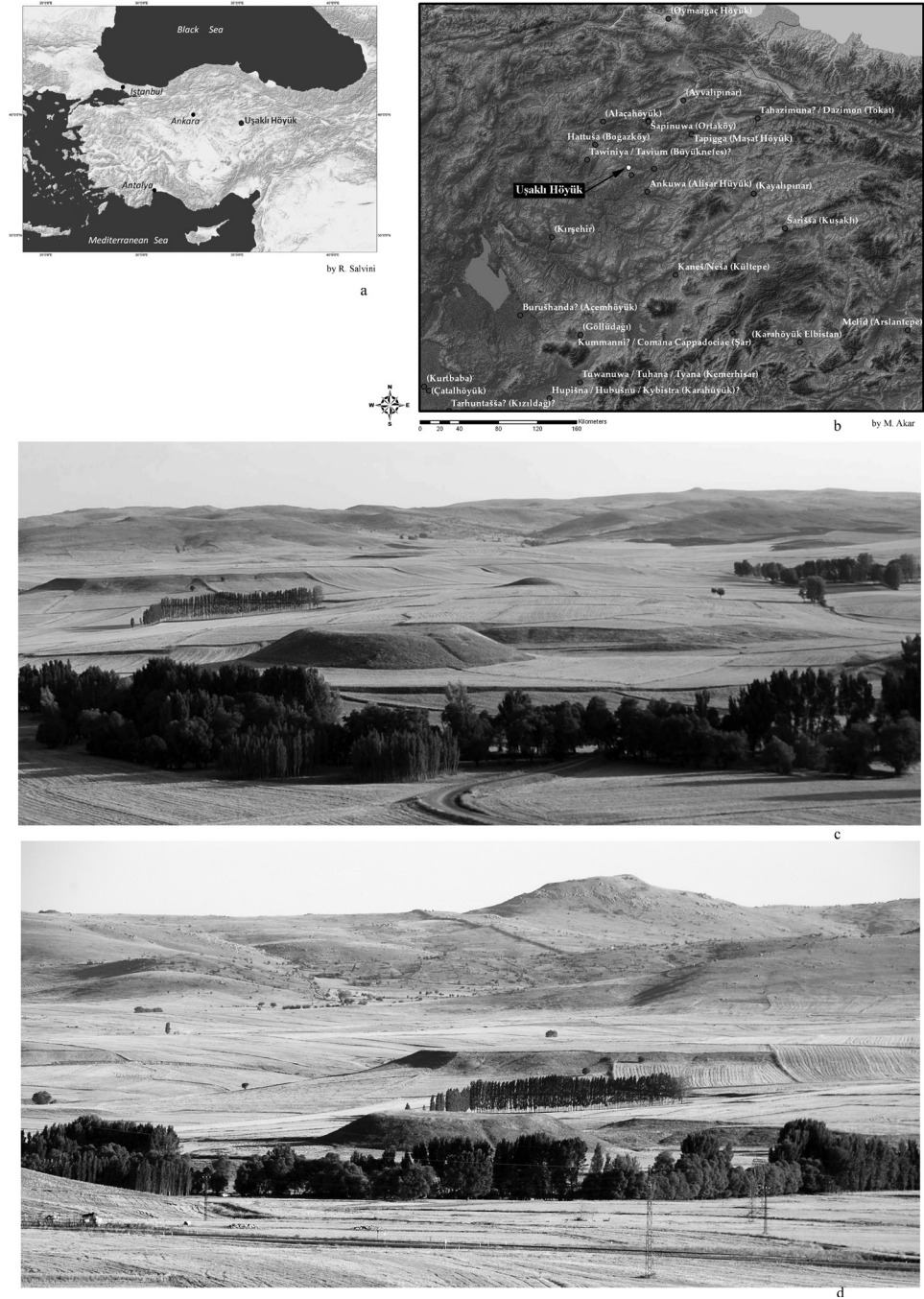


Fig. 1. a–b. The location of the site and a map of Central Anatolian Plateau showing some sites dating to the Hittite period. c–d. Views of Uşaklı Höyük from N and from NNE (in the background the Kerkenes Dağ).

some pits/cisterns (sites 15, 16, 19); and in one case (site 4) we found probable traces of a large buried wall in connection with a concave area. Given the small amount of potsherds present on the surface, it is hard to assign a specific time period to these sites. According to the evaluation of the few diagnostic types collected, only an approximate date between the late 1st millennium BC and, mainly, the Common Era can be suggested. In addition, other places have been registered for their potential relevance: a quarry (site 13), the location of a worked stone of Hittite manufacture (site 8) and a mound but apparently without sherds (site 10). The emerging pattern from the survey is that of a territory occupied by sparse small villages or more probably farmsteads of Later Periods, with no sites dating to the Bronze and Iron Ages, with the exception of Taşlık Höyük and Uşaklı (site 1). It could also be true that the potential of identifying the earlier sites, often not on mounds, could have been hindered by the intense agricultural use of the land as well as by the heavy erosion and sediment accumulation that characterise this region.

The geological analysis of the territory was aimed at identifying geologic and geomorphologic structures useful in reconstructing the ancient natural background of human settlements and the identification of exploitable sources of raw materials. One of the targets of this research, is to determine the area of provenience of the large granitic blocks used for buildings and often found protruding from the surface of Uşaklı. With the permit of the Turkish authorities, a large number of rock samples collected during the prospection will be analysed in the laboratory of Siena University.

The fieldwork at Uşaklı, the main site of the area, consisted of geophysical and archaeological prospections to prepare for the subsequent more invasive scraping and digging operations. The geophysical prospection and collecting activities have been carried out together, proceeding gradually in both and using the same georeferenced grid.

The results of the geomagnetic and the geoelectric prospections, from both the terrace and the high mound, turned out to be fruitful (**fig. 2b–d**). Several anomalies have been registered under the surface soil and their processing produced clear results that can be interpreted as large articulated buildings, city walls, dwellings, alignments of walls, possible streets as well as other isolated structures of different sizes and shapes. An urban layout seems to emerge with distinct features of an ancient 2nd millennium BC city with public buildings, such as Building II reminiscent of a typical Hittite temple. It is noteworthy to highlight here, that the structures individuated from the geophysical analyses are not all necessarily contemporaneous and could belong to different chronological phases.

During the 2008–2010 seasons, the systematic collecting of the materials scattered on the site demanded a great deal of efforts and organization. The planned intensive sampling strategy of all the artefacts relating to the main topographical or surveyed units aimed at achieving precise spreadsheets of the different categories of findings for scatter analysis. The collection was carried out in several areas of the mound surface, namely the top of the

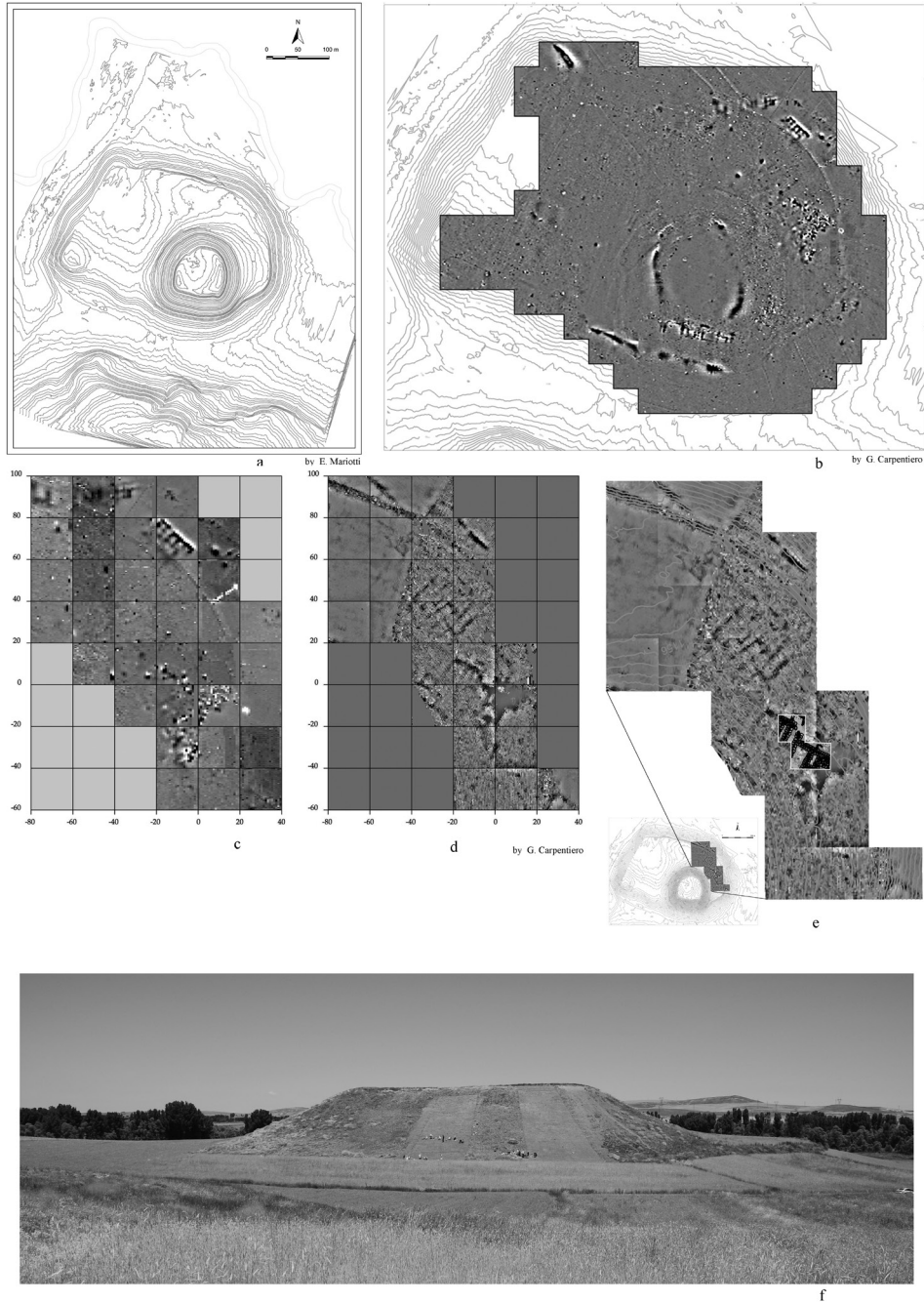


Fig. 2. a. Topographic map of Uşaklı Höyük. b–c. Geomagnetic anomalies. d–e. Geoelectric anomalies and location of Area A. f. Scraping on the southern slope of the high mound.

terrace and its low slope that gradually descends to the valley floor, and the south-eastern slope of the high mound. In fact, in the course of a preliminary extensive inspection these areas of the site showed a major concentration of sherds, whereas the other sectors were characterised by a very low occurrence of materials. The surface of the site was divided into precise survey units, of square or irregular shapes, depending on the morphology or the topographic grid. All the scattered artefacts and diagnostic sherds were collected from and assigned to these units during the systematic fieldwalking. Rakes, shovels and rods were used to clean the selected sectors from the residuals of the crop season and natural vegetation, which would have compromised the visibility of the soil surface. Furthermore, the whole site was surveyed in order to evaluate the validity of the representative sample and test the quality of findings from different sectors of the settlement in terms of functionality or at least of archaeological deposits. The same portions that disclosed clearer evidence during the geophysics prospection gave back more substantial collection of materials, in terms of state of preservation, variety and relevance of documented categories. This is due to the fact that in some areas of the site, namely in the eastern sector of the flat terrace, significant archaeological layers are nearer to the surface and are not covered by a thick layer of eroded deposits coming from the high mound or from decayed mud-brick structures.

Herbaceous plants have always covered the surface of the high mound during our fieldwork period, preventing a good visibility of the soil. Because of its steep sides the high mound was not used for agriculture and it has not been ploughed. The cutting and removal of the vegetation with sickles and rakes, which proved to be an efficacious approach in the survey of the terrace, turned out to be ineffective here given that the surface soil was very compact and had very few exposed materials. Therefore, the scraping operations on the slopes of the high mound of Uşaklı that took place in 2012 was necessary to gather evidence on the occupational sequence of this area of the site, where the few sherds collected in the previous years did not produce enough satisfactory information and left us a little bit puzzled concerning the rarity of findings dated to the Later Periods, within our first poor collection. Focused deep scraping operations of the superficial layers of soil have been effectuated on the southern and south-eastern slopes, which correspond to a long anomaly in the upper portion of the slope revealed by the geomagnetic prospection and interpreted as a well-structured wing of a large building with large rooms and courtyards of regular plan. Removing by scraping the topmost layer of soil by means of trowels and shovels was then the best method to obtain results from the slope surface (**fig. 2f**). This method allowed us to find a good amount of sherds and expose also the upper surface of sizeable archaeological features, such as traces of collapsed mudbrick walls that were in some cases burned. Hence, the location and limits of the reddish, brownish and buff spots were measured and their layout was overlapped with the geomagnetic anomalies of the buried building, resulting in some cases with a good correspondence (Mazzoni et al. 2014: fig. 12). Because of the

sloping of the surface soil, a fine-grained characterization in chronological terms of the different collections is obviously hard to be determined, nonetheless interesting data have been collected and are reported in the following section. Noteworthy was the finding of three fragmentary tablets with cuneiform inscriptions, possibly in relation with the geomagnetic anomalies mentioned above.

Two small test soundings investigated the depth of some significant anomalies and features of a probable surfaced segment of a wall. The first was located at the base of the southern slope, where the geomagnetic prospections signaled a large 3/4m thick anomaly. The excavation of a homogeneous deposit of soil reaching a depth of 1.20m allows us to exclude the proximity of a buried structure to the surface; therefore, the structure potentially related with the anomaly is likely to be located at a deeper level. The second sounding was done on the top of the mound, where some large stones protruded from the surface, possibly related with the strong pseudo-circular anomaly clearly visible in the geomagnetic map. Here, the emerging stones were cleaned and part of a wall has been exposed in a superficial dig; it consisted of two rows of ashlar separated by a row of middle-sized stones, with no trace of mortar.

One of the purposes of our project was to approximately locate the levels dating to the 2nd millennium BC. The extensive techniques adopted in the site survey allowed us to correlate the distribution of artefacts (see below in section .2) with the large structures detected under the surface by the geophysical prospection, determining the two areas to be examined in details and allocating the excavation trenches according to the periods to be investigated. Consequently, in 2013 the first large excavation area was opened in the eastern portion of the terrace, where scattered massive granite blocks were preserved on the surface and partially in situ till 2011 (during the winter of 2012 some stones have been removed and piled up by the landowner in order to facilitate his ploughing activity). This area was also selected for two other reasons: the geoelectric survey was especially productive and registered the presence of a structure likely interpreted as a large building of about 875m² (**fig. 2e**); the scattering of sherds indicated that this area was potentially recommended given the concentration of Late Bronze Age materials and low occurrence of material dating to the later periods. The first digging operations exposed directly under the topsoil the groundwork of a large building preserved for a unique course (**fig. 3**). A series of well structured walls (width of 2.10m and 2.70m) made of large rough granite blocks (**fig. 3b**) laid on a sort of deep under-foundations of middle-sized stones were traced (**fig. 3c**); they delimit elongated spaces (measuring between 4, 25x1, 60m and 4, 60x7, 50m). The orientation of the longer rooms, probably a sort of cellars, is NW–SE. The building shows no traces of the original collapse and/or destruction; and only very small segments of badly preserved beaten earth floors have been found in two different areas. Some of the stone blocks, originally part of the foundation, were relocated, occupying the inner space between two walls. There is evidence of

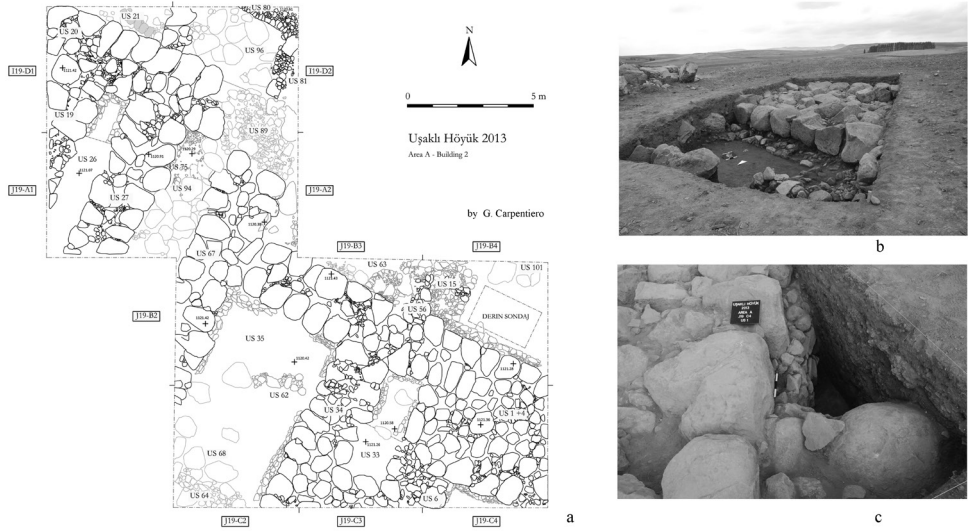


Fig. 3. a. Plan of the Building II in Area A. b–c. Particular of the walls and platform in course of digging. d. The portion of Building II exposed in the 2013 season.

Location of Collecting Units and Activities (Surface Survey/Scraping/Excavation)	Ceramic Shers -Diagnostic-	Ceramic Sherds -Generic-	Ceramic Sherds -Total-	Ceramic Weight in Kg	Roof Tiles Weight in Kg	Slags Weight in Kg	Year of Reference
<i>Terrace-Surface Survey</i>	1954	10613	12567	378,93 Kg	187,79 Kg	30,16 Kg	2008-2009
<i>Terrace southern slopes-Surface Survey</i>	1372	3932	5304	210,98 Kg	12,72 Kg	3,91 Kg	2008-2009
<i>Outside unit-Surface Survey</i>	9		9				2009
<i>Hoyuk south and south-eastern slopes-Surface Survey</i>	205	1161	1366	36,91 Kg	0,73 Kg	4,85 Kg	2010
<i>Hoyuk south and south-eastern slopes-Scraping</i>	2190	4362	6552	212,44 Kg	2,40 Kg	21,37 Kg	2012
<i>Acropolis_Gates NW</i>	40	50	90	3,01 Kg	2,07 Kg	0,06 Kg	2012
Totals (Scraping+Surface Survey)	5770	20118	25888	842,27 Kg	205,71 Kg	60,35 Kg	2008-2012
Building II excavations	1369	6191	7560	222,14 Kg	3,08 Kg	1,81 Kg	2013

Chart 1.

a partial reuse of some rooms, such as the presence of different built walls bonding with the main walls or overlaying them and marginal addition of light structures. The building, after its first phase of use, was left exposed for a long time and used for different purposes, and lastly progressively dismantled and its materials reused. This fact, in addition to the intense farming activity that levelled eventual relics of the mud bricks upper part of the walls, could explain the absence of any debris of the original collapse of the elevation and the preservation of only large heavy boulders of the foundation. The regular plan and the general concept of the building, as visible through the processing of geoelectric results and results of the first excavations, as well as its monumental character reminds of the layout of the temples of Boğazköy. In particular the thickness of the walls, sustaining probably an upper storey, finds comparisons with the Temple I of the Lower City. A small sounding (1.80 m deep) on the north-eastern side of the building has revealed a sequence of eight cobbled floors separated by thin accumulations of soft clayish earth, containing pottery and animal bones. It is probably a part of some preparatory work intended to regularize and strengthen the area for the building of the structure; however, at the moment a cultural purpose (a ritual to clear or to purify the area?) has not been ruled out.

The impressive architecture we started to expose in Area A in the course of the 2013 campaign, the fragments of tablets and a clay bulla found in the survey suggest the importance of the settlement at the end of 2nd millennium BC, at the time of the Hittite rule over the region and – as the following section will illustrate – probably already existing during the older phases.

2. The Findings, Their Dispersion and Preliminary Dates of the Occupation

The corpus of archaeological artefacts recovered after the surface survey and scraping consists for the greatest part of potsherds, but also a notable amount of roof tiles and slags were collected (**chart 1**). Lithics on the other hand were only sporadically found. The distribution pattern of roof tiles points out to some form of occupation of the site during the Late Roman/Byzantine periods, apparently clustered on the top of the northern sectors of the lower terrace. Roof tiles are essentially absent from the slopes of the höyük (**fig. 4a–b**). Samples of amorphous slags, composed of a variety of melted combustion residues, were found scattered all over the surveyed areas with a remarkable density noted in some of the eastern sectors of the terrace (**fig. 4a–b**). They are likely to be connected with ancient fire events.

Potsherds are ubiquitous (**fig. 4a–b**). Simple body-sherds without additional features (like paint or plastic elements) have been sorted out as <generic>, whereas all of the other sherds generally connectable with vascular shapes or decorative styles have been sorted out as <diagnostic>. The great majority has been classified according to broad chronological periods, finer dating was arduous to achieve in many cases, given that our effectiveness in dating non-stratified assemblages is deeply affected by the relative continuity in the central Anatolian ceramic productions over long chronological periods.

As far as the results of the surface survey on the terrace are concerned, a few sherds of glazed pottery dated to the medieval period document the most recent occupation of the site. The ceramics dated between the late Iron Age and the Byzantine periods were mainly scattered over the western portion of the terrace. Iron Age period sherds, possibly as a result of disturbances from modern ploughing activities, were homogeneously distributed over the surveyed area. Most of the representative inventories dated to the Late Bronze Age period are clustered on the northern and eastern slopes of the terrace, possibly in connection with the buried structures identified by geophysics survey. A considerable amount of sherds, more likely connected with a Middle Bronze Age ceramic horizon was concentrated on the south-eastern slopes of the terrace. A group of hand-made sherds with red slipped surface, probably to be dated to late Early Bronze Age, account for the most ancient occupation of the site (Mazzoni et al. 2010: 112–118; 2011: 94–96; 2012: 322–324; D'Agostino/Orsi 2011).

In all likelihood, the substantial post-depositional displacement of surface archaeological finds connected with the steepness of the southern slopes of the high mound of the höyük deeply affects a fine chronological classification of the units selected for scraping. The percentage of ceramic sherds per m² recovered on the slopes after the scraping activity is decidedly higher if compared to that acquired after the surface survey.⁴ The ceramic

4 On the slopes of the höyük the ratio between scraping and surface survey is 8,67 to 1 ceramic items per m². The method of scraping resulted in 5,2 ceramic items per m², whereas the sole surface

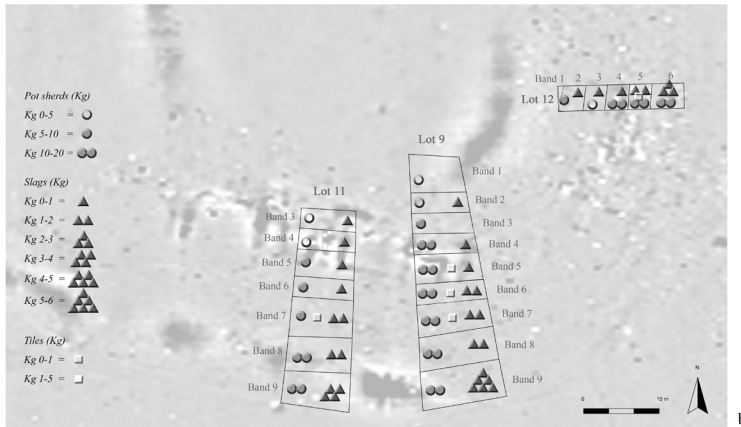
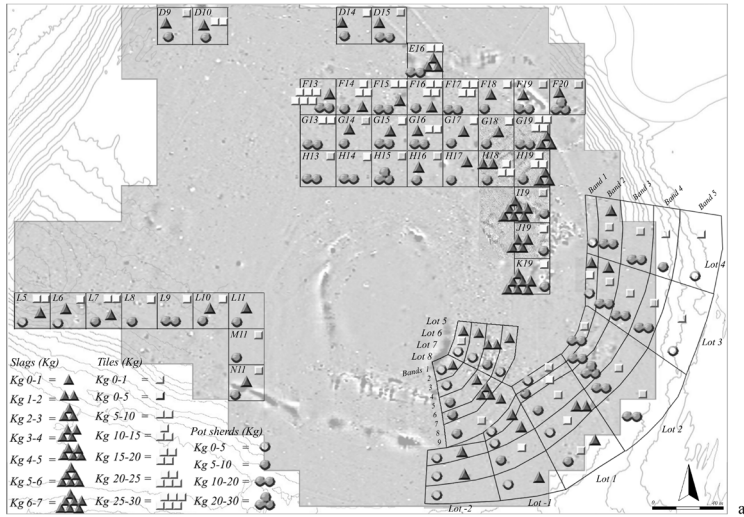


Fig. 4. a. scattering of materials (survey). b. scattering of materials (scraping). c–d. sherds dating to LBA and MBA periods (plates and red-slip specimens from deep sounding).

inventory included a significant amount of Painted Wares of the Middle and Late Iron Age periods, largely comparable to the so-called Phrygian and Alishar IV–V repertoire.

The distribution pattern of Middle Iron Age sherds over the sloping area is quite homogenous, hinting to a corresponding uniform distribution of contemporaneous buried archaeological evidence, or possibly resulting from the erosion processes affecting the upper part of the mound.

Despite some difficulties in the chronological attribution of some of the ceramic types (see Mazzoni et al. 2014: 256–257 for more details), Middle and Late Bronze Age periods are well attested by the presence of Red Slip and Drab Ware diagnostic shapes. Their distribution over the sloping area is also unexpectedly consistent, thus suggesting that the contemporaneous deposits have not been substantially concealed by later accumulation. Similarly, unforeseen was the substantially low percentage of later ceramics of Hellenistic or Byzantine periods, that leads us to hypothesize that the occupation of the main mound during these periods was not particularly conspicuous. Minor evidences of late 3rd and early 2nd millennium BC periods are provided by Hand-made red-slip wares and painted sherds, which distribution pattern is mainly scattered and sporadic (Mazzoni et al. 2014: 256–257).

Among the surface and scraping finds, remarkable is the recovering, concentrated between the southern and south eastern low slopes of the höyük, of 4 fragmentary tablets with cuneiform inscriptions, dated to the Middle to Late Hittite period.⁵ Preliminary readings interpret them as letters and a mythological text. Moreover, a clay bulla with two sealed impressions made by a circular stamp, dating to the Hittite period, was recovered from the northern slope of the terrace (Mazzoni et al. 2011: 92).

Unexpectedly, the superficial fillings of Building II, the excavations of which started in 2013, yielded only very sporadic fragments of roof tiles as well as slags, suggesting that the samples recovered from the surface survey in the same area must have originated from archaeological remains located elsewhere.

No primary context with associated materials has been reached so far, but the secondary context accumulations covering the structure provided a rich ceramics inventory. The chronological span is quite large, reflecting the same sequence attested on the surface. The prevailing ceramic class is represented by Common ware; nonetheless, Kitchen along with Storage wares are well attested. Contrarily, Fine ware was only sporadically found.

In the accumulation layer immediately above the poorly preserved floor of one the rooms of the building, a set of 3 miniature vessels has been found (an ointment vase, a conical cup and a plate). They belong to cultic pottery equipments of the Late Bronze period,

survey on the slopes of the höyük returned approximately 0,6 ceramic items per m².

- 5 The first and most sizeable tablet has been recovered during the surface survey of the terrace southern slopes (Mazzoni et al. 2011: 92; Pecchioli et al. 2014); the other three minor fragments result from the scraping of the lower band of the höyük southern and south-eastern slopes (Mazzoni et al. 2014: 257 and fig. 11).

thus providing additional support for the general functional interpretation of the original structure.

A large assemblage of Common and Kitchen ware can be attributed to the Late Bronze period (15th–13th cent. B.C.). Notable is the presence of the coarse platters with string impressions on the rim, which constitute an important bulk of the whole assemblage. *Drab ware*, in the prevailing shape of simple rim bowls, is also abundant. The typology of Common ware production seems to be quite standardized, with marked predominance of open shapes, namely small bowls with rounded profile and simple rim, and medium size bowls with inner-thickened or in-turned rim.

A medium percentage of wheel made red slip ware is also present. Most recurring shapes are upper-convex side bowls with vertical, triangular lugs; small, carinated bowls with vertical upper section; necked jars and spouted vessels.

A small corpus of painted sherds, usually hand-made with burnished surface, belongs to the Early Cappadocian/Intermediate and Middle Bronze Age horizons, whereas a group of hand-made red-slip ceramics, mainly chaff tempered with unevenly burnished surface, should be assigned to the Early Bronze Age.

The Middle and Late Iron Age horizon is also well documented and ubiquitous, especially in the upper portion of the filling layer, and consists of painted geometric wares.

The pottery inventory from the deep sounding under Building II is not homogeneous, but typical late Bronze Age ceramic typologies, including platters with string impressions on the rim (**fig. 4c**) constitute the main and the more recent attested ceramic horizon. Wheel made Red slip ware sherds are also quite frequent (**fig. 4d**), as well as hand-made sherds both with red slip or painted surface dating to the late Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age.

3. Conclusions

The analysis of the ceramics assemblages leads us to suggest that the settlement of the region around Uşaklı Höyük reached its peak most probably during the later periods (from late 1st millennium BC to Late Roman/Byzantine periods). During the Iron Age, the area was apparently scantily settled, as no mounds or scatters of materials belonging clearly to this phase were identified. The site of Uşaklı itself was occupied from the end of the Early Bronze Age to the Byzantine period. The fact that most of the Late Bronze Age and even earlier materials dating to the Middle Bronze Age period were found on the outskirts of the terrace can substantiate the hypothesis of a significant settlement consisting of a lower town and an acropolis already existing during this older phase. Its *floruit*, corresponding to an intensive occupation, was in the course of the entire 2nd millennium BC. During this phase, the site already covered 10 ha, as the distribution of diagnostic sherds suggests. Noticeably,

no materials of the Old Hittite or Imperial periods have yet been collected in the territory. However, even if still inadequate to offer a definitive confirmation to the identification of Uşaklı Höyük with ancient Zippalanda, the results of the first archaeological researches on the site provide a strong support to the identification. They testify to a markedly important city of the Hittite period, well situated within the geographical setting associated with the ancient holy centre.

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Anacleto D'Agostino & Valentina Orsi, University of Florence.