

## A Gate Opening to the South of Erzurum: Hınıs Plain and Parmaksız Kale Höyük

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Submitted 19.03.2025  
Revision Requested Last 21.06.2025  
Revision Received 03.07.2025  
Accepted Date 17.09.2025  
Publication Date 25.09.2025

### Cite this article

Parliti, U. & Yücel, Ç. (2025). A Gate Opening to the South of Erzurum: Hınıs Plain and Parmaksız Kale Höyük, *Oannes*, 7(2), September, pp. 336-357.

### Abstract

*The Erzurum region in Asia Minor serves as a crucial geographical transition point between Transcaucasia, Northwestern Iran, and Central Anatolia. From the Paleolithic to the Chalcolithic and subsequent Bronze Ages, the number of settlements and population in the area increased. While the region has always been located along key migration routes, its rich mineral resources, extensive agricultural lands, and livestock farming have consistently drawn attention, both in the past and today.*

*The Hınıs Plain, located in the Eastern Anatolia Region, which is predominantly mountainous, plays a key role between the mountainous southern border belt of Erzurum—where the influence of Transcaucasia is strongly felt—and the Muş Plain, which reflects Mesopotamian influence from the early Chalcolithic period onwards. This plain, which holds significant importance, sheds light on numerous socio-economic and political developments that have evolved along the north-south axis since the Chalcolithic period.*

*One of the missing links in the archaeology of the region is Parmaksız Kale Höyük, one of the prominent settlements of the Hınıs Plain. It is located along the northern tributaries of the Hınıs River, which originates from the eastern slopes of Bingöl Mountain and flows through the Hınıs Plain. In this respect, it occupies a strategic position in terms of raw material procurement and transportation. Playing a key role within the plain, Parmaksız Kale Höyük stands out with the archaeological materials recovered during the 2022 surface survey and the 2023-2024 salvage excavations. Based on the findings, the chronological framework of the mound spans the Late Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, and Middle Iron Ages. However, apart from Parmaksız Kale Höyük, no other excavations have been conducted in the Hınıs Plain and its surroundings to confirm the accuracy of these layers. Future research and excavations at Parmaksız Höyük will contribute significantly to the understanding of regional history, alongside important archaeological centers such as Pulur, Karaz, Sos, and Güzelova in the Erzurum region.*

**Keywords:** Mountainous Eastern Anatolia, Erzurum, Hınıs, Parmaksız Kale Höyük, Chronology.



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## Genişletilmiş Özet

*Parmaksız Kale Höyük, Erzurum ili, Hınıs ilçesinin kuş uçuşu 5 km kuzeydoğusunda, Hınıs-Erzurum yolu üzerinden 8.6 km kuzeyinde, Aşağı Parmaksız Mahallesi'nin güney ucunda yer almaktadır. Bu merkezin bulunduğu konum Aşağı Parmaksız Köyü sakinleri tarafından "Parmaksız Kale Mevkii" adıyla tanımlandığından höyük "Parmaksız Kale Höyük" olarak adlandırılmıştır. Höyük, ovoid 60 m kadar yükseklikteki büyükçe bir ana kaya kütleli üzerinde, 300 m uzunluk ve 100 m genişliğiyle çok kabaca yamuk bir şekle sahiptir. Höyüğün güney ve doğu etekleri, eski dönemlerde insanlar tarafından mezarlık alanı, en kuzey uç bölümü ritüel alanı olarak kullanılmıştır. Söz konusu etekler ve ritüel bölümleri de hesaba alındığında kuzey-güney doğrultuda 600 m, doğu-batı doğrultuda 300 m kadar oldukça geniş bir alana yayılım söz konusudur.*

*Parmaksız Kale Höyük'ün topografik yapısı, mimari unsurları ve yüzey buluntuları incelendiğinde, höyüğün dört ana bölüme ayrıldığı anlaşılmaktadır. Ritüel Alan/Sitadelin Kuzey Kısmı, sarnıçlar, işlikler ve açık hava tapınım alanını içermektedir. Sitadelin Güney Kısmı, höyük ile kale alanını kapsamaktadır. Yamaç Alanı/Höyüğün Etek Kısmı, sitadeli çevreleyen yol ulaşımı, MÖ 4. Binyıl sonundan başlayarak MÖ 3. Binyıl boyunca ve MÖ 7-6. yy mezarlığı ile muhtemelen maden ergitme birimlerinin bulunduğu bir bölge olarak kullanılmıştır. Karşı Yamaç ise MÖ 2. Binyıla tarihlenen mezarlıktan oluşmaktadır.*

*Höyük etrafında bu ana kaya kütleli üzerine açılmış çok sayıda kaya çanağı, oluklar, nişler ve farklı boyut ve şekillerde çukurlar dikkati çekmektedir. Ayrıca sitadel kısmında yer yer görülen düzenli taş sıraları Urartular zamanından günümüze kadar ulaşmayı başarmış olan sur sisteminin birer parçasıdır. Tüm bu özellikler, höyüğün yalnızca bir yerleşim alanı değil, aynı zamanda kale-höyük karakterine sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Höyük doğudan ve güneyden iki derin plato üzerinden güneyde tarım, hayvancılık ve ormancılık faaliyetlerine müsait oldukça geniş sulak düzlüğe açılmaktadır. Bu özelliklerinden ötürü yer seçimi bakımından bilinçli bir tercih yapıldığı hemen dikkati çekmektedir. Sitadelin kuzey kesiminde yer alan, su sarnıçlarının bulunduğu bölümün Urartular zamanında kutsal alan işlevi gördüğü düşünülmektedir. Urartu kültürünün izlerini barındıran bu alanın hemen kuzeyinde ele geçen demir bir iğne, birkaç küçük tunç plaka ve bir bebeğe ait iki kaburga parçası, buranın bir Urartu yerleşim alanı olabileceğini ve muhtemelen bir Urartu tapınağı barındırdığını düşündürmektedir.*

*Sitadelin güney yamaçlarında gerçekleştirilen yüzey taramalarında ve kurtarma kazılarında kaçak kazılar sonucu tahrip edilen Erken Tunç Çağı Kura-Aras kültürüne ait mezarlar tespit edilmiştir. Güney Yamaç Mezarlığındaki kaçak kazı çukurlarının genişliklerinin 3 ila 5 m arasında değişmesi ve mezarlar içerisindeki plaka sal taşları ile kerpiç bloklar, bu mezarların muhtemelen oda mezarları olduğunu göstermektedir. Kaçak kazı çukurlarında görülen taş dizilimleri de, bu yamaçta oldukça büyük mezar yapılarının olabileceği izlenimini vermektedir. Mezarların kaçak kazı çukurlarında ve çevresinde yapılan detaylı yüzey taramalarında ve kurtarma kazılarında, insan ve hayvan kemikleri dışında çok sayıda oldukça gösterişli işlenmiş Kura-Aras kap parçalarına, kemik ve pişmiş topraktan eserlere ve oldukça nadide bakır/tunçtan yapılmış plaka şeklindeki ana tanrıça idollerine ulaşılmıştır.*

*Güney Yamaç Mezarlığı'nın hemen karşısındaki Karşı Yamaç Mezarlığı'nda kaçak kazılar sonucunda tahrip edilmiş Orta Tunç Çağına tarihlenebilecek tahrip edilmiş en az 3 mezar tespit edilmiştir. Mezarların çevresini ve duvarlarını oluşturan taşlar yerinden sökülüp, mezar odasına ve çevresine dağıtılmıştır. Talandan geriye kalan insan ve hayvan kemiklerinin yanı sıra amorf nitelikte boyalı kap parçalarına, bir tunç mızrak ucu ve iki ok ucu bulunmuştur. Ayrıca bu mezarlıkta ele geçen Orta Tunç Çağı idolu stilistik açıdan Erken Tunç Çağı idollerine göre oldukça küt ve gösterişsiz işlenmiştir. Madenin içeriğine baktığımızda bakır oranı yüksek olmakla birlikte, kalay oranı Erken Tunç Çağı idolüne göre oldukça yüksektir.*

*Sonuçta, Parmaksız Kale Höyük Kalkolitik Çağlardan Demir Çağlar'ına kadar uzun bir zaman diliminde varlığını sürdüren önemli bir merkezdir. Yerleşimin taşınır ve taşınmaz kültür varlıkları, bu dönemde burada yaşayanların, yalnızca yerel değil, aynı zamanda bölgesel ve kültürel anlamda da etkili bir toplum olduğunu göstermektedir. Özellikle Kura-Aras ve Urartu kültürleri ile ilişkili buluntular, Parmaksız Kale Höyük'ün sıradan bir yerleşim yeri olmadığını, belki de bir tür bölgesel merkez olabileceğini düşündürmektedir.*

## Introduction

Sharing similar geographical characteristics with the Eastern Anatolia Region, Erzurum is one of the most significant mountainous areas located north of the Taurus belt. The Hınıs region, situated in the southern districts of Erzurum and home to Parmaksız Kale Höyük<sup>1</sup> —the focus of this study—also exhibits comparable geographical and ecological features. Hınıs is a large depression zone, and due to its proximity to the geometric center of the Eastern Anatolia Region and its distinct geographical characteristics, it resembles an oasis. Although administratively part of Erzurum Province, the Hınıs district is geographically and culturally more aligned with the Upper Murat-Van region (Koday, 1999, p. 361, Fig. 1). The Hınıs Depression is bordered to the north by the Akdağ Massif (2881 m), to the south by the Hamurpet Mountains (2870 m) and Akdoğan Mountains (2879 m), and to the west by Bingöl Mountain (2193 m). This depression was filled with

<sup>1</sup> The Parmaksız Kale Höyük, located within the boundaries of Parmaksız Mahallesi in Hınıs district, Erzurum province, and partially owned by the Treasury on parcels 132, lot 1, and 183, lot 1, was registered as a First-Degree Archaeological Site by the Erzurum Regional Board for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage with decision no. 3700, dated 30.07.2019. Based on the results of the surface survey conducted in Hınıs, the site boundaries of parcel 183, lot 1, of Parmaksız Kale Höyük were redefined and expanded on 19.01.2023.

volcanic material originating from Bingöl Mountain and was subsequently incised by rivers, forming deep and narrow valleys. Consequently, the region's landscape is characterized by deeply eroded valleys interspersed with high plateaus. This geological formation is exposed at the location of Parmaksız Kale Höyük. The Hınıs Depression's topographical features create the shortest natural route connecting the Erzurum region in the north to the Muş region in the South (Polat, 2000, p. 170, 172; Hadimli, 2001, p. 1,7).

Throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, archaeological research in the Erzurum and Muş regions has remained limited and has never reached the desired level of intensity<sup>2</sup>. Archaeological investigations in the region began in the early 1940s with H. Z. Koşay's sondage at Karaz, focusing primarily on specific areas. These studies were mostly concentrated on the Erzurum Plain and the Pasinler Plain to its east. However, the southern areas of Erzurum Province, which could provide valuable data on north-south interactions, remained largely unexplored. No long-term, systematic excavation has been conducted in the Hınıs region, which falls within this under-researched area, to establish the main framework of the region's archaeology. The first archaeological data from Hınıs emerged when N. Başgelen and A. Özfirat introduced Urartian belt fragments reportedly excavated from Hınıs-Toprakkale to the archaeological community (Başgelen & Özfirat, 1996, p. 143-158). The scattered data and materials obtained from illicit excavations clearly reveal the region's significant archaeological potential (Gündoğdu et al., 2005: Photo. 6). However, considering the scattered data and materials obtained from illicit excavations, it is evident that this region holds significant archaeological potential. Our archaeological survey conducted in 2022, followed by salvage excavations led by the Erzurum Archaeology Museum in 2023–2024<sup>3</sup>, has confirmed these assessments.

The limited archaeological research carried out across Erzurum Province thus far has revealed a cultural sequence in Northeastern Anatolia that began in the Chalcolithic period and continued into subsequent ages. However, many archaeological periods within this sequence remain insufficiently understood in terms of their dynamics and parameters<sup>4</sup>. The Iron Age, in particular, stands out as one of the least comprehended phases. While different regions of Eastern Anatolia experienced diverse developmental trajectories during the Iron Age, numerous aspects of this period in mountainous Northeastern Anatolia remain unclear. The limited available data suggest that the Late Bronze, Early Iron, and Middle Iron Age phases may have been more prominent in this region than previously assumed. However, systematic regional excavations and research are necessary to clarify these processes. Parmaksız Kale Höyük, the focus of this study, possesses significant archaeological potential to address key research questions related to the Chalcolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages<sup>5</sup>.

### **Parmaksız Kale Höyük**

Parmaksız Kale Höyük is located approximately 5 km northeast of Hınıs district in Erzurum province (as the crow flies) and 8.6 km north of the Hınıs-Erzurum road, at the southern edge of Aşağı Parmaksız Mahallesi (Map 1). Since the local residents of Aşağı Parmaksız Köyü refer to this area as the "Parmaksız Kale Mevkii" (Parmaksız Castle Area), the mound has been named Parmaksız Kale Höyük. Situated on a landform resembling a deeply dissected plateau due to the effects of rivers, the mound is traversed by Parmaksız Stream, one of the tributaries feeding Hınıs Creek, along its southern slopes.

The mound sits atop a large bedrock formation approximately 60 meters above the plain, with an irregular trapezoidal shape measuring 300 meters in length and 100 meters in width. The southern and eastern slopes of the mound were used as a cemetery in ancient times, while the northernmost section functioned as a ritual area. When considering these slopes and ritual areas, the site extends across 600 meters in a north-south direction and 300 meters in an east-west direction, covering a fairly large area.

<sup>2</sup> For general information on research in the region, see Işıklı, 2011, 211-247.

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank the Director of Erzurum Archaeology Museum, Hüsnü GENÇ, and the Director of Erzurum Regional Laboratory for Restoration and Conservation, Lokman KEMALOĞLU, as well as their staff who kindly offered their support.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the region's archaeology, see Işıklı, 2010, 22-30.

<sup>5</sup> The results were achieved with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism under Project No. YA012502(2022) and Atatürk University under Project No. SAB-2023-13297.

Several rock-cut basins, channels, niches, and pits of various shapes and sizes carved into the bedrock are visible around the mound (Photo 1). Additionally, the regular stone rows occasionally observed in the citadel area are remnants of a fortification system dating back to the Urartian period (Photo 2). These features indicate that Parmaksız Kale Höyük was not just a settlement but also had the characteristics of a fortified mound. To the east and south, the mound is bordered by two deep plateaus, which lead to a vast, well-watered plain in the south, suitable for agriculture, animal husbandry, and forestry. These geographical advantages suggest that the location was carefully chosen for settlement (Photo 1).

#### Settlement Layout and Finds of Parmaksız Kale Höyük

An examination of the topographic structure, architectural elements, and surface finds of Parmaksız Kale Höyük indicates that the site is divided into four main sections:

1. Ritual Area/Northern Part of the Citadel: This section includes cisterns, workshops, and an open-air worship area.
2. Southern Part of the Citadel: Encompassing both the mound and the fortress area.
3. Slope Area/Lower Section of the Mound: This part, which surrounds the citadel, was used as a transportation route, a cemetery dating to the 3rd millennium BCE and the 7th–6th centuries BCE, and possibly as a metal smelting zone.
4. Opposite Slope: Consists of a cemetery dating to the 2nd millennium BCE (Map 2).

The southern part of the citadel covers an area of 21 hectares. The ceramic evidence recovered from the surface suggests that the site was continuously inhabited over a long period.

Additionally, on the steep southeastern-southwestern slopes overlooking the Parmaksız River valley, the presence of a fortification wall constructed from large, irregular stones, with almost two or three preserved courses, is noteworthy (Image 3). Considering this wall and the settlement's location, it is evident that Parmaksız Kale Höyük functioned as a fortress. It was likely used as a defensive center during specific periods. The destruction caused by a base station constructed in the central part of the citadel's southern section has left behind neatly cut local stone blocks, which were extracted from the depths of the mound. These stone blocks resemble dismantled sections of monumental architectural walls. A detailed and extensive field survey conducted in the southern part of the citadel revealed numerous amorphous Kura-Araxes and Urartian ceramics, as well as fragments of bronze and iron objects. The abundance of metallic artifacts recovered from the surface, particularly from areas disturbed by illegal excavations, suggests the destruction of elite tombs (Image 4). The stone metal mold discovered in the citadel and the large amounts of slag identified on the western slope suggest the existence of metalworking workshops and furnaces within the settlement.

#### Religious and Funerary Contexts

The northern section of the citadel, where water cisterns are located, is believed to have served as a sacred area. Several artifacts discovered just north of this area, including an iron pin, a few small bronze plaques, and two rib fragments belonging to an infant, indicate that this might have been an Urartian settlement area and may have housed an Urartian temple (Image 5a).

A rock-cut tomb (M1) identified on the eastern slope of Parmaksız Kale Höyük exhibits remarkable features. One of its most significant elements is the presence of two niches carved into the rock at the upper part of the tomb chamber. The first niche, located 65 cm north of the tomb, is partially pear-shaped, carved into the rock in two levels, and measures 68 cm in height and 55 cm in width, making it significantly larger than the second niche. The second niche, situated just above the first, is 25 cm in height and 20 cm in width. A third niche, carved into the opposite rock face, measures 20 cm in height and 20 cm in width. The dimensions of the tomb chamber are 1.37 m in the north-south direction, 1.10 m in the east-west direction, and 1.16 m in depth. Although the 20 cm-thick stone slab that likely served as the ceiling was removed, the original position of the cover is still identifiable (Image 5b).

During fieldwork on the eastern slope, a tomb exposed due to erosion was identified, containing a well-preserved skeleton. Surface collection conducted around the burial site yielded a miniature vessel, fragments of pottery associated with the Urartian and Kura-Araxes cultures, and numerous small metal objects believed to be appliqué. These artifacts are considered grave goods related to this and other nearby burials. The grave measures approximately 2.65 m in width and 1.00 m in length. Since no excavation was conducted, macroscopic observations were carried out on the bones beneath the surface. Since no excavation was conducted, macro-observations were made on the bones exposed at the surface, but no precise measurements were taken. Based on the observable skeletal remains, the mandibular corpus, the left ulna, and the middle diaphysis of the radius, which was fractured in the middle, were identified. Considering the eroded cross-section and the exposed bones, the tomb appears to be oriented in a northwest-southeast direction. The mental protuberance suggests that the individual was male, while the visible teeth indicate that the individual was an adult male aged between 35 and 45 years (Image 5c).

The stone metal mold identified in the citadel and the large quantities of slag discovered during surveys on the western slope provide clues indicating the presence of a metalworking workshop and furnaces in this area. Just north of this area, several artifacts were recovered, including an iron pin, a few small bronze plaques, and two rib fragments belonging to an infant. These findings suggest that this could have been an Urartian settlement area and may have housed an Urartian temple (Image 5a).

The rock-cut tomb (M1) identified on the eastern slope of Parmaksız Kale Höyük exhibits noteworthy features. One of its significant characteristics is the two niches carved into the upper part of the tomb chamber. The first niche, located 65 cm north of the tomb, is partially pear-shaped and was carved into the rock in two stages. It measures 68 cm in height and 55 cm in width, making it significantly larger than the other. Directly above it, there is a smaller niche, measuring 25 cm in height and 20 cm in width. Opposite these, on the rock surface, a third niche was carved, measuring 20 cm in height and 20 cm in width. The tomb chamber itself measures 1.37 m in a north-south direction, 1.10 m in an east-west direction, and has a depth of 1.16 m. Although the 20 cm-thick stone slab, which is thought to have sealed the ceiling, has been removed from its place, the position of the cover is still visible (Image 5b).

During the fieldwork conducted on the eastern slope of the mound, a tomb and a well-preserved skeleton were discovered as a result of erosion exposing the site. Surface collection around the tomb revealed a miniature vessel, fragments of pottery associated with the Urartu and Kura-Aras cultures, and numerous metal objects that are thought to have been applied. These items are considered to be grave goods related to the tomb and surrounding burials. As much as the tomb could be identified, it measures 2.65 m in width and 1.00 m in length. Since no excavation was conducted, surface-level macroscopic observations of the bones still underground were made, and no measurements could be taken. Based on surface observations, the bones belong to the same individual, and they consist of the middle mandibular corpus and the ends of the middle diaphysis of the left ulna and radius, which became exposed due to a break in the bones. Considering the erosion patterns and the bones together, it appears that the tomb is oriented in a northwest-southeast direction. The mental protrusion suggests that the individual was male, and the observed teeth indicate that the individual was an adult male, aged between 35-45 years (Image 5c).

During surface surveys conducted on the southern slope of the citadel, 8 tombs that had been destroyed by looting were identified. The looting pits in the Southern Slope Cemetery range in width from 3 to 5 meters, and the slab stones and mudbrick blocks inside the tombs suggest that these were likely chamber tombs (Image 6). The stone arrangements visible in the looting pits also give the impression that large burial structures might exist on this slope. In the detailed surface surveys conducted around the looting pits and the surrounding area, a large number of highly decorated fragments of Kura-Aras pottery and copper/bronze plaques representing the Great Mother Goddess idols were found, in addition to human and animal bones. One of the idols found has a stylistic feature typical of the Early Bronze Age idols. When examining the composition of the metal, the high copper content and the smelting technology stand out (Graph 1)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The notable miniature vessels, footed vessels, a large number of intact Kura-Aras vessels, as well as needles, beads, seals, clay, and metal figurines brought to the Erzurum Museum from this area provide clues as to how rich the tombs in the Southern Cemetery Area might have been.



In the Opposite Slope Cemetery, located directly across from the Southern Slope Cemetery, 3 tombs were identified, which had been destroyed by looting (Image 6). The stones forming the tombs' surroundings and walls were removed and scattered around the tomb chamber and its vicinity. Among these, on the surface of Tomb M1, in addition to human and animal bones left behind by the plundering, a bronze spearhead and two arrowheads were found. On the surfaces of the looted Tombs M2 and M3 on this slope, no additional finds were encountered, aside from amorphous painted pottery fragments and bones. An idol was found in the Opposite Slope Cemetery, and, notably, painted ceramic examples were also discovered. These finds, along with the results obtained from XRF analysis of the idol found here, reveal the highland culture of the 2nd millennium BCE. The Middle Bronze Age idol in question is stylistically much more blocky and plain compared to the Early Bronze Age idols. When examining the metal composition, it shows a high copper content, but the tin ratio is significantly higher than in Early Bronze Age idols. As a result, the idol is more resilient, solid, and hard (Graph 2)<sup>7</sup>.

The idols found at Parmaksız Kale Höyük exhibit significant similarities and differences when compared to other figurines/idols from different periods of Anatolia. Chalcolithic period figurines are generally stylized female figures, goddesses of fertility, or zoomorphic depictions. The idols found at Parmaksız Kale Höyük resemble examples known from settlements such as Kayalidere (Séton & Burney, 1965: p. 222, Plate 4) in the Muş Plain, Pulur Höyük in Erzurum, Norsuntepe and Tepecik Höyük around Elâzığ. In particular, stylized female idols and figurines are a common motif throughout the Late Chalcolithic period of Eastern Anatolia (Koşay 1976, p. 335; (Koşay & Turfan, 1959, p. 399). The craftsmanship of the idol from Parmaksız Kale Höyük dating to the Middle Bronze Age is more detailed. This feature can be compared to similar examples from Sos Höyük in Erzurum and Yoncatepe in Van (Sagona et al., 1998, p. 39). The idols of Parmaksız Kale Höyük, both typologically and iconographically, reflect the cultural influences of Eastern Anatolia, Northwestern Iran, and the Transcaucasian regions. Ongoing excavations will help us better understand the social, economic, and religious contexts of these figurines.

As a result of the rescue excavations conducted in the Southern Slope (Sector 1) during the 2023-2024 years, it has been confirmed that the tombs were destroyed by illegal excavations. The rescue excavations in 2023 and 2024 were carried out in a 10x10 meter grid system, with 5x5 meter grids divided into four equal parts labeled "a-d." During the excavations in 2023, in the area south of Excavation A-1, level descending work between a large rock mass, measuring 1.50 m in height and 2.00 m in width, and an irregular stone pile yielded numerous broken human bones, broken ceramics, and various metal fragments. These findings indicate that there was at least one tomb in the area, which was destroyed after the illicit excavation. Additionally, numerous human bone fragments and portable decorative artifacts were found to the north of the excavation area. Moreover, scattered box-type slabs found within the excavation are remnants of these tombs. The findings suggest that the wealthy tombs belonging to the elites in this area were destroyed as a result of the damage caused by the excavations (Figures 7-8).

The 2024 excavations continued in Sector 1, where the lower boundary of the Southern Slopes of Parmaksız Kale Höyük is surrounded by a cemetery (Figure 9). The portable artifacts and findings, particularly those from the Late Chalcolithic-Early Bronze Age (Kura-Aras) and the Middle Iron Age (Urartu), are significant. The small portable findings obtained from Excavation 24-H reveal the existence of wealthy tombs that could belong to elites. The slab stones that remained from the destruction and the human bones found alongside extremely rare portable decorative artifacts serve as evidence of this (Figure 10). In this excavation, the remains of a destroyed box tomb bed and scattered human skeletal remains have survived to the present day. Among these bones, there are fragments of the middle frontal, right and left parietal, occipital, caput and collum mandible, skull pieces, as well as the proximal epiphysis, proximal diaphysis, and middle diaphysis of the left ulna and the middle and distal diaphyses of the left radius (Figure 11). Anthropological observation of the bones suggests that these fragments belong to the same individual. Considering the measurable characteristics of the ulna bone, the platoleneal index indicates that the

<sup>7</sup> For the highland cultures of the 2nd millennium BCE and for comparison, see Özfirat, 2002, pp. 3-6, Image 11, Image 14/4-5, Image 15, Image 22/1-7, Images 23-24; Köroğlu & Konyar, 2007, p. 23.

individual was a male aged between 18-29.9 years. Similarly, the nuchal crest of the occipital bone also points to a male individual at a grade 4 level. After the restoration of the skull fragments, measurements were taken, and the following cranial indices were obtained: Cranial index 72.2, fronto-parietal index 52.7, sagittal-parietal index 76, with a pronounced inion. The individual has a dolichocephalic skull, a curved forehead, and a parietal width that is relatively narrow compared to the forehead width. Sutural aging also suggests that the individual was between 18-29.9 years old. The measurements of the ulna and radius indicate moderate muscle use. Dolichocephaly is commonly observed in the Early Bronze Age Anatolian communities (Şenyürek, 1951, p. 614). The measurements taken from a skull found in the Iron Age community of Erzurum/Güllüdere, which has undergone anthropological analysis, are quite similar to those of this individual (Sevim et al., 2007, p. 147).

Another human remains identified on the surface are the middle diaphysis of the left humerus and the middle diaphysis of the left radius. It is not possible to determine an exact age from the humerus and radius bones, as the epiphysis regions are damaged. However, considering the midshaft circumference and diameters, the humerus indicates a child in the age range of approximately 6-10 years (White et al., 2012, p. 38). Measurements taken from the radius resulted in a diaphyseal index value of 70. Macro observations and calculations on the radius suggest it belongs to a young adult female (Barrier & L'abbé 2008). The distal epiphysis and diaphysis of the left radius piece found on the surface have been damaged by rodents, while the proximal epiphysis and diaphysis were not obtainable due to natural degradation. To estimate age and sex, the middle diaphysis was used. The diaphyseal index of the radius was calculated to be 76.9. The measurements of the radius suggest that this individual may be a young adult male (Barrier & L'abbé 2008).

As a result of the ground-penetrating radar studies, the excavation carried out in the 28-O trench revealed human bones and portable decorative items found in small pieces, which increases the likelihood of it being a grave; however, the entire area needs to be excavated (Figure 12). In fact, the graves in the southernmost and western half of the southern slope of Parmaksız Kale Höyük, which were destroyed, are associated with the Kura-Aras culture, while the grave in the southeast has been associated with the Urartian culture, which is noteworthy.

#### The Purpose and Importance of the Excavations at Parmaksız Kale Höyük

When examining the assemblage of portable finds recovered from Parmaksız Kale Höyük, it is evident that they predominantly belong to the Kura-Araxes and Urartian cultures. However, metallic artifacts and both painted and unpainted ceramic specimens datable to the Middle Bronze Age have been found only on the slope opposite the South Slope Cemetery. Among these, a rather slender and elongated bronze spearhead, two arrowheads, and an idol provide valuable insights into the cultural developments of this period. In addition to the monochrome pottery fragments unearthed from the second-millennium BCE graves, painted specimens feature geometric decorations consisting of motifs such as diamonds, triangles, bands, and vertical lines. The primary objective of the excavations is to recover these artifacts in situ and in their entirety through systematic scientific investigations. By doing so, the archaeological data from the Hınıs Plain, which represents a missing link in Eastern Anatolian archaeology, will begin to be analysed, and significant chronological gaps in the region's cultural history will be addressed.

Another important aspect is that, while the number of metal artifacts associated with the Kura-Araxes culture in Eastern Anatolia has generally been quite limited, a significant number of such artifacts have been uncovered during the rescue excavations at Parmaksız Kale Höyük. Nevertheless, the excavations have yielded little to no information regarding the metal production techniques, technologies, and artistic traditions of this culture. However, despite the brief duration of the rescue excavations and surface surveys, the recovered metal artifacts have provided highly valuable data. Among these, copper and bronze<sup>8</sup> artifacts associated with the Kura-Araxes period were shaped using hammering and casting techniques. Decorated examples were ornamented using perforation, embossing, and engraving methods with a fine-tipped tool.

<sup>8</sup> The slag found around Parmaksız Kale Höyük indicates that metal production took place at this site. Additionally, the high concentration of metal artifacts discovered, along with the demand for tin, suggests that this center played a significant role in trade.

Notably, the application of this latter technique closely corresponds to the decorative practices observed on terracotta artifacts from the Karakaya and Keban regions<sup>9</sup>.

The Kura-Araxes ceramic assemblages recovered during the rescue excavations are also highly significant for analyzing the cultural fabric of the region. The ceramics associated with the Kura-Araxes culture include pithoi, pots, and bowls in terms of form. Among these, a pedestal vessel exhibits characteristics of the Late Chalcolithic Age and can be compared with examples from the Upper Euphrates-Malatya and Southeastern Anatolia regions (Palumbi, 2008, pp. 79-106). All of the vessels are handmade, burnished, and coated with a slip on both their interior and exterior surfaces. The exterior surfaces of the Kura-Araxes ware groups are either glossy or matte black, while the interior surfaces exhibit shades of brown and its derivatives. The fabric colors vary, including gray, beige, and reddish tones. As tempering materials, crushed stone, mica, sand, lime, and plant/straw inclusions were used. Although a few examples exhibit good firing quality, most are of medium or poor quality. While the majority of the ceramics are undecorated, some feature relief or incised decorations. Similar ceramics to those unearthed at Parmaksız Kale Höyük can be found across a vast geographical region, extending from Transcaucasia to Palestine and from northeastern to northwestern Iran (Pehlivan, 1984, pp. 34, 49-50, Lev. IX, Res. 16-18, Lev. X, Res. 19-21, Lev. XI, Res. 22-23). In Anatolia, similar ceramics have been found at Dilkaya Höyük (Kozbe, 1990, Pic. 2b, 3b, 6a), in the Upper Murat-Van region; at Pulur (Işıklı, 2005, Lev. 143-150), Karaz (Işıklı, 2005, Lev. 6-39, 84; Işıklı, 2010, Lev. 85), Güzelova (Pehlivan, 1984: p. 33) and Sos Höyük (Sagona, 1984, Fig.47/6, 119-123) in the Erzurum-Kars region; and at Pulur Höyük (Koşay, 1976, Lev. 55/127-146, 75/144-210) in the Upper Euphrates-Malatya region. The close parallels of the Kura-Araxes ceramic groups from Parmaksız Kale Höyük extend as far north as Bayburt<sup>10</sup> and as far east as Sivas.

On the other hand, the fact that all the Middle Iron Age (Uartian) metal artifacts we were able to examine were found within the eroded soil of the eastern slope suggests that they were grave goods. These artifacts are highly ornate and primarily consist of jewelry. The metal objects were mostly crafted using the hammering technique in the form of thin metal sheets. The surfaces of these sheet artifacts, mainly earrings and their variants, were perforated from the back using fine-tipped tools to create embossed decorations. During the 2024 rescue excavations, based on georadar data and skeletal remains exposed by erosion, a rescue excavation was conducted at the southeastern tip of the mound. The bracelets and an ornate brooch recovered from a grave unearthed in this area constitute a distinctive group of Middle Iron Age finds. These artifacts indicate that, similar to the Kura-Araxes cultural phase, the southern slopes of Parmaksız Kale Höyük were also used as a burial ground during the Uartian period. There is strong evidence suggesting that these artifacts were produced at Parmaksız Kale Höyük. Based on such significant findings, it is possible to analyse the technological and technical advancements in production at a local western Uartian center beyond the royal Uartian core region (Van geography) through further investigations.

When examining the Middle Iron Age ceramics from Parmaksız Kale Höyük, it is evident that nearly all of them were wheel-made. The dominant colors within the assemblage are light brown, reddish-brown, and brick-red. Among the recovered ceramics are also typical red wares of the Uartian culture. Additionally, a small number of dark-colored ceramics stand out. The fabric colors range from red and its derivatives. Almost all of the ceramics are slipped and well-burnished. As tempering materials, sand, sand with crushed stone, and mica were used. The firing quality is generally medium to good. The ceramics from this period consist of pots, bowls, and plates. Decoration is a prevalent feature among the examined ceramics. Particularly notable are bands applied to the shoulders and rims of vessels, featuring motifs such as fishbone

<sup>9</sup> An idol discovered at Norşuntepe also exhibits an attempt to depict the breasts, with the contours rendered in an incised manner (see Hauptmann, 1982, p. 28, 26/1). Similarly, another idol acquired by purchase for the Elâzığ Museum features a distinctly marked female genital organ, represented by a triangular incision (see Gündoğan Aydingün, 2003, pp. 31, 147, Cat. No. 136, Pl. 31c, 120-20). The contours of the Arslantepe idol were also depicted using incised lines (see Palmieri, 1972, p. 204, Fig. 9). A similar method is observed in one of the idols from Pulur Sakyol, where the eyes, nose, and mouth were created by perforation (see Koşay, 1976, p. 70, Cat. 71/376). In another mother goddess idol from Pulur Sakyol, the eyes and nose were also accentuated through perforation (see Koşay, 1970, p. 140, Photo 5).

<sup>10</sup> For Çiğdemtepe Höyük, see Parlüt & Akyüz, 2022: 14-15; for Büyüktepe, see Sagona, 1994, pp. 229-234.



patterns, notches, zigzags, parallel and wavy lines, all executed using the incision technique. In addition to incised decorations, there are also a few examples with impressed-grooved, relief, and painted decorations. In terms of form, bowls are the most common type within this ceramic group. Regarding both form and material characteristics, these ceramics exhibit a strong resemblance to Iron Age pottery from Eastern Anatolia in general. In particular, the color and decorative features of the assemblage from this southern section of Erzurum show greater similarity to the ceramics of Muş and its connected regions, including the Upper Murat-Van and Upper Euphrates-Malatya regions<sup>11</sup>. As is well known, in the northern part of Erzurum, burnished dark surfaces are more dominant in ceramics from the Iron Age and other periods (Işıklı & Erdem, 2009, pp. 249-268). Currently, since no excavation in the region has been able to clearly resolve the stratigraphy, a precise distinction cannot be made. However, based on fundamental characteristics, it can be stated that all three sub-phases of the Iron Age are represented within this assemblage. Nevertheless, the dominant phase is the Middle Iron Age. At this point, our aim is to address the chronological and ceramic classification issues, which remain a challenge for Eastern Anatolia.

Among the artifacts delivered to the Erzurum Museum as a result of the excavations and research at Parmaksız Kale Höyük, in addition to ceramics, there are highly elaborate metal objects, idols made of metal, bone, and terracotta, as well as figurines and stone beads. As is well known, beads, which exhibit a variety of colors, sizes, and forms, have been indispensable grave offerings in every period. Notable grave goods include metal mother goddess idols from the Early Bronze Age and a miniature terracotta ram figurine. The metal assemblage, predominantly composed of bronze artifacts, also includes spearheads, arrowheads, needles, bracelet fragments, and rings. Among the metal objects, needles, jewelry, and spear and arrowheads particularly exhibit characteristics of both the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Iron Age<sup>12</sup>. Likewise, a significant number of terracotta game pieces, which have survived despite the destruction of Early Bronze Age graves, are noteworthy. Bone needles and perforating tools used as weapons are also of particular interest. Another important category of finds from the excavations is stone tool technology, which includes grinding stones, pestles, weights of various forms, and obsidian cutting and perforating tools.

### Conclusion

Parmaksız Kale Höyük is a significant settlement that sustained its existence over a long period, from the Chalcolithic Age to the Iron Age. The site's movable and immovable cultural assets indicate that the inhabitants were not only locally influential but also played a role on a broader regional and cultural scale. In particular, the findings associated with the Kura-Araxes and Urartian cultures suggest that Parmaksız Kale Höyük was not an ordinary settlement but possibly a regional center.

The metal artifacts, casting molds, and slag dated to the Kura-Araxes cultural phase indicate the possibility that the site functioned as a production, trade, and economic hub. Additionally, the Kura-Araxes ceramics, which date to the late Chalcolithic period, provide valuable insights into the early phases of this culture while also offering significant data regarding the origins of local dynamics.

Surface surveys and salvage excavations conducted on the citadel and lower terraces of Parmaksız Kale Höyük (2022–2024) have yielded a significant number of portable archaeological artifacts associated with elite individuals. Unfortunately, most of these finds consist of remnants from tombs that were looted and destroyed by illegal excavations. The archaeological evidence confirms the presence of elite burials at the site. When compared to contemporary elite burials such as those at Arslantepe (Frangipane, 2001, pp. 13, 17, Fig. 4,11,12), Başur (Sağlamtimur & Ozan, 2014: pp. 527-528, pic. 8-10), Alacahöyük (Arık, 1937, pp. 55-56, Fig. 74-75) and the Royal Tombs of Ur (Zettler, 1998, pp. 21-23, Fig. 20-22) in Mesopotamia, the significance of Parmaksız Kale Höyük becomes even more apparent.

Following the Kura-Araxes cultural phase, Parmaksız Kale Höyük continued to be an important center during the period of the Urartian Kingdom. Archaeological evidence reveals that during this time, the site was surrounded by defensive structures characteristic of Urartian culture. The fact that many Urartian metal

<sup>11</sup> For detailed information see Russell, 1980; Koçhan, 1990, pp. 87-102; Koçhan 1998, pp. 23-29; Rothman, 1993, pp. 279-295, Özfirat, 1999, pp. 193-210; Sevin, 1998, pp. 715-726; Konyar, 2004; Kalkan, 2008; Erdem, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> For comparison see Yıldırım, 1989; Belli & Pulhan 2004; Belli, 2010.

artifacts were recovered from tombs and eroded soil layers can be interpreted as an indication of the region's wealth.

The analysis of Urartian ceramics demonstrates distinct regional variations. However, the presence of similar ceramic types in different settlements suggests an interaction related to transportation and trade. The Urartian vessels found at Parmaksız Kale Höyük closely resemble those discovered in the Upper Murat-Van and Upper Euphrates-Malatya regions. This similarity underscores the site's importance as a center of trade, attraction, and a key crossroads in the region.

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**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval is not required.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Financial Disclosure:** The authors declared that this study has no financial support.

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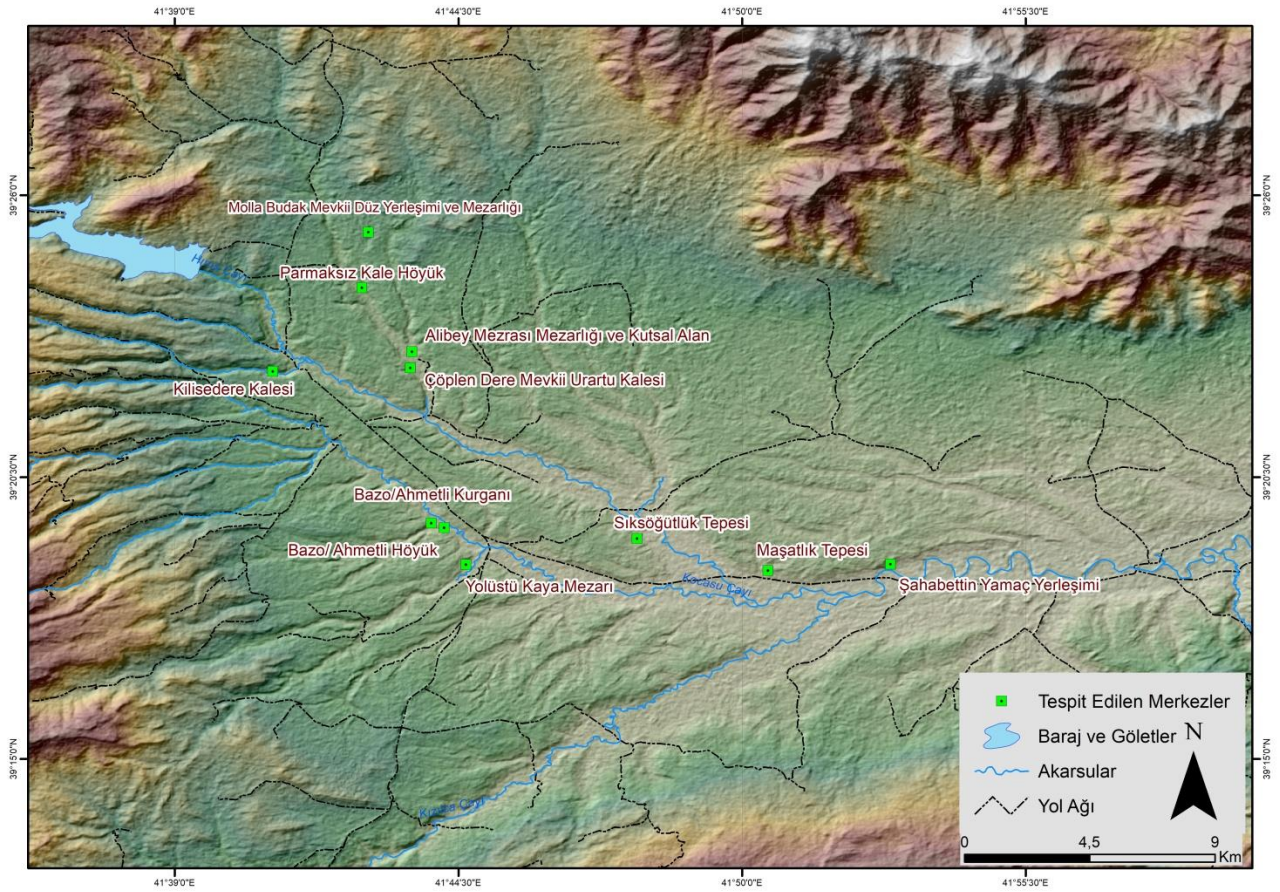
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## Figures



**Map 1:** A map showing the location of Parmaksız Kale Höyük in Hınıs District





**Map 2:** Parmaksız Neighborhood and the four main sections of Parmaksız Kale Höyük.



**Fig. 1:** Parmaksız Kale Höyük and the deep canyon opening into the Hınıs Plain.



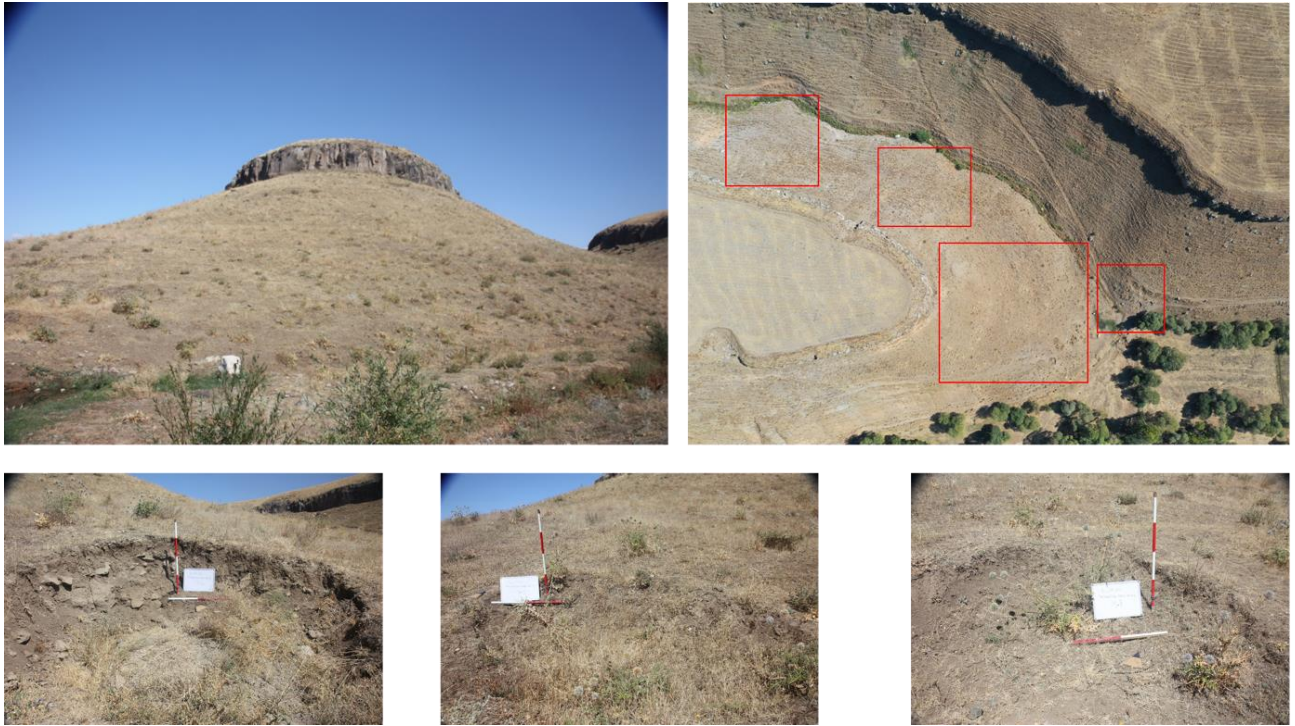


*Fig. 2: Parmaksız Kale Höyük, the canyon opening towards Erzurum*



*Fig. 3: Wall foundation bed and the damage incurred.*



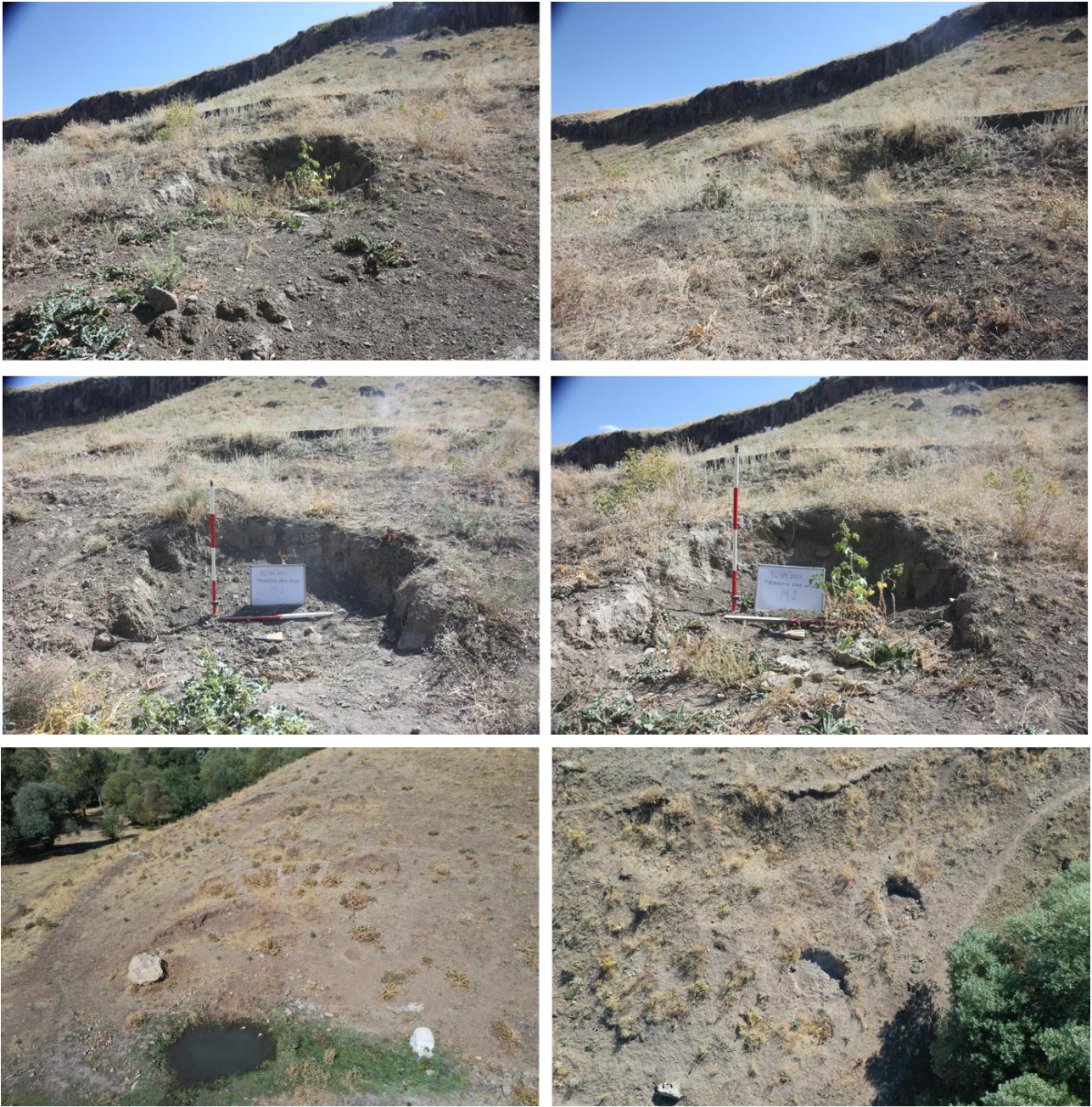


**Fig. 4:** Severe destruction in the southern and eastern parts of Parmaksız Kale Höyük.



**Fig. 5:** a. Images from the ritual area; b. Rock-cut tomb and its niche; c. Skeletal remains from a tomb exposed due to destruction.





**Fig. 6:** Illegal excavation damage and excavation pits in the Southern and Opposite Slope Cemetery of Parmaksız Kale Höyük.





*Fig. 7: Destroyed tombs from the 2023 rescue excavation.*



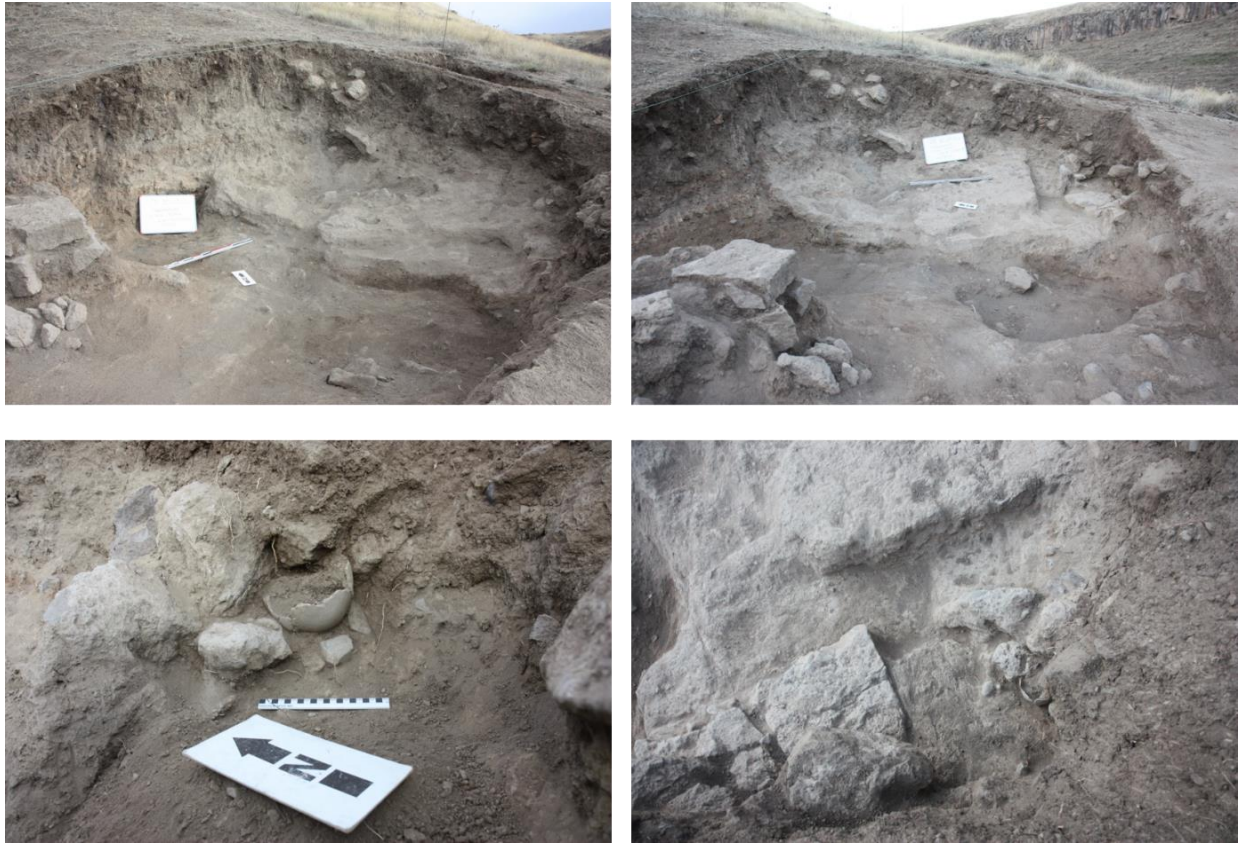


*Fig. 8: Artifact assemblage recovered from elite tombs in Trench No. 1 of the 2023 excavation.*



*Fig. 9: The two trenches excavated during the 2024 Parmaksız Kale Höyük rescue excavation.*

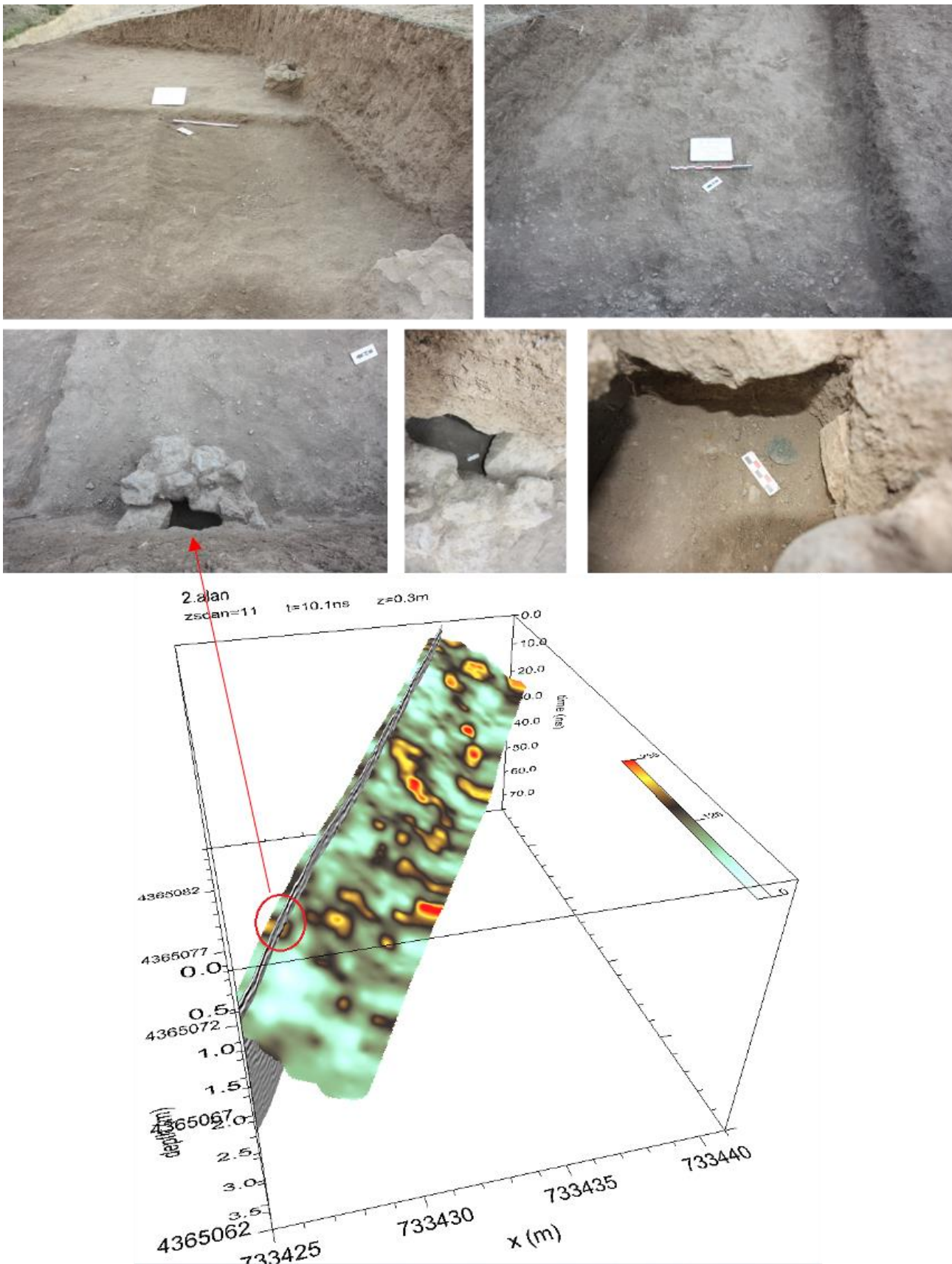




*Fig. 10: Trench 24-H and Grave No. 01-24.*



*Fig. 11: Trench 24-H and human skeletal remains from Grave No. 01-24.*



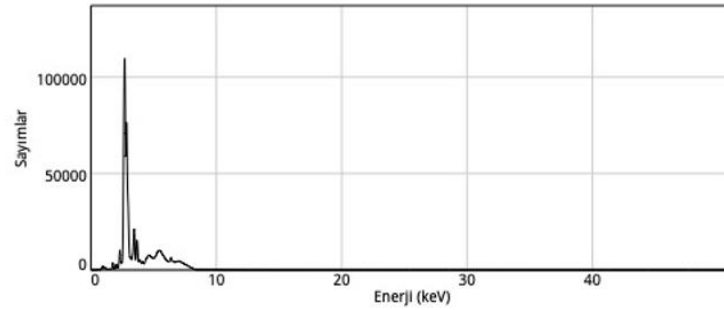
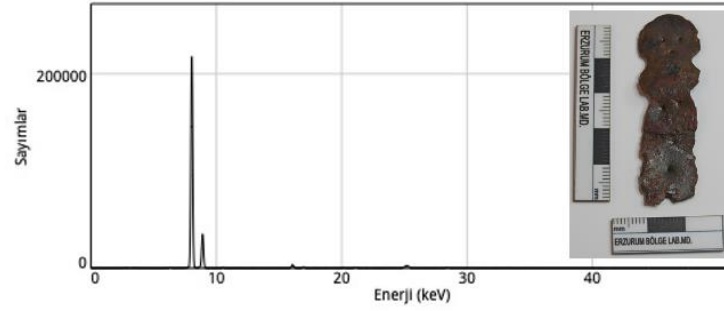
**Fig. 12:** Partially excavated possible grave in Trench 28-O, containing small human bone fragments and portable decorated artifacts, and the georadar scan before excavation.

Erzurum Restorasyon ve Konservasyon Bölge Laboratuvarı Müdürlüğü  
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Yakutiye / Erzurum  
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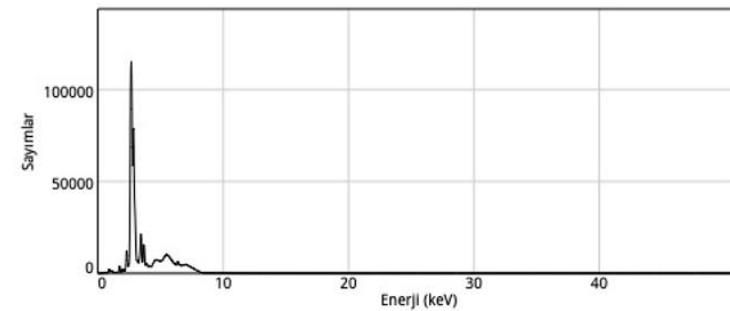
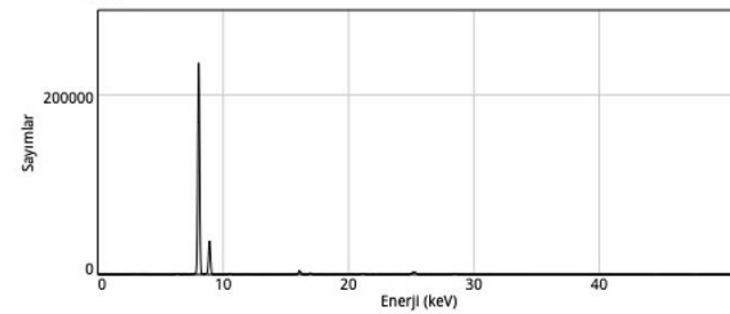


Erzurum Restorasyon ve Konservasyon Bölge Laboratuvarı Müdürlüğü

Ad figürin-1	Sınıf Alloy_LE-FP			Tarih 25/03/2025			Saat 12:38		Süre 50 s	
Element	Cu % 95,64 0,082	Sn % 2,21 0,012	Si % 0,78 0,011	As % 0,52 0,008	S % 0,30 0,003	P % 0,25 0,005	Fe % 0,19 0,005	Pb % 0,05 0,005	Zn % 0,03 0,002	Co % 0,02 0,002
±										
Tenörler: Eşleşme Yok										



Ad figürin-1	Sınıf Alloy_LE-FP		Tarih 25/03/2025		Saat 12:41	Süre 50 s	
Element	SiO2 % 1,60	Fe2O3 % 0,26	Al2O3 % 0,00	MgO % 0,00	CaO N/A	MnO % 0,00	K2O N/A
±							
Element	SnO2 % 2,73	CuO % 119,89	TiO2 % 0,00	SO3 % 0,96	V2O5 % 0,00	SrO N/A	NiO % 0,00
±							
Element	Nb2O5 % 0,00	ZrO2 % 0,00	Mg % 0,00	Al % 0,00	Si % 0,75	P % 0,18	S % 0,39
±			0,000	0,000	0,010	0,004	0,003
Element	Denge % 0,00						
±							
Tenörler: Eşleşme Yok							



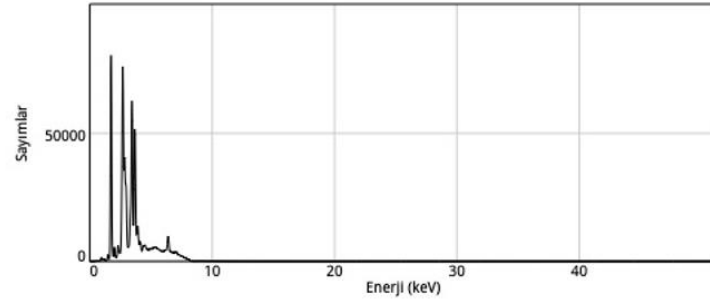
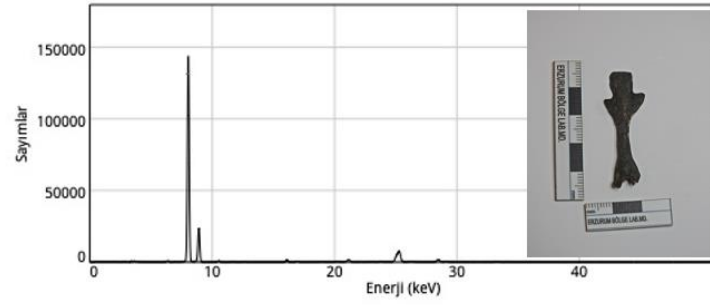
**Graph 1:** XRF result of the Mother Goddess idol found in the Early Bronze Age Cemetery of Parmaksız Kale Höyük.



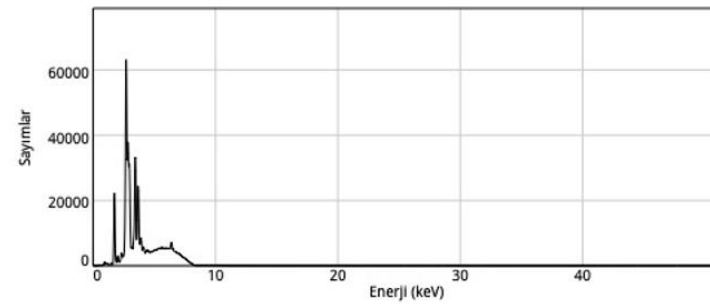
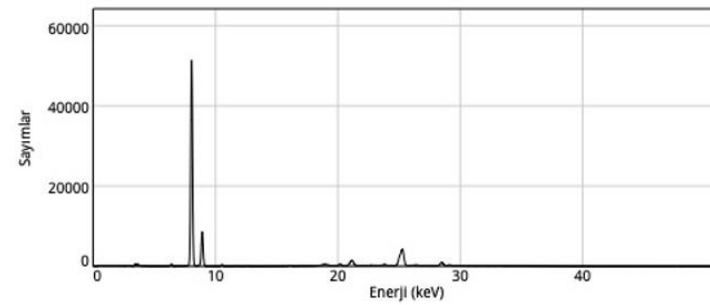
Erzurum Restorasyon ve Konservasyon Bölge Laboratuvarı Müdürlüğü  
Gazi Osman Paşa Cad. Şahin Bey Sok. No:2  
Yeni Müze Binası A Blok  
Yakutiye / Erzurum  
0090 442 234 19 03



Ad figürin-4	Sınıf Alloy_LE-FP			Tarih 25/03/2025		Saat 13:00		Süre 50 s		
Element	Cu % 68,80 0,069	Si % 20,88 0,038	Sn % 6,38 0,018	Al % 1,71 0,036	P % 0,60 0,007	Fe % 0,45 0,008	As % 0,42 0,006	Sb % 0,22 0,006	Pb % 0,21 0,006	S % 0,19 0,003
Element	Ni % 0,06 0,005	Zn % 0,04 0,002	Co % 0,02 0,003	W % 0,02 0,004						
Tenörler: Eşleşme Yok										



Ad figürin-4	Sınıf Alloy_LE-FP		Tarih 25/03/2025		Saat 13:01	Süre 50 s	
Element	SiO2 % 35,54	Fe2O3 % 0,90	Al2O3 % 0,00	MgO % 0,00	CaO N/A	MnO % 0,00	K2O N/A
±							
Element	SnO2 % 12,77	CuO % 86,50	TiO2 % 0,00	SO3 % 0,50	V2O5 % 0,00	SrO N/A	NiO % 0,11
±							
Element	Nb2O5 % 0,00	ZrO2 % 0,00	Mg % 0,00 0,000	Al % 0,00 0,000	Si % 16,62 0,060	P % 0,72 0,015	S % 0,20 0,006
±							
Element	Fe % 0,63 0,016	Co % 0,03 0,007	Denge % 0,00				
±							
Tenörler: Eşleşme Yok							



**Graph 2:** XRF result of the Mother Goddess idol found in the Middle Bronze Age Cemetery of Parmaksız Kale Höyük.