

KARAVELYAN EXCAVATIONS WITHIN THE ILISU PROJECT

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Key Words: *Halaf • Late Neolithic • Pottery • Ilisu Project*

Abstract: Karavelyan is located in the Upper Tigris valley. The site is *ca.* 150 km to the north of the modern Turkish-Syrian border and on the right bank of the Tigris River. The site is within the flooding zone of the Ilisu Dam to be constructed on the Tigris River. The excavations started in 2009 and were completed in 2012. The site consists of two individual settlements situated 200 m apart. The eastern one, known as Hınçıka, was an Assyrian settlement. Karavelyan, to the west, is a mono-period site only inhabited during the Early Halafian. The archaeological deposit at Karavelyan are approximately one metre deep and contain two building levels. The architecture is very poorly preserved. The top-most level 1 yielded rectangular buildings of *pisé* walls without foundation while the second layer contained rectangular architecture with the second foundations. In this article, for the first time, Karavelyan is extensively introduced into the world of science.

ILISU PROJESİ KARAVELYAN KAZILARI

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Halaf • Geç Neolitik • Çanak-çömlek • Ilisu Projesi*

Özet: Karavelyan Yukarı Dicle Vadisi'nde yer almaktadır. Yerleşim Dicle'nin sağ kıyısında ve modern Türkiye-Suriye sınırından yaklaşık 150 km kuzeyindedir. Yerleşim Dicle nehri üzerine inşa edilen Ilisu Barajı dolun alanı içinde kalmaktadır. Kazılar 2009 yılında başlamış ve 2012 yılında tamamlanmıştır. Yerleşim 200 m uzaklıkta iki höyükten oluşmaktadır. Bunlardan doğudaki Hınçıka bir Assur yerleşimidir. Batıdaki Karavelyan ise sadece Erken Halaf süresince iskan edilmiştir. Karavelyan'daki arkeolojik dolgu yaklaşık bir metre derinlikte ve iki yapı katından oluşmaktadır. Mimari oldukça kötü korunmuştur. Üstteki 1. Yapı Katı temelsiz *pisé* duvarları olan dörtgen binalardan oluşurken 2. Yapı Katı dörtgen planlı mimarisi ikinci bir temele sahiptir. Bu makalede Karavelyan ilk kez kapsamlı olarak bilim dünyasına ana hatlarıyla tanıtılmaktadır.

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Introduction

Named after Karavelyan, whose grave is located on the site, the settlement was first visited by an American team at the end of the 1980s during a survey undertaken within the scope of the Ilisu Dam Archaeological Salvage Project¹. It was revisited in 2007 by the excavation team working in Hakemi Use during the Ilisu Pottery Neolithic Settlements Survey and data regarding some of the potsherds recovered at surface level was published.

A highly-respected non-Muslim living in a nearby village in the early 20th century, Karavelyan (*Karavelioğlu* in Turkish) was entombed in a small shrine upon his death. Karavelyan's grave was considered holy and visited by the local community until recently. Today, although the shrine has disappeared, the field where it is located is still named after the grave. There is a second mound, called Hınçıka by the local community, located 200 metres east of Karavelyan. No excavations have yet been carried out on this second mound, which is a Late Assyrian settlement as survey results demonstrate.

Location

Karavelyan is located 5 kilometres west of the village of Merdan, Tepe within the Bismil district of the city of Diyarbakır. Once situated on a 10 metre-high natural terrace on the banks of Tigris River, the settlement is now 100 metres away from the altered riverbed (Fig. 1). Potsherds on the surface are scattered over approximately 1.5 hectares of agricultural

field. The natural height of the settlement has been reduced due to long years of agricultural activity. Islamic graves, normally dug at about 1.5-2 metres deep, lie directly under the surface, which gives an idea about the extent of destruction.

Excavations

Excavations in Karavelyan were started in 2009 and the fieldwork ended in 2012². Since the settlement is located within private property, permission of the land owner was taken for the excavations. Partly due to this limitation, during the first season, the excavations were carried out in five trenches (BB 9, BB 10, CC 9, CC 10 and DD 11) measuring 10x10 metres in the western part of the settlement (Fig. 2). Virgin soil was reached at a depth of 80 centimetres in some parts of these trenches. The surface had been destroyed to a great extent due to the use of agricultural machinery; in terms of architectural remains, only some furnaces were observed in some parts of the excavated areas.

Excavations were undertaken in four trenches (CC14, CC15, DD14 and DD15) in the eastern part of the settlement in 2010 and in six trenches (FF10a, FF10b, FF11a, FF11b, FF11d and GG11b) in the southern part of the settlement in 2011. Virgin soil was reached at a depth varying between 80 centimetres and 1 metre in a total of 10 trenches covering an area of 1000 m² excavated over three seasons (Fig. 3).

¹ Algaze – Rosenberg 1991, 148, Fig. 2a.

² Tekin 2011a.

Architecture

No architectural remains referring to a powerful settlement were discovered during the excavations. However, two small furnaces with surrounding carbonised wooden remains recovered in trench CC9 offer some clues about the architecture of the settlement (Fig. 4). Also, irregularly-dispersed, medium-sized uncut stones were found in all of the trenches (Fig. 5). As they were not bound with a strong mortar, these stones, which are the foundations of a wooden structure, crumbled away over time after the settlement was abandoned. As a result of these, no stone architecture with a regular plan was discovered during the excavations.

It has been established that Karavelyan, which is currently at field level, has two building phases (Fig. 6). Architectural remains recovered during the excavations offer some clues about the settlement. The upper building phase consists of structures built of light building material such as wood and thatch, directly plunged into the soil. Rows of medium-sized stones were placed without use of mortar on the floor on both sides of the structure. The stones fell apart after this short-term settlement; thus, no regular plan was discovered during the excavations. The recovered stone foundation remains reveal that the settlement lasted a very short time and that no constructions requiring hard work were undertaken.

The second building phase differs from the upper phase in terms of architecture. A structure recovered in trenches FF11a and FF11b in the southern part of the settlement has *pisé* walls built without a stone foundation as well as two conserved rooms, the larger rear one having a rectangular plan and the other front one apsidal terminated in the eastern part. The walls were loosely built by manually shaping the mortar for a short time. No traces or segments of *kerpiç* (mud brick) were observed within the walls.

On the other hand, a depiction on the neck of a pot recovered during the excavations held in 2011 offers valuable data regarding the building technique and the frontal view of the structures (Fig. 7). The painted decoration on the potsherd depicts a structure rising on large wooden posts stuck in the ground³. Spaces between the wooden posts were covered with thatch while the sides of the walls and the roof were covered with straw.

Parallels of Karavelyan have been discovered in some contemporary settlements in Mesopotamia before: in Tell Arpachiyah⁴ near Mosul in Iraq, Fıstıklı Höyük⁵ among the excavations at Birecik Dam, Şanlıurfa and Domuztepe⁶ in Kahramanmaraş, pots with similar building and human depictions were recovered. This structural tradition is rather suitable for seasonal settlements in a nomadic lifestyle than long-term settlements, which coincides with the results of the excavations carried out in Karavelyan.

³ Tekin 2011b, 310, Fig. 2-4.

⁴ Mallowan – Cruikshank-Rose 1935.

⁵ Pollock *et al.* 2001, 50, Fig. 6, f.

⁶ Kansa *et al.* 2009, 910-911, Fig. 5.

Graves

A total of 52 graves belonging to different periods were excavated. 40 of these are recent Islamic graves that were discovered directly under the surface and which could have been dated solely according to the position of the bodies. Upon enquiry, we found out that the territory was used as a cemetery by the local community in early 20th century, where mostly Muslims but also a few non-Muslims were buried.

Wheel-made pottery recovered around skeletons allowed to date three graves belonging to the Late Assyrian Period. Apparently, during the Late Assyrian Period, the inhabitants of Hınçıka mound to the east buried their dead in Karavelyan. Wheel-made Assyrian pots recovered in simple earth graves prove this. It should however be noted that no potsherds belonging to the Late Assyrian Period were recovered during the excavations in Karavelyan.

Nine Late Neolithic graves, all showing similarities, were discovered in Karavelyan. Grave gifts were recovered in five of these graves buried under house floors and empty spaces between buildings⁷. All of these graves are simple earth graves belonging to the first building phase. Graves for adults have no directional unity. Painted terracotta pots were left by the side of the bodies as grave gifts (Fig. 8). No ornamental objects or objects of different material were discovered. The limited number of graves, on the other hand,

demonstrates that the settlement was not used throughout the whole year.

Pottery

A total of approximately 2000 potsherds, all handmade, were collected during the excavations, which can be categorised into three main groups: *Coarse Ware*, *Simple Smoothed Ware* and *Painted Ware*.

A large amount of the pots is made up of *coarse wares*, which are made of a fabric rich in organic matter with a dark core. Small pieces of stone and sand were observed in some of these examples that were not sufficiently fired in terms of temperature and duration. Pots made of light yellow, dusty beige and light buff fabric are quite simple in form. Pot forms mostly include bowls, small-sized and shallow as well as large and deep ones. A considerable number of cooking pots without necks is also to be noted. This group also includes a small number of *busking tray* sherds, recovered in very small pieces which do not allow an estimation of their sizes. Yet, similar to contemporary Mesopotamian examples, potsherds recovered in Karavelyan mostly have parallel chamfers on the inner side of the base.

The simple smoothed ware pieces are fewer in number among the potsherds recovered at Karavelyan. All of the pots in this group, fired at higher temperatures for longer periods compared to the previous one, have a fabric rich in sand and minerals but also organic matter, mostly in tones of grey and brown. Pot forms mainly consist of bowls of different sizes and depth as well as a small number of

⁷ Tekin 2014, 248.

jars. Pots in this group have no surface decoration.

The *Painted ware* form as much as two third of the whole assemblage of potsherds (Fig. 9). Their meticulously-produced fabric has very little organic matter in it. Pieces of lime and sand were used instead for tempering. Pot forms mainly include bowls and plates as well as some necked jar and vase forms. *Cream bowls*, named after those at the excavations in Tell Arpachiyah⁸ near Mosul, are quite prevalent in Karavelyan. These fine-fired pots have fine painted decoration, mostly of geometrical patterns, on the inner and outer surfaces. Among typical Halaf decoration, crossed triangles, grid patterns and horizontal wavy lines as well as *dancing ladies* are often found on the Karavelyan pots (Fig. 10).

Human and animal figures can also be seen on painted Karavelyan pots. The most interesting of these is undoubtedly that on the neck of a long-necked pot, depicting a human and a structure. Although the main scene consists of the structure, the human figure depicted walking towards it is also significant for the information it offers about the looks of the people at the time. The human figure in the depiction is of unknown sex and has long, dishevelled hair extending down on the front until the knees. A bulge at the waist gives the impression of a belt. The right hip and calf are quite thick as opposed to the schematic left side. Although the body lines resemble those of a woman, it is difficult to tell the sex of the human

figure. Potsherds similar to those in Karavelyan were recovered at the well-known Late Neolithic settlements of Tell Halaf⁹ and Tell Sabi Abyad¹⁰ in Syria, the common characteristic of which is long, dishevelled hair in depictions of humans.

Small Finds

Small finds recovered during the excavations in Karavelyan are few in number and show little variety. A small number of clay spindle whorls and bone awls, universally found in any Late Neolithic settlement, were recovered as well as a stone seal, a clay stamp impression and a few *tokens*.

The majority of the stone tools consist of small hand tools produced within the scope of the ground stone industry. These tools made of stones abundantly found in the area inform us about the toolbox of the inhabitants of Karavelyan. They are tools designed for fine craftsmanship with an ergonomic structure allowing easy handling. Chipped stone tools are mostly made of flint as rich flint deposits are found within 5 kilometres around Karavelyan. The abundance of flint cores and flakes indicate production in the settlement. Obsidian tools are few and no obsidian cores were recovered.

Discussion

Karavelyan is a small Early Halaf settlement on a natural terrace on the banks of the Tigris. In the lack of a radiocarbon dating history, archaeological data suggests that the settlement was inhabited shortly from 5.800 BC to 5.700 BC. As

⁸ Mallowan – Cruikshank-Rose 1935, 131.

⁹ Schmidt 1943, 43-44, Taf. LX.

¹⁰ Nieuwenhuyse 2008, 252, Fig. 8.5.1.

such, it appears to be a “station” where small nomadic populations settled on a short-term basis. No finds indicating a powerful settlement were recovered in the two building phases of this settlement, which gives the impression that it was not permanently inhabited throughout the year. The existence of very few architectural remains and frequent traces of carbonised wood reveal that the inhabitants of the period built their shelters of light material. This is supported by the suitability of the recovered stone tools for tool-making, rather than an agricultural lifestyle. Archeo-botanical results also confirm that agriculture was not the primary activity. It should also be noted that a large amount of sheep and goat bones were recovered during the excavations.

Karavelyan’s position is better understood in relation to the other settlements discovered in the surveys carried out by the team in the area¹¹, including Hucetti and Gir Beşik along the Tigris, a couple of significant Halaf settlements covering 4 and 2 hectares respectively, and other settlements at field level, covering one hectare or less, like Karavelyan¹². Hardly visible to the naked eye today, these settlements can be identified according to the potsherds recovered on the surface of sites.

Apparently, Karavelyan and contemporary settlements were short-term stopping points of small groups moving seasonally along the Tigris (approximately 100 kilometres). Some small groups inhabiting main settlements such as Hucetti

and Gir Beşik, which are only 25 kilometres apart, bred small livestock and exploited the favourable environment that the Tigris and its branches offered. That the stone tools recovered during the excavations in Karavelyan are not suitable for agricultural activities and the existence of distinct traces of cutting on small livestock bones were abundantly recovered during the excavations are compatible with the function of the stone tools.

Yet, it should be noted that no organic connection can be made between Karavelyan and Hakemi Use, located 7 kilometres west. The last building phase at Hakemi Use was dated around 5.950 BC; no settlement took place at the site after this date while at Karavelyan and its other contemporaries in the area, settlement began after 5.800 BC. A single settlement that could possibly bridge these two periods was identified during the survey carried out in the area: Situated approximately 1 kilometre south of the Tigris and 10 kilometres southwest of central Bismil, Doruç is a mound settlement that contains material similar to both Hakemi Use and Karavelyan. Much about the Late Neolithic Period of the Upper Tigris Valley remains to be revealed by future excavations at this and other sites.

¹¹ Tekin 2009.

¹² Tekin 2017, 109, Fig. 9.1.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Karavelyan, view from the north.

Figure 2: Topographic map.

Figure 3: Trenches, view from the south-east.

Figure 4: Trenches, view from the north.

Figure 5: Trench FF10a, view from south.

Figure 6: Southern trenches, view from the north-east.

Figure 7: Painted sherds with human and building.

Figure 8: Small jar from a burial.

Figure 9: Some painted sherds.

Figure 10: Some sherds with “dancing ladies” motifs.

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Figure 1

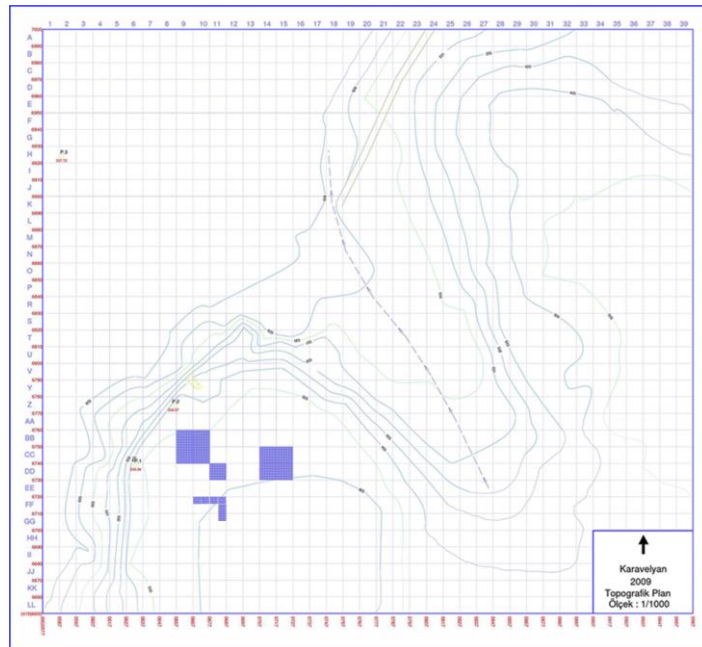


Figure 2



Figure 3

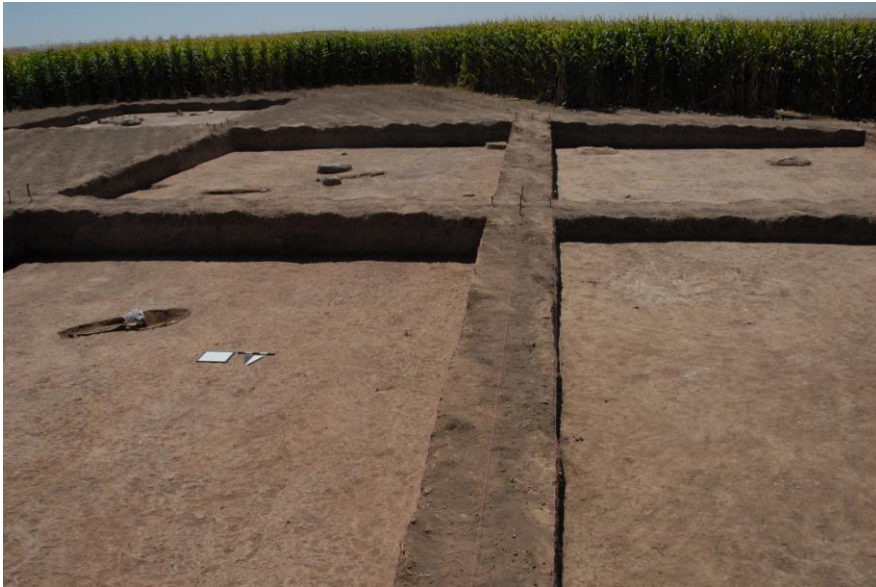


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10