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Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna
Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà

Karkemish of the Hittites on the Euphrates
New Discoveries and New Acquisitions

Ante Quem

edited by
Nicolò Marchetti

Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna
Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà

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New Discoveries and New Acquisitions

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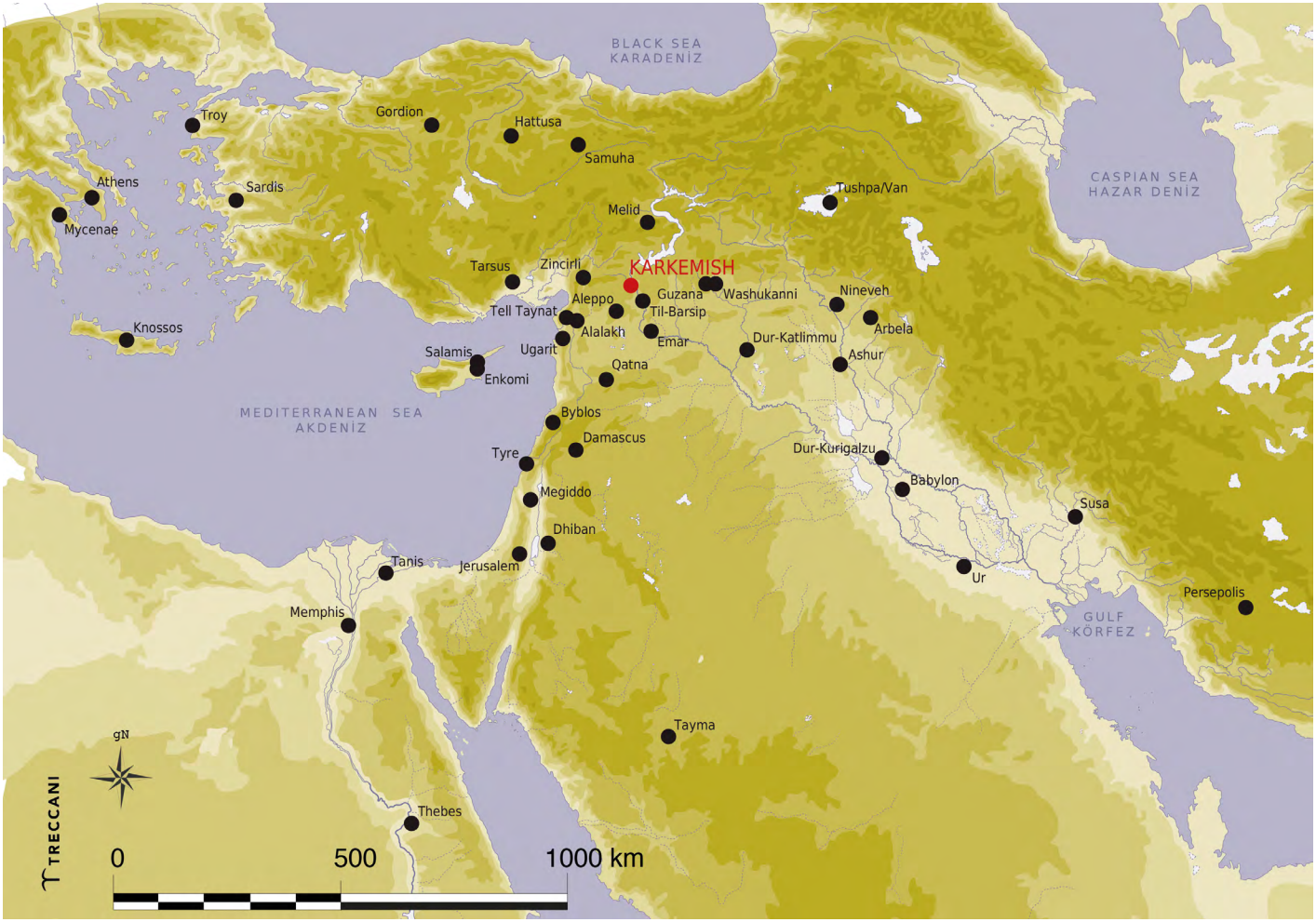


Forewords

Karkemish, situated on the banks of the Euphrates River at a strategic crossing between Anatolia and Mesopotamia, emerged as one of the most significant commercial and political centers of the Ancient Near East. During the Hittite Empire period, the settlement acquired the character of a frontier city and an administrative hub, and it continued to maintain its importance after the collapse of the empire as the capital of one of the Late Hittite kingdoms. The orthostats, inscriptions, and architectural remains that have survived from this long historical trajectory provide direct insight into the artistic production, religious thought, and political organization of the Hittite Empire and Late Hittite periods. In particular, the war scenes, royal representations, and depictions of deities carved on the orthostats clearly articulate the ideological framework and concepts of power that shaped the period. In this respect, Karkemish and its associated archaeological remains occupy a prominent position in scholarly research as a key reference point for understanding political continuity, cultural interaction, and artistic development in the histories of Anatolia and North Mesopotamia. The first systematic archaeological excavations at the site were conducted between 1911 and 1914 under the direction of the British archaeologists David Hogarth and Leonard Woolley. During these campaigns, T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), who was present in the region in his capacity as an archaeologist before becoming a war intelligence officer, provided logistical support and contributed to field organization. Woolley's excavations brought to light palace complexes, monumental gateways, and orthostats with a wide range of thematic content; these discoveries clearly demonstrate that Karkemish had reached a high level of political organization and artistic production in the Late Hittite period. A substantial portion of the orthostats, inscriptions, sculptures, and architectural fragments recovered from the excavations at Karkemish is today displayed in the collection of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. These reliefs — depicting scenes of hunting, warfare, banqueting, public presentation, processions of gods, and ceremonial processions involving priests and priestesses — occupy a distinguished position within the Iron Age Near Eastern artistic repertoire, both for their iconographic diversity and their state of preservation. Through these works, visitors are able to apprehend the political and religious structures of the Late Hittite period not solely through written sources, but within a comprehensive historical framework grounded in visual and material evidence and situated within the broader Anatolian chronology. In this respect, the Karkemish reliefs constitute one of the Museum's most prominent collection groups, as they vividly reflect the characteristic stylistic features of Late Hittite art. The gathering of these objects within the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations allows Karkemish to be considered not merely as a regional center, but within the broader framework of the long-term political and cultural transformations of Anatolian history. Within the Museum's chronological narrative — extending from prehistory to the Ottoman period — the Hittite Empire and Late Hittite phases acquire a concrete and legible structure through the Karkemish material, enabling visitors to trace a historical continuity that extends from a local archaeological context to the wider Anatolian landscape. The transfer of the archaeological finds uncovered at Karkemish to Ankara is directly linked to the cultural policies adopted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during the formative years of the Republic. This approach — emphasizing the centralized protection, documentation, and scholarly investigation of archaeological heritage — reflects a deliberate effort to

reposition Anatolia's multilayered past within a newly articulated national historical narrative. Within this framework, Hamit Zübeyir Koşay played an active role in overseeing excavations conducted according to scientific standards, in the systematic classification of the finds, and in their relocation to Ankara, thereby making them accessible within the public sphere; his efforts contributed significantly to the institutional foundations of Republican archaeology. Koşay's work, both at Karkemish and across Anatolia more broadly, enabled archaeological heritage to be removed from a strictly local context and integrated into a centralized museum narrative. In this respect, the display of the Karkemish material in the Stone Artefacts Hall of the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations may be regarded as a tangible indicator of the process through which historical consciousness began to be structured through museums in the early Republican period. In this respect, the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations has transformed Karkemish from an archaeological heritage confined to its excavation site into one of the principal institutional frameworks through which it has gained national and international visibility. The finds from Karkemish clearly demonstrate that, following the collapse of the Hittite Empire, political and cultural order in Anatolia did not disappear but instead persisted in reconfigured forms at centers such as Karkemish. Consequently, within the Museum's narrative, Karkemish has become one of the primary reference points through which political continuity in Anatolian history can be traced. The exhibition Karkemish of the Hittites on the Euphrates: New Discoveries and New Acquisitions*, organized thanks to the collaboration between the Universities of Bologna, Istanbul, Gaziantep and the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, provides a framework in which the finds recovered from the excavations at Karkemish are examined within their historical contexts and in light of current scholarly approaches. This project demonstrates that the tradition of scholarly research on Karkemish — spanning more than a century — continues without interruption through contemporary contributions. We extend our gratitude to all institutions that supported the realization of the exhibition, foremost among them the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as the University of Bologna and the SANKO Holding.*

Yusuf Kiraç and Umut Alagöz

Director and Deputy Director
The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations

Anatolia is a unique geography where civilizations were born, cultures were blended, and some of the most striking chapters of human history were written. With its past extending over more than six thousand years, we experience the great honor and excitement of bringing together with you, here in our capital Ankara, through this exhibition, the magnificent heritage of the ancient city of Karkemish, which has left deep and lasting traces in the memory of these ancient lands.

As SANKO Holding, throughout our 120-year corporate history rooted in this geography, we have carried out our industrial and production activities with a sense of responsibility toward contributing to society. For us, the preservation of cultural heritage is an indispensable cornerstone of a sustainable future, just as much as economic development.

With the understanding inherited from our founders and serving as the compass of our Group — "Those who do not protect their past have no future" — we regard the preservation of the values entrusted to us by these lands not merely as a corporate responsibility, but as a debt to our homeland.

At Karkemish, one of the most important crossroads of world history, we have taken pride since 2015 in supporting the archaeological excavations meticulously conducted by the Turco–Italian joint expedition under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye.

At the same time, through our engineering vision, we have also contributed to history's resistance to time: the Lower Palace Protective Shelter Project, realized by one of our group companies, Poligon Construction, admired within the archaeological community for its originality and inaugurated in 2024, stands as a concrete expression of SANKO's sensitivity toward cultural heritage and its vision of "preservation through continuity."

This exhibition held at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, together with the catalogue you hold in your hands, brings to light a memory that lay buried beneath the soil for thousands of years and presents it to large audiences. On these pages, every sculpture restored through the meticulous work of specialists and every small find on display whispers the stories of the people who once lived on these lands, who produced, and who shaped life.

On this cultural and institutional journey extending from Zeugma to Karkemish, I would like to express my most sincere thanks, on behalf of myself and the SANKO Group, to our esteemed archaeological teams who work devotedly in the field, to the valued representatives of our Ministry, and to everyone who contributed to the realization of this precious exhibition, which brings the historical depth of Gaziantep into the international world of science and culture.

I invite you to become a part of this ancient story carried from the banks of the Euphrates to our capital city, and I would like to emphasize once again that we will continue to build the future with the inspiration we draw from the past.

Respectfully,

Adil Sani Konukoğlu

Chairman of the Board
SANKO Holding

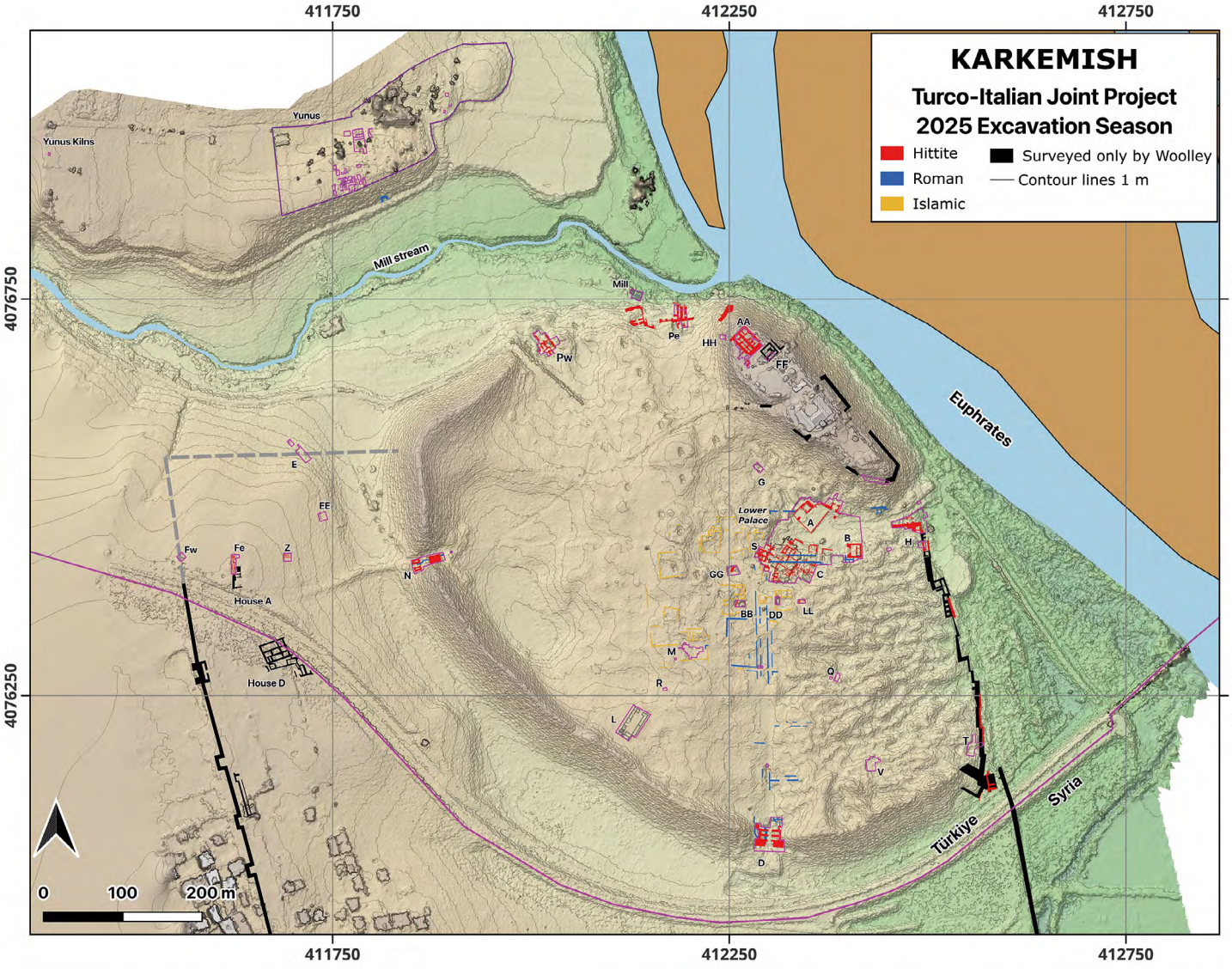
A public exhibition is an occasion to assess, reflect, celebrate and plan around a project, while at the same time serving the fundamental duty of communicating to the people new results about a scientific quest made possible by the collective support it has received. On the fifteenth year of fieldwork by the Turco-Italian Archaeological Expedition at Karkemish by the Universities of Bologna, Istanbul and Gaziantep, all these aspects are present at this event which marks both a milestone and a renewed starting point for the next phases of research. As scholars rooted in Open Science, we publish in Open Access and we share the underlying data: we develop and make public 3D models of scientific accuracy, we have strived both to open the site, located in a military area, to visitors and to build a multidisciplinary environment in which specialists bring their own perspectives and approaches around the shared goal of putting forward explanatory models of the past. Karkemish is an ancient site as well as a modern community and they both have become woven into the fabrics of our lives, much as it happened more than a century ago to the protagonists of the memorable archaeological exploration by the British Museum. To the people of Karkamış and nearby villages and to the friends and Authorities in Gaziantep, who have always fully supported us, we owe a debt which can only be honored through our enduring commitment to produce a sustainable future for the site, while contributing to the development of all the area for cultural as well environmental tourism.

The Turco-Italian Archaeological Expedition at Karkemish by the universities of Bologna, Istanbul and Gaziantep (represented by Hasan Peker and Mustafa Özakça and now by Medya Karakaya and Mehmet Yiğit Meydan) is funded by the University of Bologna, the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (DGCE 13th Office), that for Universities and Research, the SANKO Holding. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Directorate General for Cultural Heritage and Museums and its branches in the province of Gaziantep. Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, Gaziantep Governorate, Karkamış Municipality and Karkamış Local Governorate have constantly helped us in every way. The Italian Embassy in Ankara and the Italian Cultural Institute in Istanbul have always followed us with keen attention. It has been thanks to the generous and friendly reception of museum curators that we have been able to read anew the evidence, which had been documented and collected by the previous expedition, in light of our enhanced understanding of the site, through many study periods during the years (I filed museum collections thanks to the help mainly of Luisa Guerri, Antonio Bonomo and Federico Zaina). Besides the joins of new fragments to the sculptures exhibited in the main hall (for which see pp. 58-59), this exhibition presents to the public 57 objects from Turkish museums of significant historical importance spanning a period of 600 years when Hittite culture was prevalent at the site (1300-700 BCE), of which 28 unpublished and 29 – although published previously (but in many cases nothing more was known about their whereabouts) – presented here with new data, photos and interpretations. The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations has always welcomed us: this exhibition crowns years of collaboration and exchanges and we are very grateful to our colleagues Yusuf Kiraç and Umut Alagöz for deciding it together with the conservation program, building on the work carried out

with my friend Mustafa Metin, curator of the Karkemish section at the Museum, without whose keen availability, knowledge and commitment nothing would have been possible. At the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, first Zeyep Kızıltan and then Rahmi Asal as successive directors, together with our colleagues curators, allowed us to seamlessly study through their holdings from Karkemish. Gaziantep Archaeological Museum is our trusted and close partner in each endeavor, including the current one, and Özgür Çomak, Ramazan Eker, Mehmet Sait Yılmaz, Sait Uslu, Halil and Elif Yılmaz deserve our deepest gratitude. This exhibition and catalogue would not have been possible without the help of close friends, colleagues and collaborators. With Hasan Peker, who for many years has been deputy director of the Expedition, we have shared the exhibition concept and we sharpened our views on the ancient history of Karkemish through countless discussions down into the night: the format we have chosen is to let each object add a piece of history until composing a coherent historical framework after reading the whole catalogue. Claudia D'Orazio has been invaluable through all the preparatory and execution stages, and she keenly contributed to the redaction of the catalogue. Vittoria Cardini did an amazing job in typesetting both versions of the catalogue with her usual care and acumen. Jacopo Monastero is the driving force behind our 3D approach and he has realized the models of the glyptics publicly shared on https://www.orientlab.net/digital_museum/, as well as the immersive model of the Late Hittite monumental core of Karkemish at https://www.orientlab.net/3d-kark/ (building on the photogrammetry carried out in Ankara by Giampaolo Luglio). Eleonora Mariani, Francesca Cavaliere and Gabriele Giacosa carefully checked and formatted the bibliography. Francesco Prezioso masterfully took the object photos both at the dig house and in the museums, while Marco Valeri produced the maps and the cutouts of the images. Finally, we could not dream of a more committed translator, for the Turkish version of this Catalogue, than Bakış Çoğal, who availed herself of the technical consultancy of Yusuf Gürkan Ergin. The publisher, Marco Destro of Ante Quem, spent together with Enrico Gallì a great deal of time in securing the best publishing result. Pınar Ulutaş of SANKO proved as usual to be an incredibly effective media manager. To all of them I wish to express my deepest gratitude and admiration. Finally, the SANKO Holding and Adil Sani Konukoğlu have since a decade believed in the Karkemish project as a means to develop the area, protect heritage and pursue new knowledge. Their generous commitment continued with the support which they extended to the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations for the conservation works carried in the main hall there involving, in the case of the larger orthostats, their temporary removal from the display walls and, in the case of the King's Gate, their rearrangement within the Museum itself, thus setting a standard for a model cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Nicolò Marchetti

Director of the
Turco-Italian Archaeological Expedition at Karkemish
Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna


KARKEMISH
Turco-Italian Joint Project
2025 Excavation Season
Hittite
Roman
Islamic
Surveyed only by Woolley
Contour lines 1 m
411750
412250
412750
4076750
4076250
Yunus
Yunus Kilns
Mill stream
Mill
Pe
Pw
HH
AA
FF
Euphrates
E
EE
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Lower Palace
A
B
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S
C
GG
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DD
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House A
House D
Syria
Türkiye
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100
200 m

The Hittite Empire period sealing archive from Karkemish: a web of officials and economic tasks

Giacomo Benati, Claudia D'Orazio, Nicolò Marchetti and Hasan Peker

After being conquered and incorporated into the Hittite empire (c. 1330 BCE), the key city of Karkemish on the Euphrates became the seat of a viceroy and the main administrative center in the newly constituted Syrian province, as gleaned from textual and glyptic materials retrieved at Hattusa, Ugarit, Emar and elsewhere (Mora 2008; 2010; 2014). The importance of Karkemish in the administrative structure of the empire, had been, so far, gleaned uniquely from indirect evidence, since direct archeological or textual evidence from the site of Karkemish was lacking. Between the 2017 and 2023 excavation campaigns, the Turco-Italian Expedition discovered around 700 clay sealings dating from the middle of the 13th century BCE in the core public district of this capital city, in areas C East and C Center. Of them, 547 sealings and a cylinder seal (see also Cat. nos. 1-3) were retrieved from the deposit below the floors of the later building (phase A). A total of 153 sealings were found in the fills above the floors of the building (see also Cat. nos. 4-11), mainly from the western courtyard (phase B; for a description of the stratigraphy, see p. 30, figs. 3-6). The sealings pertain to the management of the local "Seal-house", or treasury, managed by the top officials of the Karkemish royal court: it was a pivotal node in a network of institutions that were at the core of the political economy of the Hittite state (Fig. 1). An analytical methodology, consisting of functional, iconographic, prosopographic and network analyses has been developed in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the administrative and socio-economic framework within which sealing technologies were employed at Karkemish at the time of the Hittite Empire. The analysis of the clay sealings targeted the examination of the impressions on their back, i.e. negative traces left on the reverses of the sealings, that, once properly understood, can reveal information about the goods that were sealed and how they were sealed. The majority of sealings were at-

Fig. 1. Group of impressed sealings from the Seal-house in area C East, excavated during the 2017 campaign.

tached to movable containers as wooden boxes/chests, baskets, bags, reed containers and some pottery vessels (Cat. no. 2-3, 5-9, 11), while only a few examples can be attributed to door-closing systems (Cat. no. 4 and fig. on p. 186). Hanging sealings are also rarely attested (see Cat no. 10). On the other hand, the study of the seal impressions preserved on the obverse of the sealings allowed us to reconstruct in the first place the typology and number of seals used by Karkemish administrative officials in this locus. Over 100 different seals belonging to over 80 officials were recognized in the corpus including button seals, stamp seals, cylinder seals, and signet rings with readable, or partially readable, names, titles and professions (see Peker 2023a). The most frequent sealers in the corpus are Paya, active in phase A and specialized in sealing leather bundles (Fig. 2), Taya, specialized in wooden chests and baskets (Cat. nos. 2, 6, 7), and Zinni (I) seems to be a mix of the other two but with the very rare specialization in vessels as well (Cat. no. 10) (see also Marchetti, Peker and Zaina 2019-2020: 267-268). Taya and Zinni are found both in phases A and B, with Zinni (I) probably promoted to the role of 'Lord of the seal' (SIGILLUM.DOMINUS, on his cylinder seal, Cat. no. 4) in the later phase (Peker 2023a: 133-134). Overall, the administrative framework of the Karkemish sealings revolved around the management of a state-run storehouse. This is suggested by three strands of evidence: 1) The retrieval of a sealing impressed by a seal belonging to an official responsible for the "seal-house" (É ^{NA4}KIŠIB) institution within our sample; 2) The overlap between the type of containers reconstructed from the back of the seal-impressions within our sample and the ones registered in the so-called "storeroom inventory texts" (Košak 1982; Van den Hout 2012: 45-47; Mora 2012: 61-64); 3) The fact that in both our sample and in the inventory texts, princes and top officials of the court were in charge of deposit and control operations. A tablet from Emar informs us about the existence of a very high official bearing the title of "master of the *abussi*-storehouse of Ini-Teshub" (D'Alfonso 2001: 273-274; Bilgin 2018: 75 n. 220, 318), which indicates that both an abussi-storehouse – of seemingly royal nature – and a seal-house were in function at Karkemish during the

Fig. 2. Container sealing (KH.17.O.691) impressed with Paya's button seal from the Seal-house, phase A (see Peker 2023a: 129, no. fig. 12, table 2).

reign of this very king. Therefore, the Karkemish sealings must have pertained to the administration of a local storehouse that was either a "seal-house" = É ^{NA4}KIŠIB, headed by the AGRIG and LU É ^{NA4}KIŠIB officials, "storehouse administrators" (cf. Cat. no. 4), or perhaps, the É *ABUSSI*, "storehouse", headed by the EN É *ABUSSI*, "master of the storehouse" (cf. Košak 1982: 49, 63; Singer 1984: 112 n. 81). The *abussi*-house was a place in which precious items were stored, with a possible cultic specialization (Bilgin 2018: 318), whereas the seal-house could manage agricultural produce as well as craft items, garments and textiles in particular (Singer 1984; Košak 1982). More generally, according to the inventory texts, the state storehouses received goods stored in containers, along with packing lists, incoming via caravan expeditions as taxes, elite gifts or traded items (Košak 1982; Siegelova 1986; cf. Bilgin 2018: 444). Subsequently, inside the storehouse, the containers were checked by officials, and the contents of a number of these packing lists were entered into tablets (Košak 1982: 91; Bilgin 2018: 316). In a final act, the containers were sealed and the packages exited the storehouse to be shipped in other locations. The storeroom inventories almost exclusively deal with

luxury items – garments, wool, linen, precious stones, metal items and raw metals, etc. – allocated to institutions (temples, military garrisons, etc.), attached craftsmen and high-ranking individuals, i.e. state officials and members of the elite (cf. Košak 1982: 195-203; Vigo 2019: 144). The integrated analysis of administrative practices, storage, official titles and networking presented above allows us to further elaborate into the bureaucratic structure of Karkemish during the Empire. The administration of the Karkemish storehouse(s) involved three ranks of officials. An upper rank composed of high dignitaries – among which feature prominently members of the extended royal family – who oversaw inspection, transportation and registration of precious materials channeled through the institutional storehouses. They did so in conjunction with a small group of high officials that were seemingly tasked with registration of goods coming from/traveling abroad, and with a larger group of mid/low officials that were seemingly tasked with the routine activities involved in storing and checking goods. The mid/low level layer of the official administration at Karkemish was composed of officials bearing titles such as "courtier", "notables", "physicians", etc. In the Nişantepe archive, indeed, "courtiers" are very frequently attested (Bilgin 2018: 393) and they were probably in charge of the basic tasks connected to the day-to-day administration of institutional storehouses. The main synchronism between the Emar documentation and the new sealing archive from Karkemish is represented by the seal of Ewri-Teshub, a diviner known both from Karkemish (Peker 2023a: 128 no. 7, figs. 6-7, together with Sunaili and Zinni I, cf. Cat. nos. 1, 4 and the discussion under Cat. no. 10; Fig. 3) and from Emar (Beyer 2001: 56-57, A14; Arnaud 1986: 225, no. 212), on a document in which the people involved are in their turn associated on other tablets with the (seal of the) king of Karkemish Ini-Teshub (Cohen 2009: 24 note 80; Arnaud 1986: 217-220, nos. 206-207), indicating a date around the central decades of the 13th century BCE for the Karkemish archive. Texts and glyptic materials from Emar, Ugarit and Hattusa, in fact show that high dignitaries from Karkemish took part in the administration of the Syrian provinces by covering various official

Fig. 3. Small container sealing (KH.17.O.671) with the cylinder seals impressions of Ewri-Teshub, Sunaili and Taya from the Seal-house, phase A. For the actual seal of Sunaili, see Cat. no. 1.

activities (Mora 2008; 2010; 2014). Many "princes" and Karkemish officials traveled in their province and abroad to oversee administrative, judicial and diplomatic affairs (Bilgin 2018: 75 n. 220; Figs. 4-5). Similarly, high officials were also involved in the management of royal storehouses in Hattusa, particularly during the second half of the 13th century BCE (Mora 2008: 562-563). Numerous clay sealings impressed with seals belonging to Karkemish "princes" have been found in the main store deposits of Hattusa and in the Westbau complex on Nişantepe – possibly a seal-house. Although the list of high dignitaries from Karkemish active at Hattusa compiled by Mora (2012) do not present overlaps with the current list of seal-bearers active in the Karkemish seal-house, the fact that several "princes" and seal-bearing officials were involved in storeroom operations in Karkemish and in Hattusa, clearly indicates that, by the time of Ini-Teshub, Karkemish was indeed integrated within the network of storehouses centered upon Hattusa, in line with the two-staged administrative system sketched by Singer (1984: 113).

Fig. 4. Jar sealing from the LB II fortress of Tell Faq'ous impressed with the signet ring of tartanu Shaggar-abu, a high-ranking official possibly connected with the Karkemish administration (after Beyer 2001: 454, no. B10, pl. 37.a).

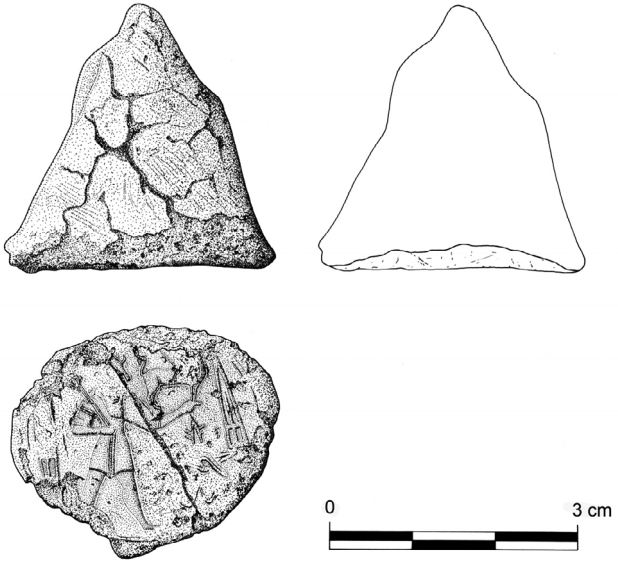

Fig. 5. Conical hanging sealing from Oylum Höyük impressed with the stamp seal of Ini-Teshub (after Engin 2019: 128, drawing 1).