

JOHN GARSTANG AT SIRKELI HÖYÜK, CILICIAN PLAIN, IN 1936-1937. Old Photographs and New Evidence from the Renewed Excavations

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Abstract

During the winter of 1936-1937, British archaeologist John Garstang (1876-1956) excavated several trenches at the site of Sirkeli Höyük, located in the Plain of Cilicia (18 km west of modern-day Ceyhan). After a single campaign, however, he left the site and his interest shifted to site of Yumuktepe/Mersin, where he then excavated for a number of years. Apart from two very brief preliminary reports of his excavations at Sirkeli Höyük, which were published in the journal “*Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Liverpool*,” not much is known about the trenches and their associated finds. Unpublished photographs kept in the Special Archives of University College London shed new light on the location and orientation of some of Garstang’s trenches at the site. Furthermore, in the 2012 campaign of the renewed Turkish-Swiss excavations at the site, a trench was found in the western part of the northern terrace that most probably was excavated by Garstang, but was not mentioned by him in his reports. This hitherto unknown trench may be related to his discovery of a lion-shaped column base made of basalt that is now kept in the collections of the Archaeological Museum of Adana.

INTRODUCTION: GARSTANG’S EXCAVATIONS AT SIRKELI HÖYÜK

In the winter of 1936-1937,¹ British archaeologist John Garstang (1876-1956) started excavations at the site of Sirkeli Höyük in the Cilician Plain. These excavations were part of the *Neilson Expedition to Cilicia*, which surveyed a number of archaeological sites in Cilicia, a region located between Anatolia and the Levant that was virtually unknown archaeologically at that time (Garstang 1937; Garstang 1938). The expedition to Cilicia was, in a way, a sort of home coming to the region of Anatolia for Garstang, since in 1906, thirty years earlier, he had already conducted his “Anatolian survey,” which in turn led to his seminal work *The Land of the Hittites* (Garstang 1910).

Altogether, according to Garstang’s preliminary reports, five trenches (called “cuttings” by him; namely Trenches A-E) were excavated at Sirkeli Höyük (Fig. 1; see also below; see part 2). The two preliminary reports published by Garstang on his excavations at Sirkeli Höyük unfortunately are almost void of detailed information on the trenches as well on the material retrieved from them. Since Garstang wrote these reports after having started excavations at Yumuktepe/Mersin, he noted: “(i)n the meanwhile, it should be said, a full season’s excavations on the mound of Mersin has provided us with a stratified series of Cilician-Hittite pottery of the early Imperial and pre-Imperial periods. We are therefore able to omit from this report all discussion of details and to confine our account to

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¹ Unfortunately, precise dates for his work at Sirkeli Höyük cannot be given.

observations illustrating the stratigraphy of these mounds (i.e. Sirkeli Höyük and Kazanlı Höyük, an archaeological site in the vicinity of Sirkeli Höyük) *in the light of more recent results*” (Garstang 1938: 12).

Thus, Garstang presented the results of the excavations at Sirkeli Höyük on a total of only five pages altogether (Garstang 1937: 64; Garstang 1938: 20-23, pls. XIV-XVII), leaving many open questions for later researchers dealing with his excavations at the site. Although Garstang published some of the pottery from these trenches, a detailed account of his excavations and the stratigraphy was never published by him. Garstang’s attention also seems to have been primarily concerned with the rock relief of the Hittite king Muwatalli II, located at the steep rock outcrop close to the Ceyhan river, which at the time of Garstang’s excavations at the site had not yet been published (Garstang 1937: pls. XVIII-XIX).

Garstang, at least so it seems, was also hoping to find archaeological evidence for the Hittite Imperial period at the site when he opened the trenches. However, since “*(i)n nearly every case remains of the Early Iron Age predominated – indeed, only at a depth of 4 m in cuttings C and E did we get down to levels of the Imperial period*” (Garstang 1938: 20), Garstang left Sirkeli Höyük for Yumuktepe/Mersin shortly after the winter campaign.

PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE SPECIAL ARCHIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Hitherto unpublished photographs taken by John Garstang at the site during the winter campaign of 1936-1937 shed new light on his excavations at Sirkeli Höyük.² Of the five trenches Garstang excavated and marked in his preliminary report (A-E), we now have photographic documentation for two of the trenches (Trenches C and D; see below). Additionally, there are three photographs that show different parts of the mound from various viewpoints and in different directions. One additional photograph also shows the upper part of the rock relief of Hittite king Muwatalli II, a detail which has not been published before (Fig. 7).³ It remains unknown who actually took these pictures, and they – as holds true for various photographs taken during earlier ventures – need not necessarily have been taken by John Garstang himself.

While three of the photographs do not show the actual excavations carried out, they can at least give an impression of the site in 1936.⁴ These photographs show the höyük from the south-east during the excavations (Fig. 2),⁵ the other two photographs show the north-

² The present author was able to locate these photographs in the Special Archives of University College London in February/March 2013 (see below, acknowledgments). For further information on photographs of John Garstang kept at the University of Liverpool, see Greaves 2010.

³ The reproductions of the photographs published here are digital scans of b/w paper prints. The original negatives were not employed here due to reasons of practicability and treatment.

⁴ An even earlier visitor to the region, but apparently not to the site of Sirkeli Höyük, was Max Baron von Oppenheim, who travelled from Hamidiye (now the modern city of Ceyhan) to Adana along the river Ceyhan (Ilan Kal’ase = Yılan Kalesi) in the year 1899. Digital scans of the photographs taken during Oppenheim’s journey can be accessed via URL: <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php> (last accessed: 17/1/2014).

⁵ Trench C can be seen on the right of the photograph, just to the left of the white tent.

western corner of the lower terrace (Fig. 3) and a view from the summit of the höyük over the low-lying terrace towards the north-west (Fig. 4).

Much more revealing with respect to Garstang's actual excavations at the site are the two other photographs. While one of the photographs shows Garstang's Trench C (Fig. 5), the other shows Trench D (Fig. 6). Both photographs were taken during the actual course of the excavations, as can be clearly deduced by the number of workmen seen inside the trenches.

It is interesting to note here that Garstang actually made a mistake concerning the orientation of Trench D in his sketch plan: While on his plan the trench is clearly oriented in a south-western to north-eastern direction, the photograph (Fig. 6) – as well as the satellite image of the höyük (Fig. 8) – clearly shows that the trench was in fact directed in almost the opposite direction (roughly west-east).

Since Garstang only produced a rough and inaccurate sketch plan of the site and gave no details on the precise location of his trenches, most of his trenches cannot be located with certainty anymore. Furthermore, the trenches opened by later excavators at the site in the immediate vicinity also make it difficult to differentiate between Garstang's trenches A, B and E of 1936-1937 and the more modern ones.⁶ Still today, however, Trenches C and D can clearly be seen in the morphology of the höyük (Fig. 8).

A HITHERTO UNKNOWN TRENCH BY GARSTANG AT SIRKELI HÖYÜK?

The site of Sirkeli Höyük, one of the biggest settlement mounds in the Plain of Cilicia, has yielded substantial archaeological remains dating from the 4th to the 1st millennium BC. Different occupational levels were already discovered during previous German excavations conducted at the site between the years 1992-1997, and from 2006-2009 (see Hrouda 1997; Ehringhaus 1999; Ahrens et al. 2008; Ahrens et al. 2010). The site consists of a 300 x 350 m² höyük. The main mound, which is roughly 40m high, has an oval shape, an adjacent lower terrace in the north of the main mound is located at its northern flank. Additionally, as already assumed, a lower town exists to the south-east of the main mound (Ahrens et al. 2010: 62). As early as 2006, the renewed excavations led to the discovery of a monumental stone building in Area A, located in the north-western corner of the lower terrace ('Building A1'; fig. 9). Although the exact layout, function, and date of this building still remain unknown at the moment, a Late Bronze Age to early/middle Iron Age dating is supported by the Imperial Hittite and Iron Age pottery found on the floor and the filling of the rooms respectively (Ahrens et al. 2010: 59, especially figs. 4-6).

During the campaign of 2012 conducted by the Turkish-Swiss team at Sirkeli Höyük, a large pit that contained a large amount of mixed pottery (dating from the Chalcolithic to the Hellenistic period) as well as a number of seemingly "modern" finds was exposed

⁶ A short summary of the history of the excavations after Garstang's first explorations is given in Hrouda 1997: 95-96; see also Ahrens et al. 2008: 71.

in Area A, located in the north-western part of the terrace (Fig. 8). At first, this pit was thought to be a modern intrusion into the latest levels attested in Area A, which date to the Hellenistic period. Upon closer inspection, however, all of the modern material retrieved from this pit turned out to date to ca. 1930. The bulk of the modern material consists of fragmentary objects made of iron, including ca. 200 nails, and even an iron peg (Fig. 10). Additionally, numerous fragments of several glass items were found. Although few of the fragments can be used for a secure typological analysis, the base of what probably was a small bottle (Fig. 11), and the neck of yet another, but different glass bottle, which most probably was used for wine or even champagne, stand out (Fig. 12).⁷

Furthermore, the dimensions of the ‘pit,’ which measure ca. 8 m x 5 m in total (half of the trench has not been exposed yet, since it is outside of the area investigated), as well as its clear and exact south-north orientation and its location right at the slope of the terrace suggest that this feature is not to be interpreted as a modern pit, but may well be an unknown trench excavated by Garstang during the winter of 1936-1937, even though Garstang did not mark the existence of such a trench in the sketch plan he published in the second preliminary report (Garstang 1938: pl. XIV), nor write anything about such a trench in his report (Figs. 13-14).

Intriguing in this respect, however, is the fact that the find of a double-headed lion column base was apparently made in exactly this area of the höyük (Garstang 1938: pl. XIV, marked ‘lion’; Figs. 1, 15).⁸ As Garstang briefly remarked in his report: “(o)n the north side of the mound stretches out a terrace on which at its extremity was found a stone lion of crude style, which may belong to a late Hittite or even later period. The position of this lion suggests that the terrace is itself ancient, i.e. not due to modern agriculture (Garstang 1938: 21).”

An identification of the “new” trench in Area A with Garstang’s Trench B, located at the northern slope of the lower terrace (Fig. 1), can be excluded with some certainty, since Garstang clearly differentiates between Trench B and the findspot of the column base in his preliminary report (Garstang 1938: 21).

Although it is clearly an open to debate, is it implausible to assume that Garstang actually tried to find out more about the archaeological context of the column base if he indeed found it here? If that was the case, one would expect him to excavate in the area where the column base was found. What cannot be explained in this respect, however, is why he did not mention this trench in his preliminary report. Since it has been demonstrated that at least one of Garstang’s other trenches (see part 2, i.e. Trench D) is definitely not positioned correctly on his sketch plan, one may assume that other omissions or mistakes

⁷ According to David Whitten (Clarksville/IN), the glass items generally seem to date to ca 1900-1940, based on the production marks and patina of the material. The neck of the bottle is that of a typical wine or champagne bottle (‘champagne finish’), most likely made in France. The base mark from a different bottle unfortunately cannot be identified or related to a specific producer at the time of writing, but most likely comes from Europe (D. Whitten, pers. comm. 2/1/2013). The forms found are quite common and remained unchanged for a long period of time; typologically similar vessels were already found in a steamboat that sunk in the United States in 1865, see Switzer 1974.

⁸ The base is exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Adana today.

may have occurred while compiling the notes and drawings for the preliminary reports. Maybe Garstang did not encounter what he was hoping to find, and thus stopped the trench without taking any notes in the field. And as only two of the five trenches excavated at Sirkeli Höyük were photographed, one may also assume that Garstang thus only rarely decided to take photographs of the trenches.⁹ One may also speculate that the column base was discovered late into the winter campaign, and that therefore field notes were not taken in the field anymore.

In this regard, it is most interesting to note here that the renewed Turkish-Swiss excavations at Sirkeli Höyük have indeed found a large stone building (see above; ‘Building A1’ in Area A; fig. 9) in this area. According to the associated pottery found within the fillings of the rooms, it was used from the final phase of the Late Bronze Age until the Middle Iron Age (for details on the building, see Ahrens et al. 2008: 75-83, Abb. 5-10) – an approximate dating that has also been put forward for the column base on stylistic grounds (Hrouda 1997: 95-96, fn. 10; see also pl. 4.4-5) – there may be an actual connection between the find spot of the column base and the building.

What is clear from the stratigraphy is the fact that the ‘pit’ (Garstang’s presumed trench) cuts deep into the foundations of Building A1. Unfortunately, since also Building A1 is not yet fully exposed, and in its southern part is heavily disturbed by later building activities dating to the Hellenistic period, it is impossible to reconstruct a complete layout of the building at the moment (Ahrens et al. 2008: 75-84). Still, one would expect a column base – such as the one apparently found by Garstang here – to have adorned a gateway or to have been part of a monumental entrance to a building of importance. The size and construction technique of Building A1 clearly meets all these standards, but at the time being it is not yet clear where exactly the position of a presumed column base (or even more bases?) might have located within the building’s layout.

Taking these ‘hints’ all in all, Garstang may indeed have found the archaeological context of the column base, but probably did not notice that it was connected to and part of a larger building complex. What led to the deposition of the ‘modern’ material inside the trench is difficult to tell exactly, but a possible scenario is that the excavated earth – this time along with material used by Garstang and his workmen – got washed back in over time. As one can clearly see on the photographs of his excavations at Sirkeli Höyük (Figs. 5-6), the excavated earth was not removed to a different location on the höyük, but left alongside the edges of his trenches, making it easier and faster for Garstang to reach deeper – and thus older – levels.

⁹ Although it has to be mentioned that there is the possibility that parts of Garstang’s field notes concerning his excavations at Sirkeli Höyük (including photographs), may have been destroyed during World War II. However, the present author was able to find a booklet prepared by Garstang, which featured photographs sorted by the main sites surveyed and excavated as part of the Neilson Expedition to Cilicia. In the booklet, no other photographs than the ones published here (except for the already published and well-known photographs of the rock relief) were found (and without “blank spots” inside the booklet). This makes it highly likely that other photographs of the excavations at Sirkeli Höyük do not exist. The Special Archives of UCL keep Garstang’s field notes of projects conducted after World War I.

What might be an alternative explanation to the suggestion that the pit was an actual trench excavated by Garstang? One could think of activities related to the building of the Baghdad Railway (built from 1903-1940), the tracks of which cut the höyük at its south-western part. However, it does not really seem to make much sense to presume that earthen material, clay, stones or the like used for the construction of the railway was actually taken from an area of the höyük which is far from the tracks. Also, at the time of Garstang's excavations at the site, the tracks of the Baghdad Railway had already been built, as can be seen on his sketch plan (Fig. 1),¹⁰ and if there had been illicit excavation work or looting prior to his exploration, he surely would have mentioned this in his preliminary reports.

The fact that a European wine or even champagne bottle was found in the filling of the pit makes it also highly likely that we are dealing with something out of the ordinary – at least in connection with the region around Sirkeli Höyük.

SUMMARY

Although many questions still remain unanswered – and can most probably never be answered with certainty –, it can be presumed on the basis of the present evidence that Garstang did in fact excavate a trench in the north-western part of the terrace. This trench, although not indicated on his sketch plan of 1937, may be related to his finding of the double-headed lion column base made of basalt in this part of the höyük, its find spot being indicated with '*lion*' on Garstang's sketch plan of the site (Fig. 1).

It can well be surmised that Garstang – leaving aside the unknown circumstances of how and where exactly the column base was found by him (e.g. lying on the ground, half-buried in the ground, etc.) – decided to investigate the context of the column base and to see if there were further similar remains nearby.¹¹ The large stone building used during the later part of the Late Bronze and the first half of the Iron Age ('Building A1') found in the course of the renewed Turkish-Swiss excavations may be linked to the column base, which is now kept in the Archaeological Museum of Adana. Unfortunately, however, definite archaeological proof for such a connection is still lacking. Would there indeed be a connection of the column base with the stone building discovered in Area A, one would expect the building to be a rather representative complex, with the column base most probably being part of an entrance gate into the building.

¹⁰ This part of the Baghdad Railway indeed had already been finished before World War I. Would the pit date to this period, the material retrieved from the filling of the pit would not seem to correspond to this date. However, it has to be admitted that the glass finds cannot be dated with such an precision.

¹¹ It is odd that Garstang apparently did not take a photograph of the column base and its findspot (should it have been seen above ground, after all), given the fact that he took various photographs of the site and even of the northern terrace prior to his excavations of Trench E there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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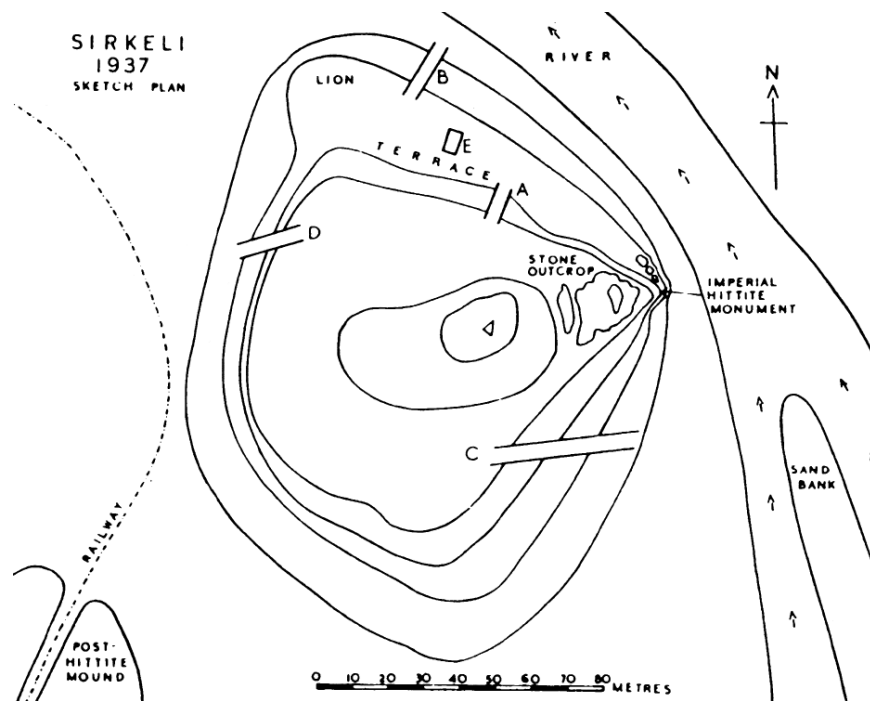


Fig. 1. Sketch plan of Sirkeli Höyük by John Garstang with the position of his five trenches (A-E), the find spot of the double-headed lion column base (marked 'lion'), and the location of the rock relief of Hittite king Muwatalli II (after Garstang 1938: pl. XIV).

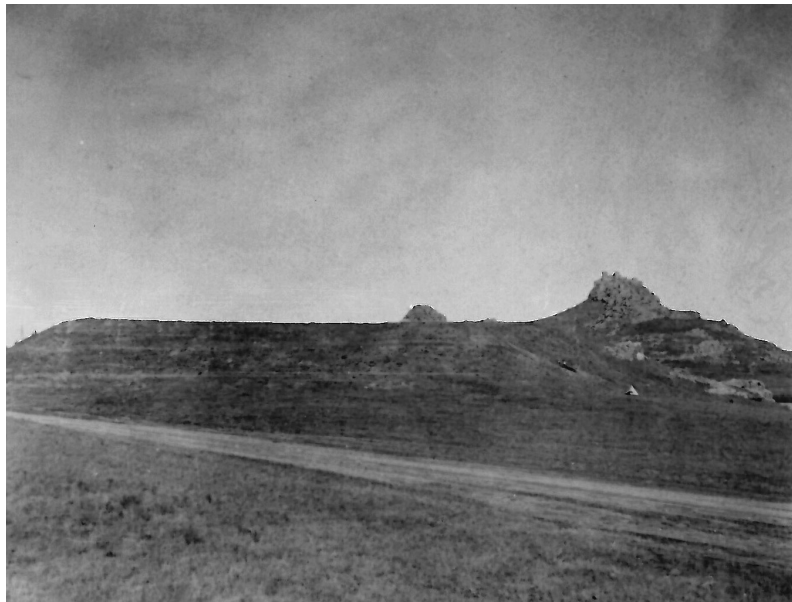


Fig. 2. Sirkeli Höyük from the south-east in 1936-1937 (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology of UCL).



Fig. 3. The western flank of the main mound and the lower terrace of the höyük in 1936-1937, from the south-west looking towards the north-west (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology of UCL).



Fig. 4. The lower terrace seen from the summit of the höyük, looking towards the north-west (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology of UCL).



Fig. 5. Trench C during excavation in 1936-1937, seen from the south-west (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology of UCL).



Fig. 6. Trench D during excavation in 1936-1937, seen from the north-east (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology of UCL).

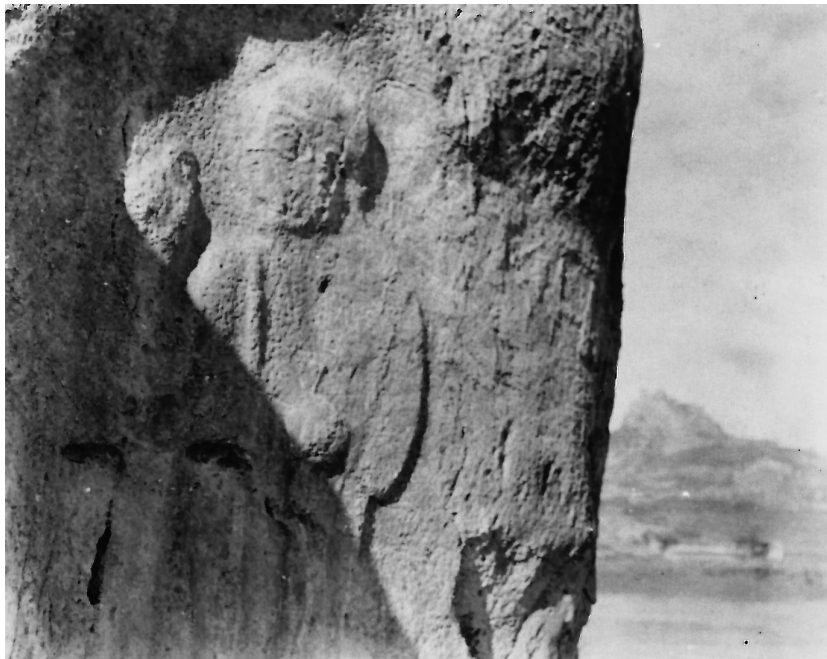


Fig. 7. Relief of the Hittite king Muwatalli II at Sirkeli Höyük in 1936-1937 (courtesy of the Institute of Archaeology of UCL).

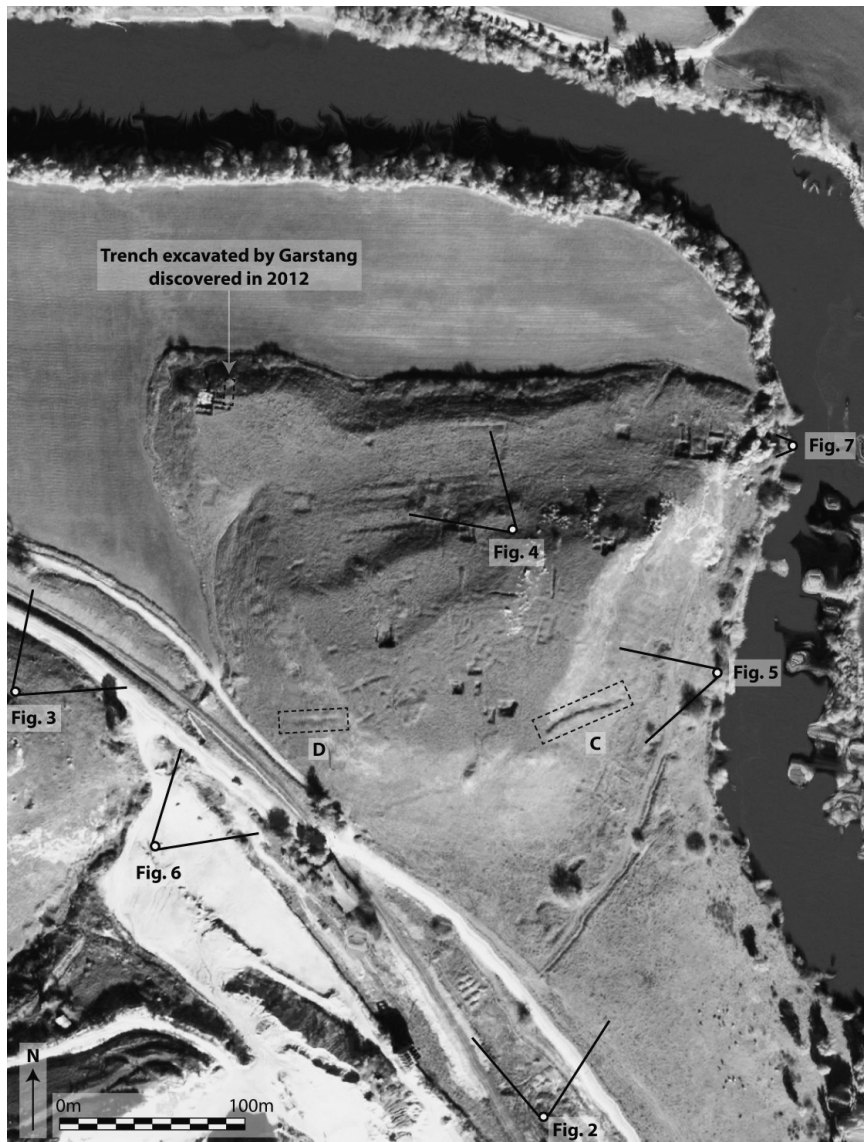


Fig. 8. Satellite image of Sirkeli Höyük with the possible location of Garstang's trenches (when possible), the viewpoints and angles of the photographs, as well as the location of the newly discovered trench in Area A (WorldView-1 satellite image [0,5 m data coverage]).

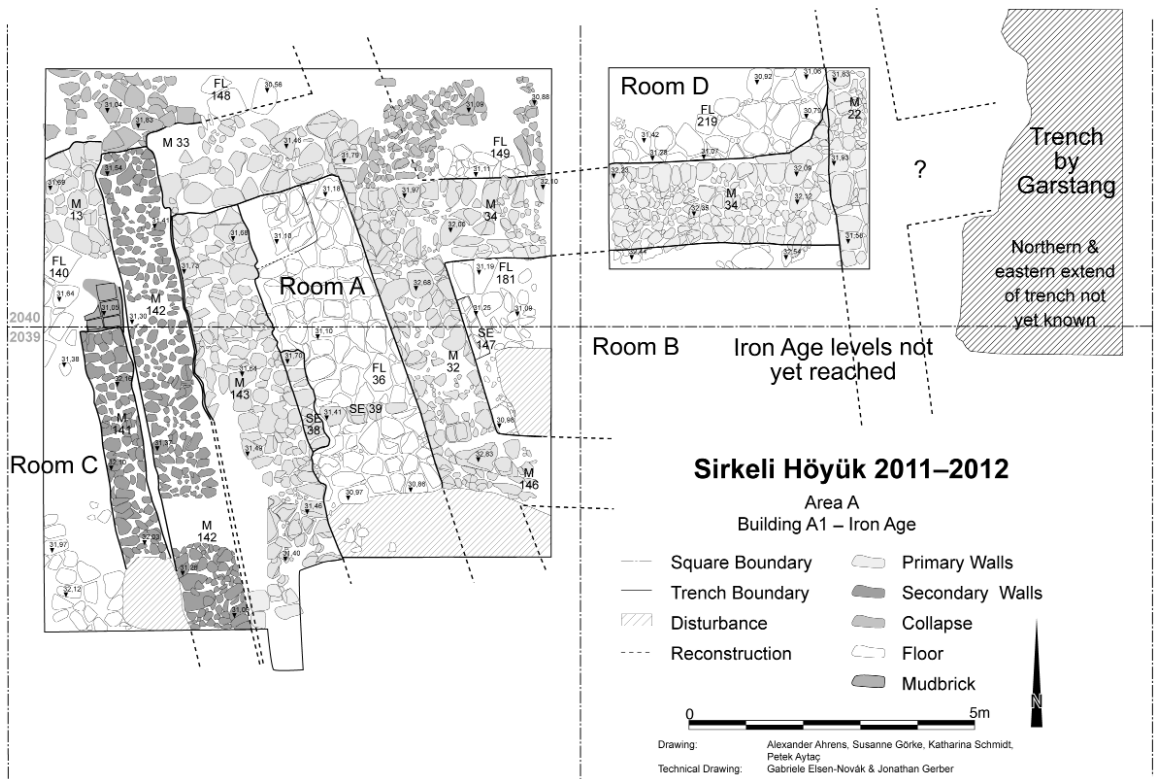


Fig. 9. Building A1 dating to the end of the Late Bronze Age-early/middle Iron Age with the location of Garstang’s trench (courtesy of the Sirkeli Höyük Excavation Project).

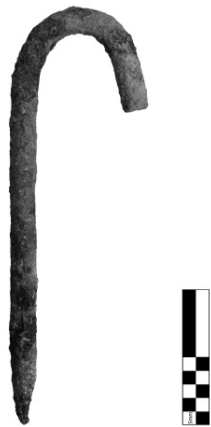


Fig. 10. Iron peg from the trench (photo: Laura Simons; courtesy of the Sirkeli Höyük Excavation Project).



Fig. 11. Base of a glass bottle with base mark from the trench (photo: Laura Simons; courtesy of the Sirkeli Höyük Excavation Project).



Fig. 12. Neck of a glass bottle with distinctive ‘champagne finish’ from the trench (photo: Laura Simons; courtesy of the Sirkeli Höyük Excavation Project).



Fig. 13. Photo of the eastern section through Garstang's trench in Area A; at the bottom right are wall remains of Building A1 (photo: Alexander Ahrens; courtesy of the Sirkeli Höyük Excavation Project).

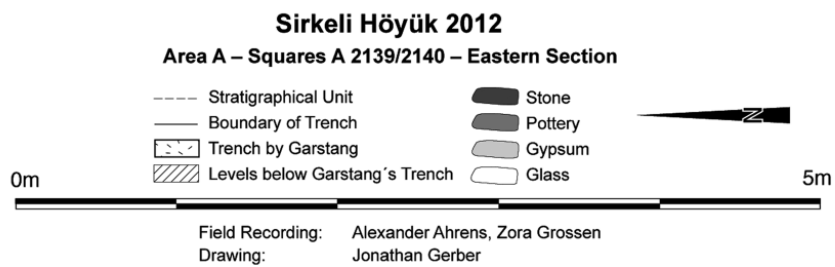
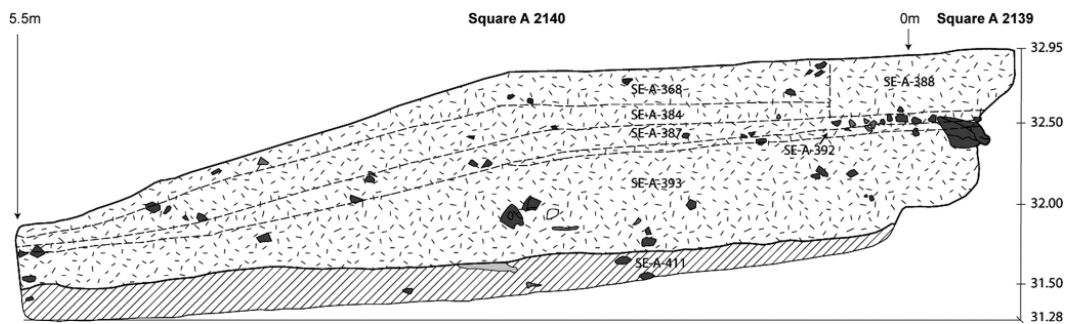


Fig. 14. Drawing of the eastern section through Garstang's trench in Area A (drawing: Alexander Ahrens; Zora Grossen; Jonathan Gerber).



Fig. 15. Column base in the form of two lions made of basalt, kept in the Archaeological Museum of Adana; approximate height: ca. 50 cm; width: ca. 70 cm, depth: ca. 50 cm (photo: Alexander Ahrens).

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