



## KERKENES DAĞ PROJECT

Scott Branting

The most important result of the Kerkenes Project in 2015 was the issuance of a full excavation permit by the government of Turkey. Since 2012 the project had been operating under yearly museum permits during the transition of leadership in the project. This very welcomed news, not received until after the project had returned from the field in 2015, should facilitate ongoing research at this important late Iron Age city for decades to come. It is the culmination of years of hard work by the Oriental Institute and its partner institutions in the project and ensures the continuation of the cutting-edge research that Kerkenes is known for around the world.

The 2015 season was undertaken over slightly more than two months from the start of May to the beginning of July. Work included a renewal of the highly successful geophysical surveys, continued excavation in the northern portion of the city, the start of a new program of ceramic analysis, continued conservation of the excavated remains, and infrastructural improvements to the excavation facilities and to the archaeological site (fig. 1). This work benefitted enormously from existing collaborations including international support from foundations and partner universities and local support from the Sorgun Mayor, the Sorgun Regional Governor, and the Yozgat Governor. None of this work would have been possible without the facilitation support generously provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the Yozgat Museum.

### Geophysical Survey

While the 2014 season had marked a return of the Kerkenes project after a brief hiatus, the late start of that season did not allow for the renewal of the resistivity survey at Kerkenes. In most years by late May or early June the soil becomes too dry for electricity to effectively reveal the city buried under the surface of the ground. This meant that the return of geophysical surveys at Kerkenes was left for the 2015 season. With the start of the season in May 2015 nine days of geophysical survey were able to be undertaken using a Geoscan RM85 resistance meter generously provided by the FORTH Institute of Mediterranean Studies and run by Tuna Kalaycı (fig. 2). Dur-

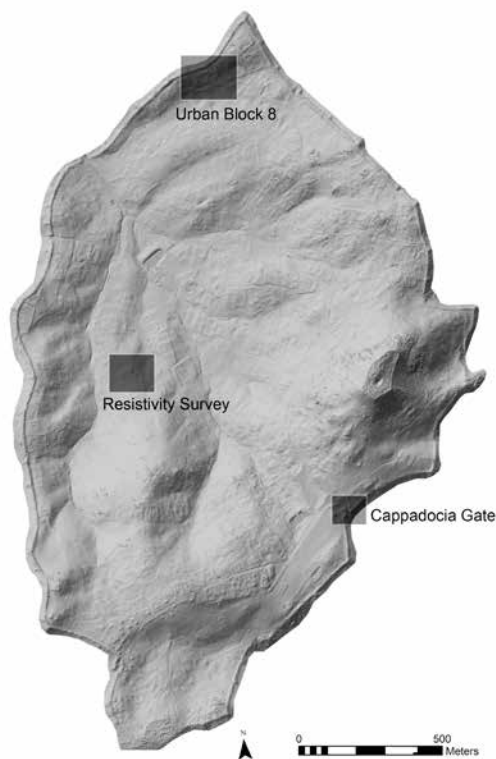


Figure 1. Map of Kerkenes showing major areas of work in 2015

ing this time 18,800 m<sup>2</sup> (1.88 ha) of area along the high slopes in the south-central portion of the city were surveyed (figs. 1 and 3). This area was selected to test the state of preservation of building foundations along the slopes of the high ridge and to begin to connect previous survey areas. Previous surveys, followed by excavations in 2010, had revealed a large structure with interior columns that was intentionally set on fire in the final destruction of the city. This season's results confirmed the presence of numerous buildings surrounding this large structure and extending well up the steep slopes, buildings which do not appear to have been intentionally set on fire or burnt to the same extent during the city's destruction. Surveys next year are planned to further expand this area and to connect it up with a large contiguous area of survey in the central portion of the city.

## Excavation and Site Conservation

Two trenches in the northern portion of the ancient city at Kerkenes were the focus of excavations during the 2015 season (fig. 1). Trench 33 (TR33) and Trench 40 (TR40) had both seen preliminary work in 2014 and 2012, but the area of the combined trenches was greatly expanded in 2015. These trenches were situated to uncover the full extents of a large columned building, measuring 20.5 × 25.5 m, and to expose an expanse of stone pavements in front of and behind the building. This building is located within Urban Block 8, one of 757 such urban blocks within the city, and is part of multi-year excavations intended to clear the full 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> extents of this important urban block. These excavations are paired with an intensive program of soil sampling and flotation in order to seek to identify different activity areas within the urban block and to gain information about the people and households that used it.

Trench 40 extended the exposure of the large columned building by an additional 300 m<sup>2</sup> (figs. 4 and 5). The focus of this work was to reveal the plan of the building and to offer a preliminary identification of the location of activity areas and installations within its two rooms. Eighteen meters of the eastern wall of the building had been exposed in 2014 and the rest of it

up to the northern wall was exposed this year. While evidence of wall plaster had been found along the inner and outer faces of the wall in 2014, the extension of the wall in 2015 revealed that the wall plaster along the outer face ended at a secondary wall that branched off to the east near the back of the building. This suggests that this space outside the eastern wall may be interior space within a room built against the main building. Excavations outside this building in future seasons should clarify this relationship between the large building and adjacent structures as well as the nature of the eastern and western walls toward the back of the building. The western wall of the building was in a much worse state of preservation, with only a few facing stones able to be identified among the collapse of the wall's lower stone courses. However, a few traces of wall plaster and mudbricks from a part of the superstructure were identified. In contrast, the northern wall of the building exhibited the best state of preservation of any of the building's walls. Its stone base was found still standing up to ten courses high, with three major leveling phases evident



*Figure 2. Resistivity survey on the slopes in the south-central portion of the city*

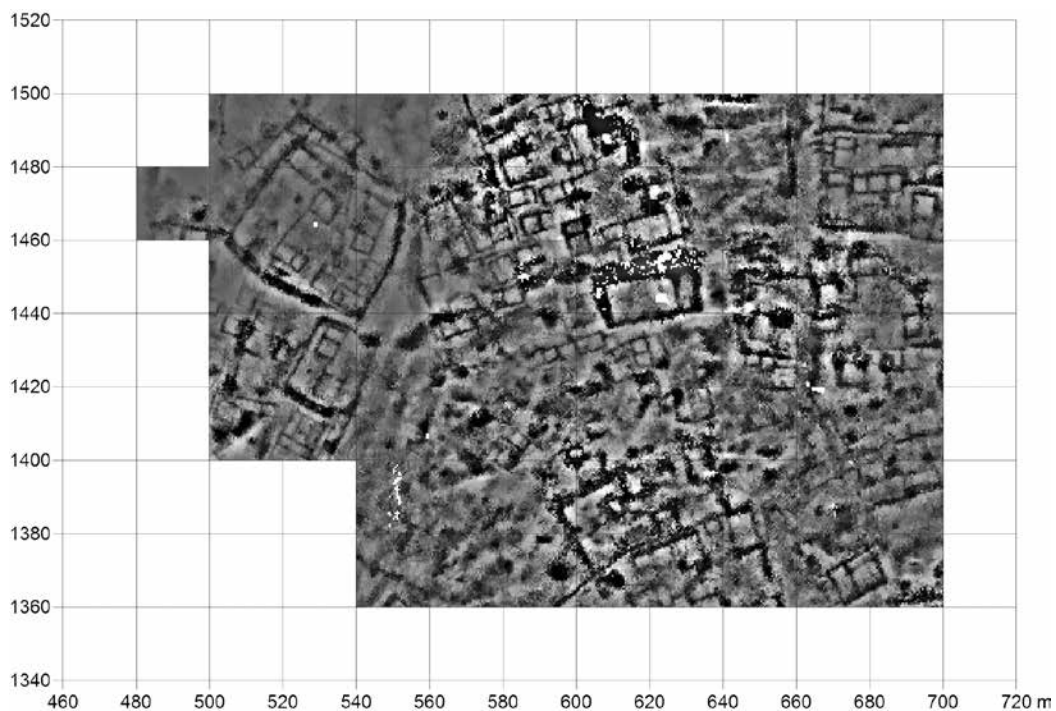


Figure 3. Results of resistivity survey in 2015



Figure 4. Photograph of Trench 40

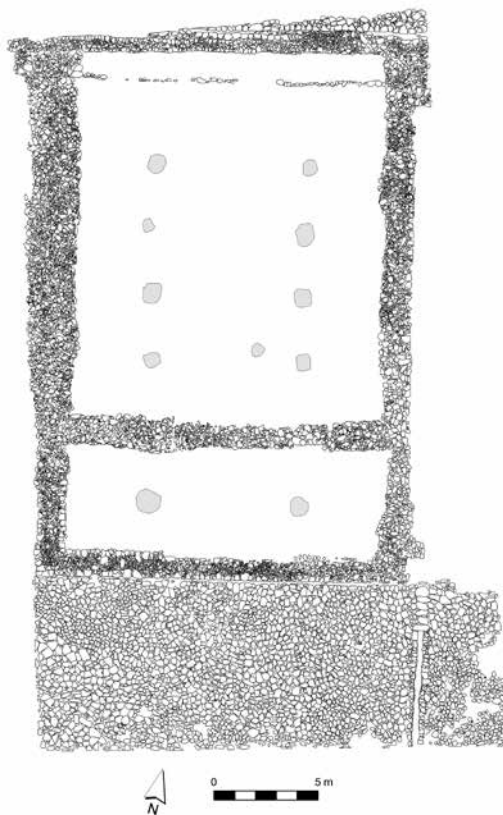


Figure 5. Plan of Trenches 33 and 40



Figure 6. Excavating on top of the north wall in Trench 40



Figure 7. Mudbrick collapse from the north wall in Trench 40

during its original construction. On top of this at least nine courses of mudbrick had originally stood, evidenced by fallen coursing found in the extensive mudbrick collapse in the back of the inner room of the building (fig. 7). This collapse was perhaps part of the reason for the impressive preservation of the north wall, but an additional factor was that the stone base functioned not only as the back wall for the building but also was a terracing wall supporting the leveling fill for the building just to the north that was partially excavated in 2011 and 2012.

The interior of this building is divided into two rooms, an antechamber in the front of the building that is 75 sq. m in size and a large interior room 260 sq. m in size (figs. 4–5). The entirety of the interior collapse within the antechamber was removed down to the heavily burnt plaster floor. Two column bases were found in the antechamber, in line with the rows of column bases in the interior room that were predicted from earlier geophysical surveys of the building. The extra heavy burning in the antechamber suggests a large amount of wood may have been used in the construction of the superstructure of the front of the building on top of the more modest stone foundations. In the interior room the collapse was removed down to the level of the column bases, a level just above the original floor level. Eight primary column bases were exposed in the interior room arranged in two rows of four columns each. Ten large wooden columns would then have originally stood here and would have held up the presumably pitched thatched roof of the building. Only one other installation of note was discovered this year in the back of the interior room. A line of raised stones lying 1.5 m from the face of the northern wall may define the front face of a slightly raised platform. Additional excavation down to the surface of the floor and this raised area should better define this feature next year.

In the building two primary activity areas have so far been identified. One of these activity areas is in the antechamber of the building where 348 more ivory and bone inlays were recovered in 2015 (fig. 8), bringing to over 800 the total number of inlays found in the antechamber. These pieces may be particularly important to understanding the activities of the people who inhabited this urban block, given the important carved ivory plaque that was also found in this urban block in 1996. Another item found within the antechamber was a looping piece of copper-alloy wire that may have been an earring (fig. 9). An almost identical piece, perhaps its matching pair, was found just in front of the same building last year. A small cluster of sherds and a largely melted copper-alloy piece that may have once been a fibula were also found in the antechamber (fig. 10). The second activity area, in the raised area at the back of the interior room, has only just begun to be investigated. A few pieces of worked stone and a large cluster of pottery were found here, including one group of nine sherds with ten repair



Figure 8. Selection of worked ivory and bone inlays from Trench 40



Figure 9. Copper-alloy spiral

holes. Some of the holes still held the lead staple pot menders that had been used for making these repairs (figs. 11 and 12). The ceramics are of particular interest given the start of a new program of ceramic analysis started in 2015 by Sarah Graff of Arizona State University. This work is focused on production, use, and post-depositional analysis of ceramics from the excavations and the comparison of the ceramic assemblages with those from excavations at other local sites and from Phrygian Gordion. Already from a preliminary analysis she's been able to identify significant weathering of ceramics suggesting that the building may have lain exposed for quite some time after its destruction and collapse.

While the main focus of work this season was in TR40, limited excavations were also undertaken in TR33. TR33 is located on a large stretch of stone pavement just outside the building's front doors. A portion of this trench extended beyond the eastern end of the building's façade and in 2014 had revealed a stone covered drain that appeared to connect to a drainage system along the eastern side of the building. In 2015 we excavated the exposed portions of the drain and collected the soil for flotation (fig. 13). Drains can be productive areas for the recovery of botanical or faunal material, clues that can aid in our understanding of the people and households that once used this urban block.

Beyond Urban Block 8, additional work was accomplished involving the conservation and maintenance of both objects and the larger archaeological site. The excavation's laboratory work was undertaken by our trained conservators on all excavated objects as soon as they were removed from the site. In addition, an ongoing program of rehousing iron objects for their long-term



Figure 10. Badly melted piece of copper alloy, perhaps a fibula



Figure 11. Group of sherds with repair holes and lead pot menders



Figure 13. Photograph of excavated drain in Trench 33

we returned to the excavation house at the start of the 2014 season, major leaks were discovered in the roof and around several windows that had developed during 2012–2013. Temporary repairs were conducted in 2014 to keep the leaks from becoming more substantial. During the 2015 season in partnership with the Sorgun Mayor, the Sorgun Regional Governor, and the Yozgat Governor we were able to replace the entire ceramic tile roof of the excavation house along with half of the windows, including all the leaking windows (fig. 14). We plan to continue to replace the remaining windows over the next few seasons. We also undertook necessary maintenance for all the project's buildings with a long-term view towards the use of these facilities for years to come.

In addition, in partnership with the Yozgat Governor and the Sorgun Regional Governor, major improvements were made to the road providing access to the archaeological site that is located on top of a high ridge above the village of Şahmuratlı. Under the direction of Metin



Figure 12. Side view of one of the lead pot menders

preservation was continued in 2015. On site in the Cappadocia Gate, ongoing assessment of previous restoration work was undertaken using photogrammetric methods begun in 2014. This work is being undertaken in collaboration with Abdullah Gül University in Kayseri and will help guide future restoration and conservation efforts in this area. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the city along the western city wall an illegal brick structure had been constructed in 2013, when our permission to work at the site was not approved. The Yozgat Museum had applied for permission to remove this illegal building in 2014, and once permission was granted we agreed to remove it on their behalf during the 2015 season.

## Facilities and Infrastructure Improvements

The excavation house, depots, and other facilities are essential to the successful operation of the Kerkenes project and represent significant investments over the years by the University of Chicago and our partner institutions and sponsors. They also require ongoing annual maintenance. When



*Figure 14. The new roof on the excavation house*



*Figure 15. Road extension created to allow better access to the northern and central portions of the city*

Kayhan, the Sorgun Special Administrative Director, the existing road was repaired and a 0.5 km extension was constructed outside the city walls to allow visitors increased access to the northern and central portions of the ancient city (fig. 15). This includes the area of the ongoing excavations in Urban Block 8. We hope to continue this program of road building and site improvements in future seasons.

Finally, planning is underway for a new archaeology museum that will be constructed in Yozgat. This wonderful new facility will include a new Kerkenes exhibit that is being designed to include a large-scale model of the Cappadocia Gate as part of the visitor experience. In 2015 we met with the exhibition designers and provided them with data and a personal site visit. We're very excited about the opportunities that the new museum will provide for tourists who come to visit Yozgat and Kerkenes.

## **Acknowledgments**

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