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# ON THE SHIFTING BORDER BETWEEN MESOPOTAMIA AND THE WEST: Seven Seasons of Joint Turkish-German Excavations at Oylum Höyük

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When approaching the modern Turkish-Syrian border from the wide plains of North-Western Syria, following the Qoueiq River, the traveller will encounter an East-West barrier at the southernmost foothills of the Taurus Mountains, the Resul Osman Dağları. Called Halep'a Bakan Dağları (literally: "the mountains looking to Aleppo") by the local population, the Resul Osman Dağları and the Kurt Dağları that run perpendicular to the former in a North-South direction form steep ridges offering a wide view over the Syrian Plain. This well-watered plain is drained to the south by the Qoueiq River and its tributaries. The Qoueiq, the ancient Xhalos River (Xenophon, Anabasis I 4, 9), passes Aleppo only to reach a dead end in the al-Matah swamps to the south. It marks the continental watershed between the Orontes tributaries to the west, that flow into the Mediterranean, and the Euphrates to the east, that form the major waterway of Mesopotamia and flowing to the Persian-Arabian Gulf.

The Plain of Kilis (Tolun 1975; Kesici 1994), as it is called on the Turkish side of the border, and the mountains that encircle it, form a natural boundary between North and South, between East and West, and between Highland and Lowland (Ritter 1843: 1687). This borderland position is also reflected in the cultural history of the region, where in some periods it forms a barrier and in others an interface between neighbouring territories. In recent years, its borderland characteristic has been reinforced by the superimposition of the modern Turkish-Syrian border. This has cut off about 400 villages on the Syrian side that previously used to depend on Kilis as their nearest market town. The town itself has since been forced into the lee of the economic flow in the region, a situation that is incomparable with that which it held in ancient times. This, no doubt, influenced modern archaeological research that overlooked much of the Kilis Plain, with the exception of some short research expeditions, even though cultural centres on the adjacent Syrian Plain such as Tell Rifa'at and Tell Akhtarine, had long been known about.

The fertile *terra rossa* soil of the Kilis Plain is now cultivated with olive plantations and vineyards (Louis 1985: 67). At regular intervals ancient settlement mounds rise above the plain (Özgen et al. 2002b). Among them is the double-summited mound of Oylum Höyük (Fig. 1), located on a small perennial stream, the Akpınar Suyu, and backed by the Resul Osman Dağları to the North. At a height of 38 m and covering an area of 17 hectares it is not only the largest on the Kilis plain but also one of the largest in all Southeastern Turkey. An

enormous cyclopean fortification wall built of basalt boulders surrounds the base of the mound. The existence of a lower town has not so far been proven but it seems probable given surface finds in the modern village that extends southeast of the mound. Oylum clearly must have formed the regional centre of the Kilis Plain from at least the fourth millennium BC. Numerous high quality small finds from the neighbourhood of Kilis that have circulated on the art market since the beginning of the 20th century (e.g., Garstang 1910: 86. 106 pl. 140, 101; Buchanan 1966: 173-174 No. 888) most probably originate from Oylum and further underline the importance of this site. The strategic importance of the place was first pointed out by U. B. Alkım during his surveys in the 1960's (Alkım 1968: 40-41) and then by a later Italian mission (Archi et al. 1971: 10. 15. 27. 87-88 No. 153).

Excavations at Oylum Höyük have been carried out since 1988 under the direction of Engin Özgen (for a bibliography of the first seasons, see Özgen et al. 1997), and since 1995 have been a joint project of Hacettepe University, Ankara, and the German Archaeological Institute, Istanbul (Özgen et al. 1996; 1997; 1999; Özgen and Helwing 2001; Özgen et al. 2001; 2002a; 2002b). These excavations have now demonstrated continuity of settlement at Oylum Höyük from at least the later fifth millennium BC to the Hellenistic period.

The primary objective of the excavations, which began as rescue excavations due to the massive looting and earth quarrying that threatened the site, has been the establishment of a regionally valid cultural sequence. Whereas comparable sequences exist to the west in the Amuq and in Cilicia (Mersin - Yumuktepe: Garstang 1953; Tarsus - Gözlükule: Goldman 1956; in the Amuq plain: Braidwood and Braidwood 1960), and to the east along the Euphrates (Kurban Höyük: Algaze 1990; Lidar Höyük: Hauptmann 1997), correlation between these remains weak due to the lack of reliable interconnection. A second objective has been the study of regional settlement history and settlement systems on the Kilis Plain, in order to understand the historical position and importance of Oylum Höyük and its satellites within the system of competing city states that flourished on the Syrian plains during the third and second millennia BC. (Klengel 1992). Finally, the continuous occupation of the site throughout the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age up until the Hellenistic period will hopefully provide new insight into developments during the "Dark Ages", when most of the other centres in Northern Syria were, at least temporarily, abandoned.

## Excavation Areas

From 1995 to 2001, excavations were carried out in six major areas of the mound, and in a field to the west of the mound (Fig. 2). These areas were:

1. A step trench on the eastern slope of the mound. Excavated since 1993, this has so far revealed a stratigraphic sequence from the Late Chalcolithic to the Hellenistic period (squares X-AA11). Middle and Late Bronze Age remains were excavated on a larger scale to the north of the step trench (squares X/Y 9-10). Although not yet stratigraphically connected, a trench at the bottom of the mound below the step trench has yielded material of the 5th millennium BC but without well-preserved architectural remains.

2. It had been hoped the recover a better preserved stratigraphic sequence for the Iron Age in two trenches located on the northern mound (squares R15-16). Here, levels of the middle Iron Age were reached.
3. An impressive mudbrick building, probably the substructure of a monumental building of Hellenistic date, was found, covering an extensive area of the southwestern summit of the mound (squares L/M 25-28).
4. Late Bronze Age remains, partly disturbed by a Byzantine cemetery, were uncovered in two trenches on the southern slope immediately above the modern village (squares X41-42, Y42).
5. Soundings on the west terrace, where earth quarrying had exposed 4th millennium BC layers, uncovered evidence considerable post-Ubaid, resp. LCH occupation (squares I31b-c, I32a-c, J31c).
6. Rescue excavations in a field approximately 600 metres west of Oylum Höyük, on the west bank of the Akpınar Suyu, revealed part of a mosaic floor belonging to an early Byzantine church (trenches K01-02).

## Excavation Results

### Chalcolithic period

On both the eastern and the western slopes, earth quarrying has removed considerable parts of the mound, uncovering Chalcolithic layers. These layers offered the promise of easy access to the lower levels of Oylum Höyük, and, at the same time, were the most in danger. The oldest Chalcolithic remains so far encountered in excavation were uncovered in trench Z 7, below and slightly north of the eastern step trench. Here, under a thick layer of recently accumulated eroded material, remains of domestic installations, associated with painted pottery of Amuq E type, where found (Özgen et al. 1997: 63-64). As the state of preservation here was poor, it was decided to shift the focus of attention to the western terrace.

The section revealed by the villagers' earth quarrying on the western side of the mound showed Late Chalcolithic (LCH)[1] remains at the bottom (Nieuwenhuyse 2001), with layers sloping gently to the west towards the modern water course. Excavation below this section began in 1997 in three 4x4 metre grids (trenches I31b, I31c, J31c: Özgen et al. 1999). After 2000 this area was extended to the south with a 4x9 m trench because it had become too dangerous to work so close to the exposed sections (trench I32ac: Özgen and Helwing 2001: 99-109).

The oldest feature to be documented as yet in the western terrace (trench J31c) was a huge wall made of untrimmed basalt boulders (Özgen et al. 1999, fig. 2). This wall stood 5 courses high and on its eastern side had backfill composed of stones and pottery sherds with very little soil. This pottery, most of it Ubaid-related, resp. Amuq E material, was badly

[1] See Helwing 2000; Özgen, Helwing, *et al.* 1999 for a discussion of the chronological subdivision into three phases applied here.

eroded and must originate from an older settlement near by, probably somewhere below the main mound. The soil layers that had accumulated on its western side contained coba bowls. Apparently, this construction did not extend further to the north. Excavations in trench I31b have now extended below the level of the stone wall but have not revealed any evidence for its continuation here. Instead, more sloping layers of dark soil containing coba bowls were found. The function of this wall remains unknown. It may have been a platform of a type known later from LCH 2 sites such as Hacınebi. Given the proximity of the watercourse, it could also have been a construction intended to prevent flooding of the chalcolithic settlement.

Above the basalt wall were several layers of domestic architecture and installations dating to LCH 1, all of which followed the ancient slope of the land. Apparently, this part of the settlement was abandoned toward the end of LCH 1, and the area was used as a graveyard during LCH 2 before a new settlement began.

Tombs of the LCH 2 period had already been uncovered in trenches I31b and I31c. These were badly preserved due to later occupation. Both children and adults were buried here, either as simple inhumations or inside pottery vessels (Fig. 3). Excavations in trench I32ac have now revealed much better evidence for standard burial customs within a regular cemetery. Ten burials have so far been uncovered in this trench. A feature common to all of them is that the burial pit is lined at one side with a row of mudbricks. Apparently, the burial pits were not dug to true vertical, but were hollowed out to one side of a vertical shaft. Following the burial, mudbricks were used to close the chamber. The bodies were laid in a crouched position, either in a large storage vessel, or in organic containers or textile wrappings. In one instance, a straight rectangular burial lining of organic material could be discerned, probably the residue of a wooden board. There seem to have been no strict rules regarding orientation. Funerary gifts occur only very rarely. Personnel ornaments such as single beads were found, and sometimes a small bowl accompanied the dead.

Still in the LCH 2 period, the area was again occupied by a settlement. The walls of these new buildings leaned against the slope of the older mound. Preservation of the architecture was very bad and as yet, no complete building has been uncovered, but a variety of domestic installations have been noted. It is too early to decide whether these layers were parts of a standard domestic settlement, or whether were workshops and installations on the fringe of the actual settlement.

The material associated with the LCH 1 levels is characterized largely by coba bowls and by chaff tempered fabrics used particularly for the production of globular jars, some of which bear a distinctive incised decoration in herringbone pattern. In the upper levels of LCH 1, a dark gray or dark brown pottery with burnished surface appears that is restricted to specific shapes, such as bowls with multiple grooves under the rim. Stamp seals with crudely incised depictions of animal, so-called 'ear-plugs' and other polished stone implements complete the assemblage. The LCH 2 material consists largely of chaff tempered wares, sometimes with red slip on the outer surface. Casseroles and hammerhead profiled bowls are the most characteristic shapes. A small percentage of ceramics that occurs mainly in the

tombs is an untempered fine ware, sometimes with a red slip applied, used for small globular bowls and jars (Fig. 4).

During the later LCH 2, northern Syria and southeastern Turkey came increasingly under the influence of Uruk culture. The layers that would have correlated with this period are, unfortunately, not accessible on the western terrace although they were documented higher up in the artificial section (Nieuwenhuyse 2001). Our settlement history of Oylum Höyük has still a hiatus at this point.

Uruk influence is, albeit at its later state, to be seen in the lowest layers of the eastern step trench. Here, two superimposed layers of domestic architecture were uncovered on the lower step Z11/AA11 (Fig. 5). The layout of both layers was almost identical, and the walls of the upper buildings stood directly on top of or next to the walls of the lower buildings. Two houses could be distinguished, neither of which was fully exposed. Slope erosion had destroyed the eastern parts of the buildings, and to the south, east and north, the houses extend beyond the limit of excavation.

The houses were constructed of rectangular mudbricks on top of foundations made of a single course of irregular stones. The preservation of the mudbricks was poor, standing to a maximum of only one to two courses and were badly torn. It seems that the walls were sheared off, and consequently the bricks appear twisted. Similar observations have been made at other late 4th mill. BC sites, such as Hassek Höyük (Behm-Blancke 1992: 1).

In the upper phase, the northern building consisted of two rooms. One was a large room with a round hearth with a central depression. Inside this depression stood a beveled rim bowl, apparently to keep glowing coals overnight. A thin buttress attached to the southern wall separated off the southeastern corner of the room. The floor was made from beaten earth and was painted white. The much smaller southern room had no such floor, and its southern wall was preserved only as a single course of stones. From the southern building, the corners of two rooms have been uncovered. Again, only the foundations were preserved. The southern building was oriented slightly more to the north in comparison to the northern building. The open space between to the two buildings was apparently open air, probably an alley. Its surface consisted of very hard mud and contained a lot of rubbish, pottery fragments and animal bones.

The lower building phase had a similar layout, except that the northern building lacked a dividing wall and only one large room was exposed. The open alleyway between the two buildings remained equally the same. Close to the entrance of this room the burial of a neonate was found. A second neonate burial had been interred next to the southern wall.
In the upper phase, floors had apparently been swept clean, and almost no *in situ* material remained to be found. This is different to the lower phase, where a full pottery assemblage was recovered. In particular the small room in the southeastern corner of the trench contained plentiful pottery, some of which had apparently been wrapped in organic material, such as a mat or basket. White organic fibers where observed between the crushed pottery vessels. The large room of the northern building also yielded a full range of vessels lying on the floor. Furthermore, animal metapodia and bone tools were found.

The pottery assemblage discovered from these two building phases consisted largely of chaff tempered fabrics, alongside a fine ware with clinky appearance and some fine, mineral tempered material. With regard to shape, bevelled rim bowls are abundant, and most of the other forms belong to the Uruk range of shapes: nose lugged jars, droop spout bottles and small conical beakers are familiar from sites on the Euphrates. However, hammerhead profiled bowls and biconical bowls occur that also link the assemblage to the Syro-Anatolian LCH.

## Early Bronze Age

The transition from the Late Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age (EBA) appears to take gradually at Oylum Höyük. Above the two LCH building layers were two more distinct building layers, preserved only in the western most part of trench Z 11. As had been the case with the earlier building levels, the walls were constructed from mudbrick on single course of stone foundations. The pottery associated with them does not show any abrupt change in the repertoire of forms and fabrics. Instead a slow and constant replacement of older traditions with newer ones can be observed. A large part of the assemblage was now made from a light coloured fabric, and reserved slip, a decoration technique well known in the LCH assemblage, was now applied to these light coloured, mineral tempered vessels. The shape of nose lugged jars changed until they resembled the well-known EBA 1 goblets from Hacınebi, and Hassek Höyük.

These building layers were sealed on top by a pavement made from untrimmed flat basalt boulders. This marked the end of the early EBA occupation of this part of the site. Above this were approximately 2.50 m of accumulated cultural layers that contained tombs of the later EBA. Some architectural remains were also found but had been heavily damaged by the construction of tombs.

Richly equipped chamber tombs had been noted at Oylum Höyük prior to the beginning of excavations. It was because of the looting of one of these chamber tombs by villagers that rescue excavations were initiated in 1988. Up until now five large chamber tombs have been excavated in the eastern step trench in squares Y-Z 11. All of these tombs were oriented north-south, with an entrance from the south. They were constructed of limestone boulders built in the dry wall technique. Two larger upright limestone slabs flanked the entrance. Where preserved, the roofs of the chamber tombs consisted of long stone slabs. In one case, however, a single course of mudbricks was preserved on top of the stone wall, suggesting that mudbrick constructions, e.g. a vault, may have been an alternative method of roofing. The size of the chambers varied, with lengths of 2-3 m, and widths of 1,5-2 m. Most of the chamber tombs at Oylum Höyük were looted in antiquity and the grave contexts disturbed. However, as some graves did contain some skeletal remains it is clear that the chamber tombs had been used for multiple burials, and whenever a new body was interred the earlier ones were pushed aside. Therefore, only the last skeleton to be buried lay in its correct anatomical arrangement, while the others were more or less scattered. The tombs contained skeletons of both sexes and different age groups, including small children.

Around and between the chamber tombs were single burials, often directly attached to the chambers. Adult graves were as pithos burials or in stone cists, with bodies laid in a crouched position. Children were mostly buried inside a jar, also in a sleeping position. These single burials appear to have been interred without adhering to any strict rules regarding their orientation. The preservation of the single adult tombs was better than that of the chamber tombs, as they apparently did not present a target for looters. They were usually equipped with large amounts of pottery, with small corrugated beakers, shallow bowls and fruit stands being the most characteristic shapes. The assemblages appear to represent serving vessels, either related to the burial ceremony or intended to provide for the deceased in the afterlife. Sometimes, personal adornments accompanied the skeleton, such as toggle pins, hair rings, and occasionally seals. These finds date of the cemetery securely to the EBA 3-4 period. There is as yet no clear relationship between the EBA tombs and the architectural remains found next to them, especially in the trenches north of the step trench, squares Y10-9. Here, the remains of a large building with small agglutinating rooms that had been destroyed in a fire were uncovered. In trench Y11 further to the south, numerous small installations, hearths, pebble pavements and flimsy hut-like constructions were observed and these are probably related to burial cult. Following the EBA period, it seems that this part of the mound at least was temporarily abandoned. The surface of the ancient mound here can easily be distinguished because of its hard texture. It slopes down to the west toward the interior of the mound.

**Middle Bronze Age**

When the eastern part of the mound was resettled during the latter part of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA), some of the previous EBA chamber tombs must still have been visible on the surface. The walls of the MBA settlement leaned on the slope of the older EBA mound and form a terraced structure. Their foundations extended below the upper level of the EBA chamber tombs, and in one case an MBA wall clearly respects an older monument.
The walls of the MBA settlement ran in line with the older slope and were oriented roughly northwest-southeast. A street climbed up the slope from the south, separating two large buildings and ending before a perpendicular wall connecting the two buildings. Two building phases could be distinguished, and each of these had several sub-phases. The buildings were constructed mostly of untrimmed basalt boulders, set carefully in two parallel lines, with small stones used as fill in between. These walls could reach Č m in height. Ceramic tubes lying at right angles to the walls served to drain water from the interior of the building out into the street. The upper part of the walls must have been constructed from mudbrick, judging by partially preserved mudbrick remains.

In the lower building phases, the building east of the street consisted of at least four rooms. Parts of three rooms were documented from south to north, none of which had an intact floor level. The next room to the north differed from the others in that it had a floor made from white lime and fine gravel, which appears to have been preserved because it was surrounded by a row of extremely large rectangular mudbricks. These mudbricks may either have been walls, or just the remains of a bench that ran around the room. A large storage

vessel was sunk into the floor, so that only its rim was visible. Scattered on the floor were several pottery vessels, probably the contents of a kitchen. Further to the north there followed an open courtyard (Fig. 6). This was the first room in which at least part of its eastern wall was preserved. The courtyard was accessible from the west via a threshold constructed from trimmed basalt slabs. In its northern wall, another door was partly preserved, with a single upright trimmed basalt stone forming the left side of the doorway. The right side of he doorway was not preserved. The northern third of the courtyard was paved with huge, irregular flat basalt boulders. On this stood a limestone tub. In the unpaved part of the courtyard, a large limestone grinding plate and a round hearth made of coarse basalt formed the major installations. North of the courtyard was a second paved outdoor area. West of this pavement had been another room. The floor level of this room lay more than 1 m below the level of the pavement. The room had been filled with pottery and small finds and apparently had originally been a cellar.

A second such cellar must have belonged to the building west of the street. This cellar (Fig. 7) contained eight storage vessels that had apparently stood on benches along the walls. When the building burnt down, the vessels fell into the room. This cellar connects to a wall lining the western side of the street that belongs to the upper building phase but no rooms or floors connected to this wall were preserved. Stratigraphically the wall overlies a smaller rectangular room that could not be connected to any of the other structures. This room had very carefully constructed thick walls and a floor made of several layers of stones and was then covered with a pavement of fine gravel. The northern wall was disturbed by a silo cut from a higher level. This room was used for depositing burials: thrown into the room from the west, bones and articulated body parts formed a thick heap at the eastern end of the room (Özgen - Helwing 2001, fig. 4). A total of 18 individuals could be distinguished, but none lay in anatomically correct positions. A broken bottle and a cylinder seal of extraordinary quality (Fig. 8) were the only burial goods.

The upper building phase followed roughly the same outline as the lower one but was much less well preserved. Worth mentioning is a small limestone relief found on the upper level of the street (Fig. 9).

The MBA level also yielded a large number of other burials. Most of these were child burials, either as simple inhumations or in jars. Adult burials occur much less frequently and appear as simple inhumations or are covered by pithos fragments. Burials were occasionally accompanied by pottery vessels and items of personal ornament such as pins, rings and beads, but in general the MBA graves are poorly equipped when compared to those of the EBA. Pottery found in the MBA building levels is largely sand tempered and wheel-thrown dating to the second half of the MBA. It occurs alongside other pottery types such as a gray or black burnished fabric that was used exclusively for plates and bowls. Only a small percentage of the pottery is painted. The small finds, seals and the limestone relief mentioned above confirm a date in MBA II.

## Late Bronze Age to Iron Age

Remains dating from the Late Bronze Age (LBA) were found in the eastern step trench in quadrant Y11, but were preserved on only a limited scale due to heavy erosion on the steep slope, so two new trenches (X41a; XY42) were opened on the southern slope in 2000 (for a detailed description, see Özgen and Helwing 2001), in an area that had already yielded rich Bronze Age surface finds. In the upper trench X41, a relatively recent house was found and below that a cemetery of Late Antique or early Byzantine date. A similar, but less well preserved sequence was found in the larger trench XY42. Below this, two phases of settlement occupation were identified (Fig. 10). The later phase was dug into the slope from above and cut into an earlier Bronze Age occupation that was itself badly disturbed by pits and silos. However, in an undisturbed room context one stamped *bulla* was found and a sculpture of a human head made of coarse basalt was found in one of the pits. The head is of a bearded male with conical hat (Özgen - Helwing 2001, fig. 32).

So far the transition from LBA to Early Iron Age has been documented in only a limited area of trench Y11 in the eastern step trench. This was followed by several Iron Age building layers in trench WX11 (for a detailed description of the Iron Age excavations, see Özgen et al. 1997). These layers reflect village-style architecture with domestic installations, hearths, tandirs and mortar stones. Enormous silos dug into these layers during the Hellenistic period heavily disturbed the upper part of the sequence in the eastern trench. It was hoped that there would be better preservation in a trench on the northeastern plateau, R15-16. Here, a Hellenistic building covered the Iron Age levels. This Hellenistic building had itself been badly damaged by agricultural work on the mound plateau. Again, Hellenistic pits cut deep into the underlying Iron Age layers, and excavations here were halted in 1998.

We can therefore state that the crucial transition from Late Bronze to Early Iron Age does exist in the cultural sequence at Oylum Höyük, but that it has not yet been accessible to large-scale excavation. It is hoped that in the future larger operations on the southwestern plateau of the mound will help bridge this gap.

## Hellenistic Period

In trenches LM 25-27 part of a massive building complex constructed almost entirely of square mudbricks was uncovered (Fig. 11, comp. Özgen and Helwing 2001). The walls of this building were 1.80 m wide. They formed the outline of small cell-like rooms. Neither floors nor any material belonging into these small 'rooms' can be discerned. In fact it appears that these 'rooms' never had a floor and that the building as excavated is the substructure beneath a larger building above, now lost. No exact date or function for the building has yet been established, and a more detailed investigation of the area is planned for the coming years.

## Late Antique - Byzantine Period

No settlement remains later than the Hellenistic period have been found on the mound. A graveyard with tombs oriented east-west and arranged in parallel rows, each containing a extended burial with sparse burial goods, was found on the southern slope in trenches X41 and XY42. This graveyard has so far yielded a total of 16 tombs of both adults and children. At this time the settlement itself must have shifted to the western side of the river. Villagers have reported numerous coins and other small finds collected from their fields on the western terrace of the Akpınar. In 1999, a column base was found during plowing, and subsequently the field was surveyed with a metal detector and illegal excavations begun. At a depth of about 90 cm the looting pits hit a mosaic floor and consequently part of the 1999 season was devoted to a rescue excavations in this field.

A 9x19 m area was opened. The subsoil had been completely disturbed by cultivation and contained abundant iron nails and roof tiles. The mosaic floor uncovered beneath this fill was best preserved in the southwestern area, and partly destroyed in the northeast because where it was closer to the surface. This floor must have belonged to a church with three aisles, separated from each other by a row of columns. Within the excavation area (Fig. 12), a row of five column bases stretching in east-west direction, and the western outer wall of the church and threshold was uncovered. The other limits of the church must lie outside the trench but we can calculate, using measurements based on the mosaic motifs, that the part of the church so far uncovered is no more than one-third of the original whole.

The tesserae used for the construction of the mosaic floor are about 1 x 1 cm in size and colours include several shades of white, yellow, red and black. Patterns were arranged in rectangles and sometimes surrounded by a bordure. They consist of lozenges, squares, zigzags, checkerboard patterns, Maltese crosses and bands with alternating lilies. The area in the centre of the church had a more complex motif of interconnected medallions. These motifs, and thereby the church itself, can be compared to other north Syrian churches of the 5$^{th}$ and 6$^{th}$ century, as known from Antioch and Apamea (Levi 1947; Gisler and Huwiler, M. 1984; Campbell 1988). Among the finds collected from the fill were two bronze crosses (Özgen – Helwing 2001, fig. 47, c-d).

One adult grave was found in the side aisle, immediately below the floor. The tomb pit had been dug through the floor and the mosaic had been repaired, albeit badly, afterwards. Three more burials where found in a limestone sarcophagus next to the threshold. The sarcophagus had been looted in antiquity by breaking in its side wall. The upper part of the skeletons, where jewelry must originally have been placed, was missing.

## Oylum Höyük In Perspective

Excavations at Oylum Höyük have so far provided evidence for the continuous occupation of the mound from the final Neolithic, that is the Halaf period, until Hellenistic times, with a gap in the excavated sequence only at the beginning of the MBA. At the end of the Hellenistic period, the settlement apparently moved to the other side of the river and the

mound was then only used as a cemetery. Oylum's place within the larger regional context can only be understood through a broader discussion of cultural developments in the Syro-Anatolian borderlands through the ages.

The oldest documented material comes from the Halaf period, but was only found in a secondary context. The earliest excavated material from the base of the eastern step trench belongs to Amuq E period and is characterized by hand made polychrome painted pottery. This assemblage represents a regional variant of an Ubaid-related Chalcolithic, first been encountered in the Tell Kurdu excavations (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960), and in the Islahiye region (Waechter et al. 1951; Alkım 1968). The associated monochrome painted pottery allows the material from Oylum to be correlated with that of Hammam et-Turkman IVa/b (Akkermans 1988a;1988c).

The Chalcolithic culture of the Syro-Anatolian Taurus foothills has long been recognized as a development related to the emerging complex policies of the Mesopotamian Ubaid culture. Therefore, models of cultural contact originally used to explain the northern expansion of the Uruk culture were projected backwards onto Ubaid-related elements in Syro-Anatolian sites. From this perspective, an asymmetrical relationship between a culturally advanced south and an underdeveloped north was postulated (Sürenhagen 1986; Oates 1990; 1993). It has recently become increasingly evident that none of these cultural transfer models can adequately describe the relationship between northern and southern sites and instead strong local continuity can be traced in the cultural development of the Taurus foothills. From the Halaf period onwards regional centres developed, of which Domuztepe and Kazane Höyük are just two examples (Bernbeck et al. 1999; Campbell et al. 1999). It seems that these "mega sites" drew their importance from their strategic positions as "gateway communities". At Oylum Höyük the 300 metres between the Amuq E layers of eastern terrace and the Late Chalcolithic features on the western terrace make it unclear whether these represent two phases of a single continuous settlement occupation or not. Given this uncertainty, it is could well be possible that Oylum Höyük represents another such prehistoric "mega site".

At Oylum Höyük, the western terrace has a full cultural sequence from the end of the Ubaid to the beginning of the Uruk culture. Contemporary sequences are so far only known from Arslantepe, periods VIII and VII (Frangipane 1993; Trufelli 1997) and from Sakçagözü (Taylor et al. 1950; Akkermans 1988c). The discovery of a platform or terrace wall in the lower layers of the western terrace makes it one of the earliest ever found.

The material culture associated with these layers is highly distinctive with coba bowls making up more than 50 percent of the assemblage. The strong emphasis on mass produced pottery marks important changes in the organization of craft activities in a way that is usually thought to relate to the emergence of complex societies (Trufelli 1994). Besides coba bowls, hand made pottery with a brushed surface and incised zigzag decoration and a gray burnished ware are also typical. This characteristic decoration is equally typical for Arslantepe VIII (Trufelli 1997: 10 fig. 13), Sakçagözü IVA (Taylor et al. 1950: fig. 17, 13-14), Tell eş-Şeyh I (Taylor et al. 1950: 97), in the Amuq (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: pl. 25, 24-25) and the Elbistan plain (Brown 1967: fig. 3, 10). To date, it has not been found east of the Euphrates. The gray burnished ware from the upper LCH 1 levels can be compared to

Hammam et-Turkman VB (Akkermans 1988b: pl. 105, 186. pl. 106, 187-189) and Sakçagözü V (Taylor et al. 1950: fig. 19, 18). Stamp seals with crudely incised animal depictions, so-called ear-plugs and other polished stone implements are all best compared to Amuq F-material (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: fig. 191, 197 for the seal. - fig. 192 for "studs".). The Oylum Höyük assemblage therefore reflects strong connections to the north and east. Comparisons to sites further west are less evident: in the Amuq, Tell Kurdu has a similar range of small finds, but in Cilicia, comparisons are restricted only to coba bowls (Garstang 1953).

The Late Chalcolithic graveyard that followed on from the settlement is so far unique in Southeastern Turkey. The distinctive tomb construction differs markedly from other tombs of the LCH period. Similar features are known from Tepe Gawra, where more then 400 graves and tombs of the fifth to fourth millennia BC were uncovered. Here, alongside well furnished and elaborate mudbrick chamber tombs, stone cist tombs and pithos burials, simple inhumations and urns also frequently occur (Tobler 1950: 98-125; Forest 1983). One group of Gawra graves, occurring most frequently in the earlier part of periods XI-A to IX, is characterized by a single wall of mudbrick along one side of the skeleton (Tobler 1950: 108-109). The only available photograph shows that on one side of a grave the mudbricks lie end-on and at an oblique angle, therefore they do not appear to have formed a proper wall (Tobler 1950: pl. 66b). Despite this difference, such graves do resemble the constructions observed at Oylum Höyük. The function of the wall remained unclear to the excavators at Gawra - probably due to the fact that the shafts leading to the tombs had not been noted during excavation. In one case matting covered the body, another feature linking the Gawra graves to those at Oylum.

Following the graveyard, the LCH 2 settlement yielded material that fits neatly into the Syro-Anatolian LCH. Most characteristic among this material is chaff tempered pottery first described as being typical for the Amuq F phase, that now helps to link Oylum to a large group of LCH 2 settlements with similar assemblages, such as Hacınebi A-B1 (Stein et al. 1996), Arslantepe VII (Frangipane 1993; 2000) and many others. More precisely, the high quantity of red slipped pottery with burnished surface allows us to place the Oylum assemblage with the western Euphrates LCH 2 (Frangipane 1993). In this period cultural developments in Syria and Eastern Anatolia appear to have unfolded independently of any developments in Mesopotamia, and regional handicraft traditions can be distinguished.

During the later LCH 2 the first Uruk settlements were established along the Middle Euphrates. These settlements soon formed part of a highly complex regional network that provided both the stage and means for intercultural exchange. Unfortunately, layers from this crucial period have not yet been found at Oylum Höyük. Instead, layers dating only from very end of this period (LCH 3) were excavated in the lower step of the eastern step trench. They provide us with a snapshot of material culture illustrating the different tracks of cultural development at work at Oylum toward the end of the 4th millennium.

Round hearths with a central depression were used at Oylum and certainly belong to a widely attested Anatolian local tradition. This form of hearths is well-known from other LCH or EBA sites in southeastern Turkey, such as Sos Höyük (Sagona 2000: pl. 3),

Norşuntepe (Hauptmann 1976: pl. 39, 31-32; 1982: pl. 17, 11. 18 pl. 12, 14. 16. 30-32; Gülçur 2000: fig. 5), Tepecik (Esin 1982: pl. 55, 51. 57, 52), Arslantepe (Palmieri 1981: 110), Judaidah (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960: fig. 260-261) and others. On the other hand, the pottery shapes clearly show connections with types from the Uruk sites on the Middle Euphrates, most characteristically droop spout bottles, nose lugged jars, conical bowls and other Uruk standard shapes. The manufacturing technique is, however, strongly rooted in the earlier LCH tradition, with heavily chaff tempered fabrics and brushes used to smooth the interior of the vessels. Such an admixture of handicraft traditions has previously been described as a hybridization process (Helwing 1999; in press) that may occur when locally trained potters start to produce the shapes of a different tradition. The Oylum Höyük assemblage is the perfect expression of such a hybridization process. With regards to the wide Uruk-related world, Oylum Höyük represents a community that must have been in close contact with Uruk sites on the banks of the Euphrates and that tried to integrate the new and unfamiliar styles observed there into its own cultural assemblage.

The transition from LCH to EBA in southeastern Anatolia and northern Syria is characterized by several dramatic changes. The Uruk sites on the Euphrates were abandoned. Most Syro-Anatolian sites underwent drastic changes in settlement layout and architectural design. Large tripartite houses, typical for both Uruk and Syro-Anatolian sites, were now replaced by smaller one- or two-roomed houses. Suddenly, large cemeteries with cist graves, chamber tombs and pithos graves, with plentiful evidence of complex burial rituals appear. Grave goods indicate a strong emphasis on status, and communal feasting seems to have been part of the burial rites, judging by the enormous quantities of pottery vessels in the tombs. It is only in the development of pottery traditions that strong continuity from the Uruk period can be seen. Pre-existing vessel forms continue to be used, as do certain decoration techniques, such as reserved slip.

Vast cemeteries of the early EBA, like those found throughout the Euphrates Valley[2], must have existed at Oylum Höyük as well. Unfortunately, in the excavated area at Oylum Höyük these tombs were destroyed by slope erosion and only the stone slabs from their walls and roof were found in slope debris. Metal objects that must have been items of personal adornment have been found out of context across the settlement.

These burial traditions continued at Oylum until the very end of EBA 4. Most outstanding are the chamber EBA 4 tombs that place Oylum Höyük in the same league as other sites where so-called "hypogee" have been found[3]. Single tombs are usually present in

[2] The best example for prestigious burials during EBA 1 is a richly furnished kurgan tomb recently uncovered in Arslantepe (Frangipane 1998); a less wealthy, but still extraordinary tomb was found in the settlement of Hassek Höyük (Behm-Blancke 1984); a contemporary graveyard with pithos graves was located west of the settlement; cist graves, chamber tombs and installations apparently related to the burial cult been recently discovered close to Birecik (Sertok and Ergeç 1999).

[3] The "hypogee" from Til Barsib is the classic example of such a chamber tomb (Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936); chamber tombs are also known from Umm al-Mara (Rice 2000), Jerablus-Tahtani (Peltenburg et al. 1996), Gre Virike (Ökse and Bucak 2001; 2002), Lidar Höyük and Titriş Höyük (Hauptmann 1997; comp. Carter and Parker 1995).

their immediate vicinity. This is also the case at most other sites where the chamber tombs form part of larger graveyards (Lidar Höyük; Titriş Höyük; Jerablus Tahtani; Belkis; Karkamish; Gre Virike). Looking further west, comparable graveyards are also known from the Islahiye area, such as Gedikli Höyük and Tilmen Höyük (Alkım and Alkım 1966).

Recently, meticulous excavations at Gre Virike (Ökse and Bucak 2001; 2002) have shed new light on burial customs in the EBA 3-4 period. Here chamber tombs formed part of a larger building complex, with small rooms that served for cooking, libations, and probably small offerings being connected to a chamber tomb. A canal system transported water from a basin on the summit, and an underground well also provided water. Apparently, the site was never used as a settlement during the EBA, instead it was entirely devoted to funerary cult. It may even been that the site served as a central funerary monument for neighbouring sites.

With the Gre Virike example in mind, the enigmatic small installations observed between the chamber tombs at Oylum Höyük can now be understood much better. As at Gre Virike, pebble platforms, small huts and cooking places may have served ritual purposes within the funerary context. More examples for this tradition can now be put into a similar context, such as the installations between graves present at the cemetery in Belkis, although not properly observed there (Sertok and Ergeç 1999). Another example of an EBA funerary monument is the "White Monument" at Tell Banat (McClellan 1998; 1999), a massive mudbrick cone that yielded many EBA tombs and that must have been visible from a distance as a central monument.

A closer look at the pottery assemblage from EBA 2-4 Oylum Höyük, characterized as it is by plain simple ware and gray-black spiral burnished vessel, with corrugated beakers, footed goblets, Syrian bottles and the similar, reveals strong links to the east, especially to sites along the Euphrates and on its western bord, above all Ebla II (Mazzoni 1982), but also Jerablus Tahtani (Peltenburg 1999a; 1999b), Tell Hadidi (Dornemann 1979; 1988) and many others. Interestingly, links to the west of Syria are much less visible: the assemblages from Tell Judeideh (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960), and Gedikli Höyük (Alkım and Alkım 1966; Alkım 1968) provide fewer comparisons, and brittle orange ware (Braidwood and Braidwood 1960), a fabric most characteristic of the Islahiye area is completely lacking around Oylum Höyük. This indicates that EBA Oylum was well integrated into an extensive *koiné* oriented towards the Euphrates, while relations to the western neighbouring Islahiye-Maraş Plain were less well developed.

This eastward orientation of Oylum Höyük shifted considerably during the MBA. Oylum was abandoned during the earlier part of MBA and was only resettled during MBA 2. This is in line with many other sites in Northern Syria that experienced a hiatus in occupation following the EBA. With the reoccupation of abandoned sites during the later part of MBA, settlements along the Levantine littoral gained a new importance as bases for steadily increasing sea trade. Northern Syria had become an integrated part of a trade network that connected to the Mediterranean and the Levant.

The large MBA building complex excavated on the eastern slope, with its distinctive trimmed basalt thresholds and large storage facilities, provides good evidence for increased

prosperity related to an intensification of trade. There are good comparisons to this building at other 2nd mill. BC centres in the surrounding area – e.g. at Alalakh and at Tilmen Höyük, where similar buildings constructed partly from trimmed basalt slabs were considered to be residences of local rulers.

The MBA 2 material found at Oylum Höyük clearly proves this new cultural and economic affiliation with the South and West. Finely carved bone inlays and small containers, frit beads, and occasional fragments of Tell al-Jahudiye ware are good indicators of Levantine trade relations. They occur alongside a distinctive Syrian pottery assemblage that can best be compared to Tell Mardikh IIIB (Matthiae 1980) and phase 5 of the well-stratified Lidar Höyük MBA material (Kaschau 1999) with plain simple ware, Amuq-Cilician painted and the characteristic Alalakh VII black/gray wares (Heinz 1992), Syrian style seals and terracotta figurines of west Syrian type.

One good example of a Syrian-style cylinder seal was found in the mass grave. It was carefully crafted from hematite with a kneeling hero flanked by two adorants as the main scene, and a standing bull below two birds as the minor scene. This seal belongs to a group of Syrian-style seals that are characterized by an "Akkadian renaissance" (Otto 2000) and the mingling of Egyptian or Egyptianizing elements (Teissier 1996) that occurs especially around Yamhad.

The small limestone relief found on the upper level of the street shows a winged god marching towards the right, carrying an axe over his shoulder and a dagger tucked into his belt. A second symbol, of a mace, shown behind the figure clearly indicates a warrior god, most probably Reshef, the male counterpart of the warrior godess Anat/Ishtar. The best comparison for this relief is a small terracotta plaque from temple P2 in Ebla (Pinnock 1995).

Mediterranean-Levantine trade intensified further during the LBA, and Oylum Höyük continued to be part of a larger, southwest oriented network. Excavated evidence is still limited, but the plentiful inventory of LBA objects points to strong western preferences. The local assemblage was enriched by local imitations of Mycenean table ware and other exotic items. Egyptianizing scarabs, Mittani common style seals and Hittite stamp seals occur within the same layers, symbols of all three power blocks gravitating around Oylum.

After the collapse of the Hittite Empire, the early Iron Age brought the fission of the imperial administration and the formation of smaller regional units of Neo-Hittite and Aramean kingdoms as their successors, eg. at Samal-Zincirli, Sakçagözü and Karatepe. Mostly, these new kingdoms were established at previously unoccupied locations, and only few places have continuity of settlement from the preceding period. Among the latter is Karkamish, where the dynasty established by the Hittites continued, to re-emerge a century later as the Great Kings of Malatya (Hawkins 1988). Oylum was continuously settled into the early Iron Age as well, but the exposed area is still too small to draw any further conclusions.

The southwestern orientation of Oylum Höyük shifted once again during the 9th-7th cent. BC., when the military campaigns of the Assyrian kings extended to the Mediterranean. There can be no doubt that these campaigns affected Oylum Höyük as well as nearby Azaaz, a town mentioned in the records of Ashurnasirpal II and conquered by Shalmanesar III (Klengel 1992: 194-196). Oylum Höyük has not been identified with a historical place yet.

Neo-Assyrian material, however, forms part of the material excavated on the northeastern summit, with Neo-Assyrian seals and the characteristic red burnished pottery of the middle Iron Age.

The following centuries brought first the integration of Northern Syria into the Achaemenid Empire in 539, and then the conquest of that empire by Alexander the Great. These events certainly had an impact on the settlement at Oylum Höyük, but the excavated buildings cannot yet be properly correlated to them, and the local material culture of these periods is so far not well understood. An enlargement of the excavations on the western summit, where a large building of Achaemenid or Hellenistic date has been uncovered, will hopefully further the understanding of these events in the future. Given the monumental scale of the building on the summit, it certainly belonged to a site of some importance. However, it is not yet clear that Oylum kept its place as the paramount regional centre in this period. The newly established settlement of Cyrrhus, about 15 km to the west of Oylum, as the crow flies, may have replaced it as a centre in the Hellenistic Period. Following the Hellenistic Period, Oylum Höyük was abandoned as a settlement site and a new settlement was founded on the western bank of the Akpınar, while the mound served only as a burial ground in Late Antique-Early Byzantine times.

## CONCLUSIONS

Seven seasons of joint Turkish-German excavations at Oylum Höyük have helped to clearly establish the importance of this strategically located settlement on the historical map of Northern Syria. A cultural sequence could be defined that now allows to trace the history of Oylum Höük over 5000 years during which the site functioned as the paramount centre of the Kilis plain, both dominating the plain and mediating relations between east and west. The borderland situation of the Kilis plain, at the transition from the plain to the mountains, and on the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, seems to have largely predetermined the role of the site. Located between overlapping interest spheres between larger cultural and political units, Oylum represented a bone of contention that was alternatingly integrated into different cultural spheres and political alliances. A more detailed investigation of these shifting cultural affiliations throughout the millennia remains the major objective of future research at the site.

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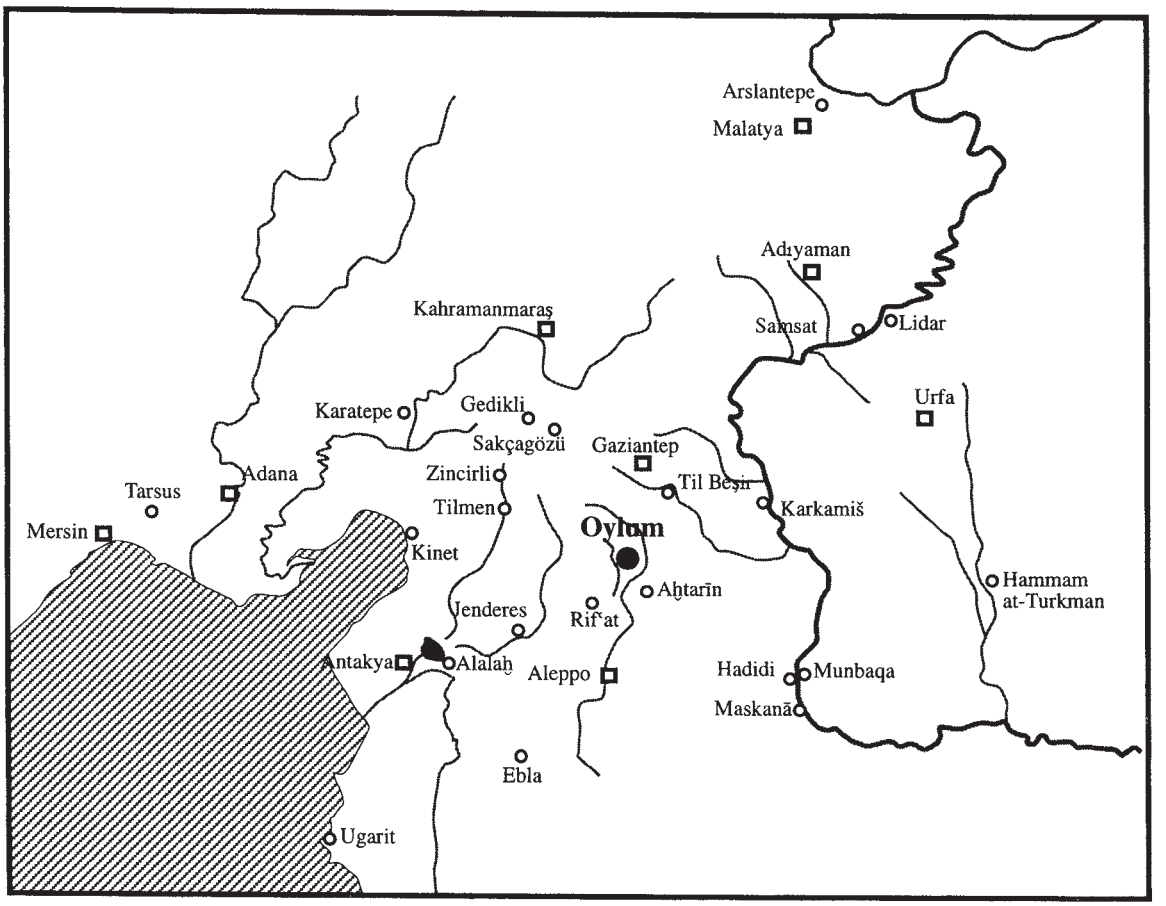


Figure 1. Map showing location of Oylum Höyük and of other sites mentioned in the text.

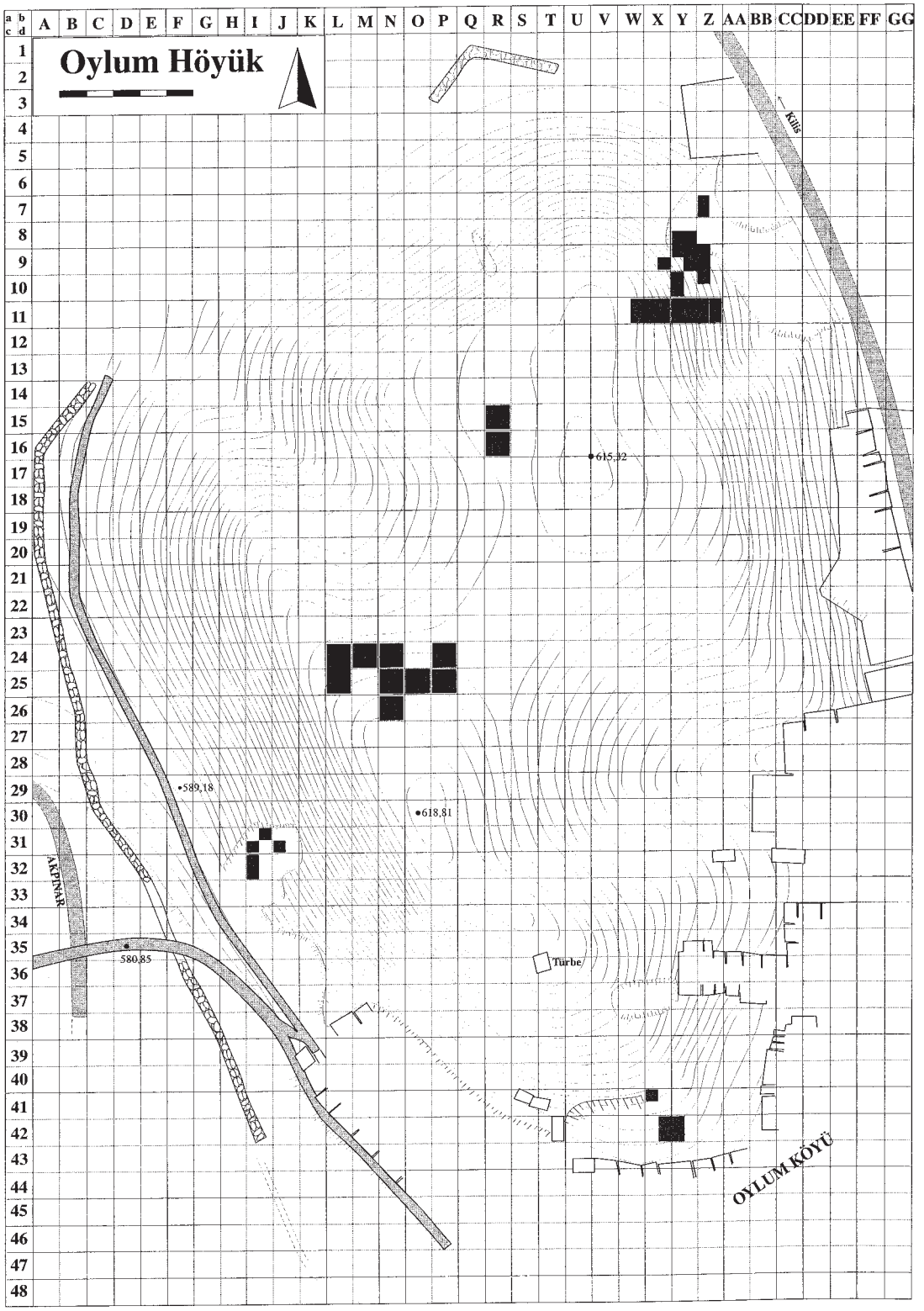


Figure 2. Oylum Höyük, topographic map and location of trenches.

Figure 3. Oylum Höyük, Western Terrace. Pithos tomb in shaft closed by mudbrick wall, LCH 2 (first half of 4th mill. BC)


Figure 4. Oylum Höyük, Western, Terrace. Red slipped pottery associated with the shaft tombs.

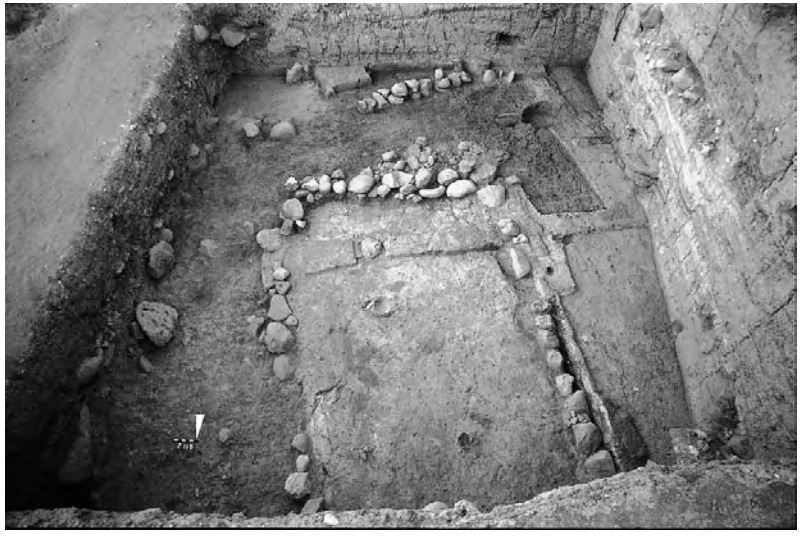

Figure 5. Oylum Höyük, Eastern Step Trench, square Z-AA11. Domestic building of the LCH 3 period (late 4th mill, BC.), lower building phase.

Figure 6. Oylum Höyük, Eastern Step Trench. Courtyard of MBA 2 building (2nd quarter of 2nd mill. BC)

Figure 7. Oylum Höyük, Eastern Step Trench. Cellar of MBA 2 building with crushed storage jars *in situ* (2nd quarter of 2nd mill. BC).

Figure 8. Oylum Höyük, Eastern Step Trench. Old Syrian Cylinder seal found in the MBA chamber burial 259.

Figure 9. Oylum Höyük, Eastern Step Trench, Lime stone relief, found in secondary position in the upper MBA building layer (2nd quarter of 2nd mill. BC)

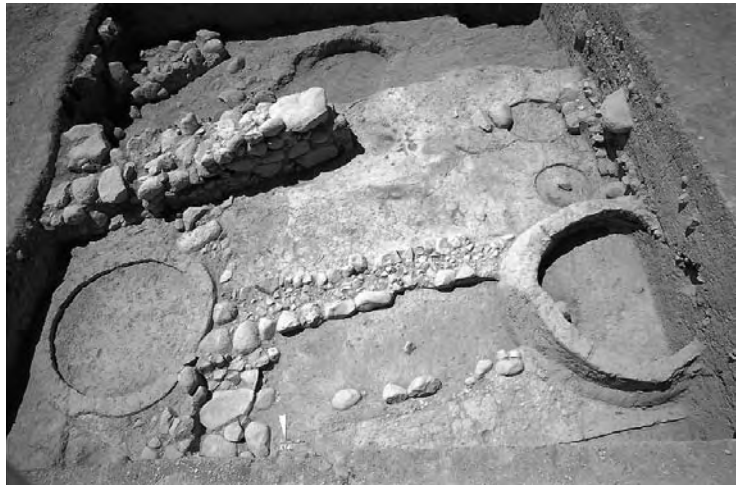

Figure 10. Southern Slope. Building of the LBA period (c. 3rd quarter of 2nd mill. BC)

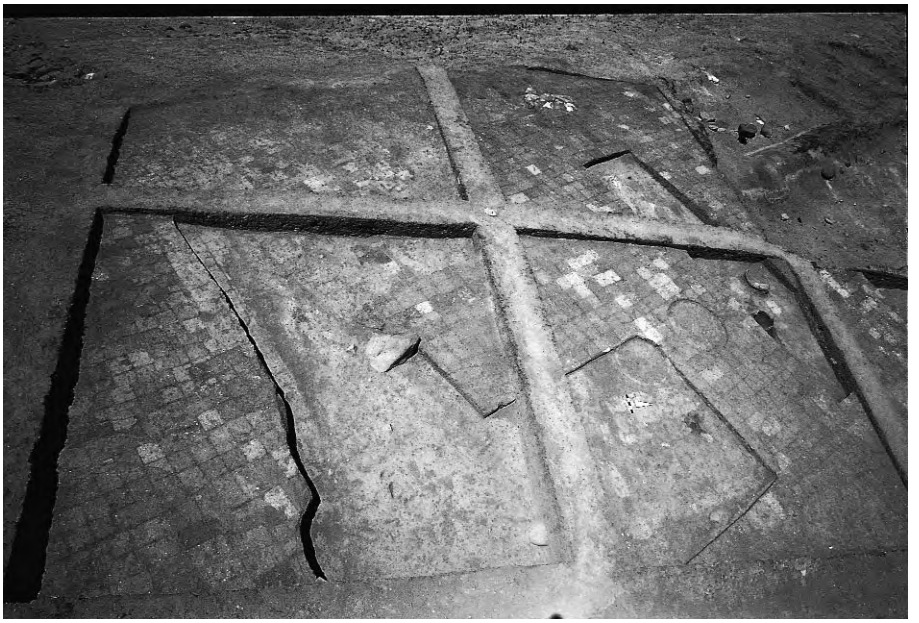

Figure 11. Oylum Höyük, Western summit. Hellenistic building.

Figure 12. Oylum Höyük, Field west of the mound.
Mosaic floor of a church, 5th-6th cent. A.D.