

Reconsidering the "Royal" Tombs of Alacahöyük: Problems of Stratigraphy According to the Topographical Location of the Tombs

*Alacahöyük "Kral"
Mezarlarına Yeniden
Bakış: Mezarların
Topoğrafik Konumlarına
Ait Stratigrafi Sorunları*

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Orta Anadolu'nun, özellikle İlk Tunç ve Hitit dönemine ait yerleşmeleri içeren, önemli merkezlerinden biri olan Alacahöyük'ün, aynı zamanda Cumhuriyetin kuruluşundan sonra Türk Tarih Kurumu tarafından başlatılan ilk Türk kazısı olması nedeniyle Türk Arkeoloji tarihinde ayrı bir yeri vardır.

Kazılarda ortaya çıkan en çarpıcı bulgulardan biri olan İlk Tunç Çağı "Kral" mezarları ve buluntuları ile ilgili bilimsel tartışmalar bugüne kadar süregelmektedir. Bu tartışmaların yoğunlaştığı konulardan biri bu mezarların tarihlendirilmesi sorunudur. Mezarların göreceli (relative) olarak tarihlendirilmesi, buluntuların İlk Tunç Çağına ait diğer merkezlerin buluntuları ile karşılaştırılmasının yanı sıra zaman zaman mezarların stratigrafisine dayandırılmıştır.

Bu yazıda, mezarların tarihlendirilmesi konusunda höyük üzerinde bulundukları bölgenin topoğrafyasının da gözönünde bulundurulması önerilmektedir. Alacahöyük'ün topoğrafik haritası incelendiğinde mezarların meyilli bir araziye yerleştirilmiş oldukları anlaşılmaktadır. Bu nedenle de derinlikleri arasındaki farkın kronolojik bir anlam taşıması olası değildir. Bundan sonra yapılacak tarihlendirme denemelerinde bu noktanın yanlış yorumlara meydan verilmemesi için mutlaka dikkate alınması gerekir.

The excavations at Alacahöyük are among the earliest Turkish archaeological enterprises starting about a decade after the foundation of the Republic. The site had already been noticed by William John Hamilton on his travels through Anatolia.¹ Initial work inc-

cludes Georges Perrots investigations published in 1872,² and a short period of excavation in 1907 by Theodor Makridi, director of conservation at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, who together with Hugo Winckler and Otto Puchstein had just started excavations at

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Hattusha.³ Then, in the 1930's, The Turkish Historical Society under the direction of Hasan Cemil Çambel was asked by Atatürk to select an Anatolian site for excavation.⁴ In 1934, upon advise of Kurt Bittel, the decision fell on Alacahöyük, and excavations began under the direction of Hamit Zübeyr Koşay and Remzi Oğuz Arık. Work has been continuing at the site with interruptions until the present and the results have been extensively published.

The mound of Alacahöyük is a large, multi-period Central Anatolian site, situated approximately 25 km N/NE of the Hittite capital Hattusha in the central region of the Kızılırmak or classical Halys river.

The earliest settlement at the site was founded on a natural hill. The present mound measures 310 m from east to west and 277 m from north to south and is the accumulation of about 15 meters of habitation levels upon this hill.⁵ A total of 14 levels were identified starting in the Chalcolithic period and ending in the Iron Age. These levels were grouped by the excavators into four cultural periods. In very general terms Period I corresponds to the post-Hittite level 1, Period II to the Hittite levels 2,3a,3b,4, period III to the Early Bronze Age levels 5,6,7,8 and period IV to the Chalcolithic levels 9,10,11,12,13,14.

Alacahöyük's claim to fame is both in the Early and the Late Bronze Ages: The EBA levels contained the series of 13 elaborate burials in a cemetery, the stratigraphy of which is discussed in this paper. Their spectacular inventory including abundant gold, silver, and bronze objects revealed not only immense material wealth, but also an intimate knowledge and sophisticated application of metallurgical techniques (Fig. 4). In the LBA, the site accommodated a Hittite center with impressive monumental architecture best known for the Sphinx Gate complex, the walls of which incorporated expressive scenes and friezes in relief-sculpture.

The excavated thirteen elite EBA burials are located in the southeastern part of the mound (Figs 1 and 3). The area covered by

the tombs measures approximately 25 squaremeters. This area has the coordinates 52-56/XLVIII-LII in the grid system of the published Alacahöyük plans and lies south of the Hittite temple/palace.⁶ The tombs must have been dug into the slope at the eastern end of the east-west running depression. This depression ends in a bay towards the outer face of the mound (Fig.2). The gentle rise of the terrain (towards the north-west) suggests that one of the main roads leading up to the settlement had always been located here, as is also indicated by the later Sphinx Gate of the Hittite settlement built in this area. Here, on the upper slope of this bay, the cemetery must have been visible from the entrance to the site, probably along a road which once led up from a contemporary gate to the center of the settlement.

The levels of the tombs are marked in a schematic isometric section.⁷ On the same drawing there is a zero-point marked on a Hittite building, which can be identified as Building IV(rooms 43-47) to the southeast of the central courtyard in the Hittite complex.⁸ J. L. Huot, in his discussion of the stratigraphy of the Alacahöyük tombs,⁹ refers specifically to this zero-point in a footnote, but expresses scepticism about its actual use and existence at the time of the excavation of the tombs. If correct, this would mean that the levels of the tombs are not secure.

Therefore, it was deemed necessary to reflect on the validity of this zero-point and the level readings for the tombs: two corresponding zero-level lines appear in the contours-map on either side of the east-west running depression, which itself is marked with negative levels.¹⁰ Another reference to a zero-level is found in a section through the chalcolithic levels in the grid location 44/XLII-XLVI.¹¹ One may think that two different zero-points are involved, because here, in this area the chalcolithic levels lie between 0-(-5) m as shown on several smaller plans.¹² This is several meters higher than otherwise indicated chalcolithic levels, namely (-10) to (-15) m.¹³ This difference in depth for chalcolithic levels is best understood in the east-west sec-

tion A-A'.¹⁴ The Hittite building with the zero level and the EBA "royal" cemetery are located in the same above described depression, partially in the so-called bay area. The chalcolithic layers in this bay area are located much deeper than the chalcolithic layers in the center of the mound, as one can observe in the section. In other words, the absolute levels of the chalcolithic remains depend on their location on the mound. One is inclined to interpret the zero-level lines on the contour map to have been based on a fixed zero-point. On the other hand the zero mark on the Hittite building, which Huot refers to, indicates a level reading, zero in this case, and not the fixed zero-point of the excavation, which unfortunately seems not to be included in the publication. Therefore, although not provided in the publication, all measurements, including the levels of the tombs seem to be made from the same zero-point/level.

The stratigraphy of the tombs is a much debated issue. There is no doubt about their all dating to post-chalcolithic levels. There is, however, disagreement concerning their relative chronology within the Early Bronze Age. It is not clear whether the burnt layer overlying level 5, which is generally accepted as the transition from EBA to the Early Hittite Period on the mound, was cut by the tombs B, D and H.

The excavators are divided on this matter. R. O. Arık had noted in a preliminary report that tomb B constituted a surprise, since it was, unlike the other two, R and T, all unearthed during the first season, dug into the burnt layer.¹⁵ In the final publication he repeats that statement, but also states that tomb B and other buildings remained as islands on the burnt level, which gives the impression that the tombs were not dug into the burnt layer, but remained above it.¹⁶ In the description of the excavation of tomb B, Arık mentions that ashes, charcoal and pottery sherds were found at the level of the bovine skulls.¹⁷ Although stratigraphically this might mean that tomb B belongs to post Early Bronze Age/Early Hittite levels R. O. Arık still regarded the then excavated three tombs R, T, and

B as belonging to the Early Bronze Age due to similarities among all the tombs' inventory.¹⁸ H. Z. Koşay on the other hand dated some of the tombs to level 5 and others to levels 6 and 7, but expressed no doubts about them all being Early Bronze Age burials.¹⁹ A rather radical suggestion about the dating of the tombs is offered by Schaeffer. He argues that since tomb B is dug into the burnt layer it cannot be dated earlier than the latter. As all the tombs have similar inventory, they must be contemporary, therefore they all must belong to post-EBA levels.²⁰

There are very few plans that show the relation of the architectural remains to these tombs. The only detailed plan of this area shows that tombs H and D destroyed walls of a level 5 building complex when they were initially dug.²¹ This specific housing complex is repeatedly illustrated in later publications.²² If this housing complex is a building of level 5, as it seems, and is destroyed by tombs H and D it would indeed mean that at least these two tombs are later in date than level 5. It is, however, not entirely clear why this building complex belongs to level 5. Although these architectural drawings were published, the architecture was not discussed in the publication.

Based on the evidence available from the published material, it is not possible, simply to conclude that these tombs stratigraphically post-date the burnt layer which is taken to mark the end of the Early Bronze Age. Without consulting further plans, drawings and photographs pertaining to this specific problem one should refrain from drawing conclusions. The burnt layer itself also constitutes a problem. M. Akok pointed out that the fire was confined to the area of the tombs and some additional area north of them.²³ Is it, then, really a destruction that signals the end of the Early Bronze Age?

More recently the stratigraphy of the tombs has been discussed by W. Orthmann and J. L. Huot.²⁴ Both agree that some graves belong to the post-destruction level 5 whereas others can be dated to level 6 and level 7. Although their opinion on each specific

tomb is different, they both take absolute levels as an indication of relative age.

In this paper it is argued that the chronology of the tombs has to be considered independent of their depths, simply because we are dealing with tombs in a cemetery set on a slope. As explained above the cemetery was located on the southeastern slope of the Early Bronze Age mound, built in the bay-shaped area, which once may have had a "theater" like effect exhibiting the tombs.²⁵ The Early Bronze Age mound was probably smaller in its dimensions and maybe also somewhat steeper in the slopes. One has to bear in mind that the Hittites did a lot of leveling before they erected their buildings.²⁶ The depth of a tomb, then, is determined by its location, i.e. whether it lies higher on the slope or further down. The uppermost tombs in the bay would have been H and B, located highest on the slope according to their levels (- 5.50m and - 6.35

m); tombs D, S, R, E, F, C, T, A, and A', cover the intermediate range on the slope. As expected the deepest tombs L and K (- 8.60m and - 9.0m) are also the ones located lowest on the slope.²⁷ Originally, all tombs might have been dug at a similar depth from the surface, however due to erosion and Hittite levelling the their distances to the surface might have been altered. It is conceivable that the tombs were dug into terraces. The only certain information about the relative chronology of the tombs is given in cases where they overlap, i.e. when it is attested that one tomb has actually been constructed partially on another tomb as is the case in A and A' or within T and C.

The rejection of absolute levels to establish the relative chronology of the burials does not constitute a solution in itself, but rather serves the purpose of clarifying the evidence in preparation for further research and analysis.

NOTES

- 1- W. J. HAMILTON, 1842, 382-384
- 2- G. PERROT, et. al., 340, pl.12
- 3- Th. MAKRIDİ, 1908, 3
- 4- K. BITTEL, 1982, 126
- 5- R. O. ARIK, 1937, 5; H.Z. KOŞAY, 1944, 170
- 6- For a general plan of the Hittite remains see H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pls. 1 and 78
- 7- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl.137b
- 8- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 79
- 9- "Il existe d'ailleurs un point de référence 0, 00... mais n'a-t-il pas été inventé après coup?", J. L. HUOT, 1982, 58
- 10- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 147, inset contours map of the mound
- 11- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 145a, note that LL should rather be XL
- 12- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 142: levels IX and X seem to be at a depth of 1.66-2.26m, level XI is at a depth of 2. 2-3.36m and level XII at a depth of 3.28-4.13m
- 13- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1944, 176
- 14- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 147, lower part

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- 15- R.O. ARIK, 1937, "Alacahöyük hafriyatının ilk neticeleri" *Belleten* 1, 219
- 16- R.O. ARIK, 1937, 112, 66
- 17- R.O. ARIK, 1937, 53
- 18- R.O. ARIK, 1937, 112
- 19- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1951, 59
- 20- C.F.A. SCHAEFFER, 1948, 286-291
- 21- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1951, plan VII
- 22- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pls. 135, 137
- 23- M. AKOK, pers. comm. July 1987. See also H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 147, section A-A
- 24- J.L. HUOT, 1982, 55-56; W. ORTHMANN, 1963, 32-34
- 25- M. AKOK described their location as "theater"-like, pers. comm., July 1987
- 26- H.Z. KOŞAY, 1966, pl. 145: see the part of the mound where it says "Eti Çağı Blokaj Temeli" (Hittite period levelled foundation)
- 27- The range of levels for tombs H and B are (all negative) 5.5-6.35m, for tombs D, S and R 6.3-6.9m, for toms E, F, C, T, A and A' 7.0-8.8m, and for tombs L and K 8.6

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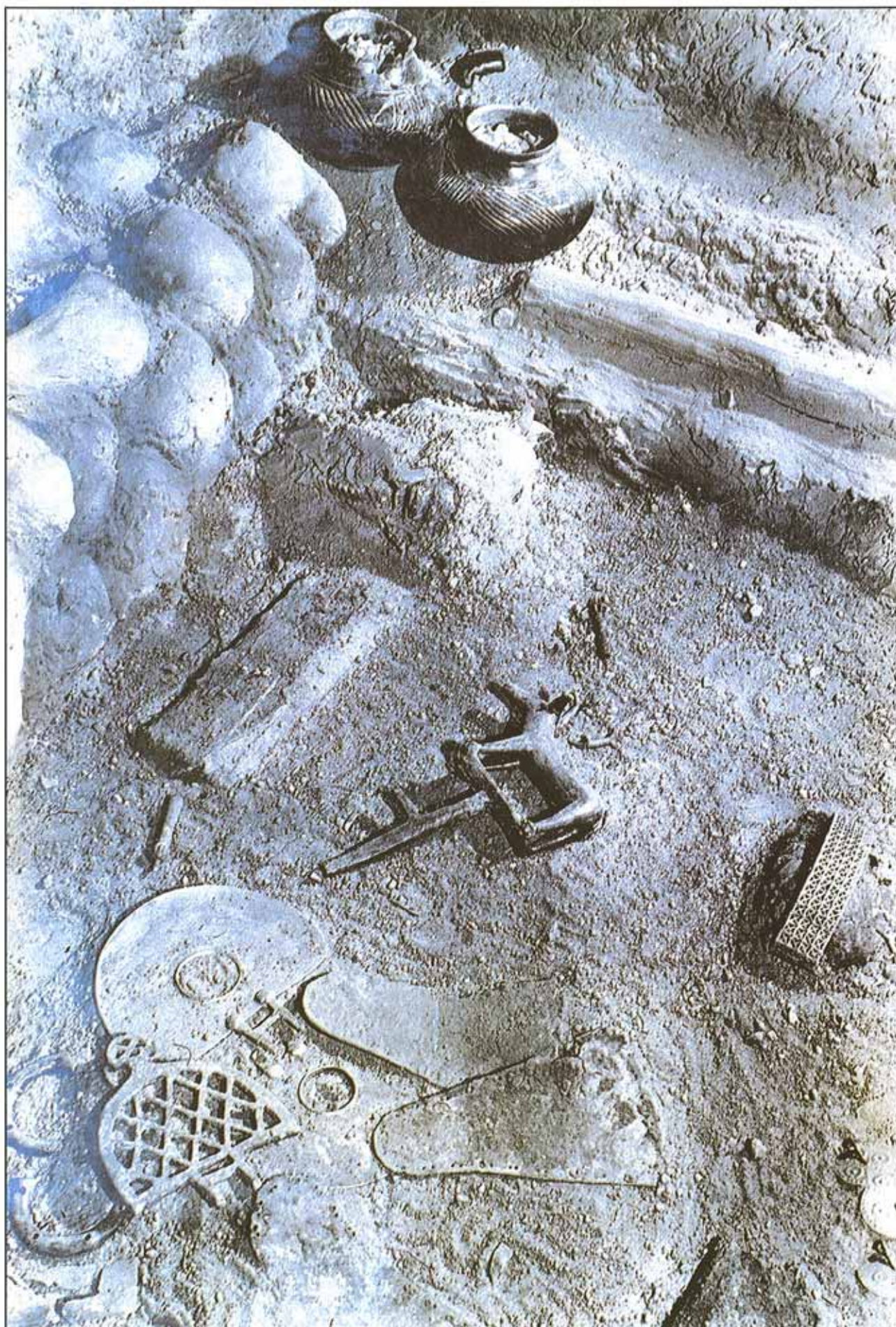


Figure 1: Photo of Tomb A with some of the inventory in situ. History Exhibition, Turkish Historical Society, 1937.

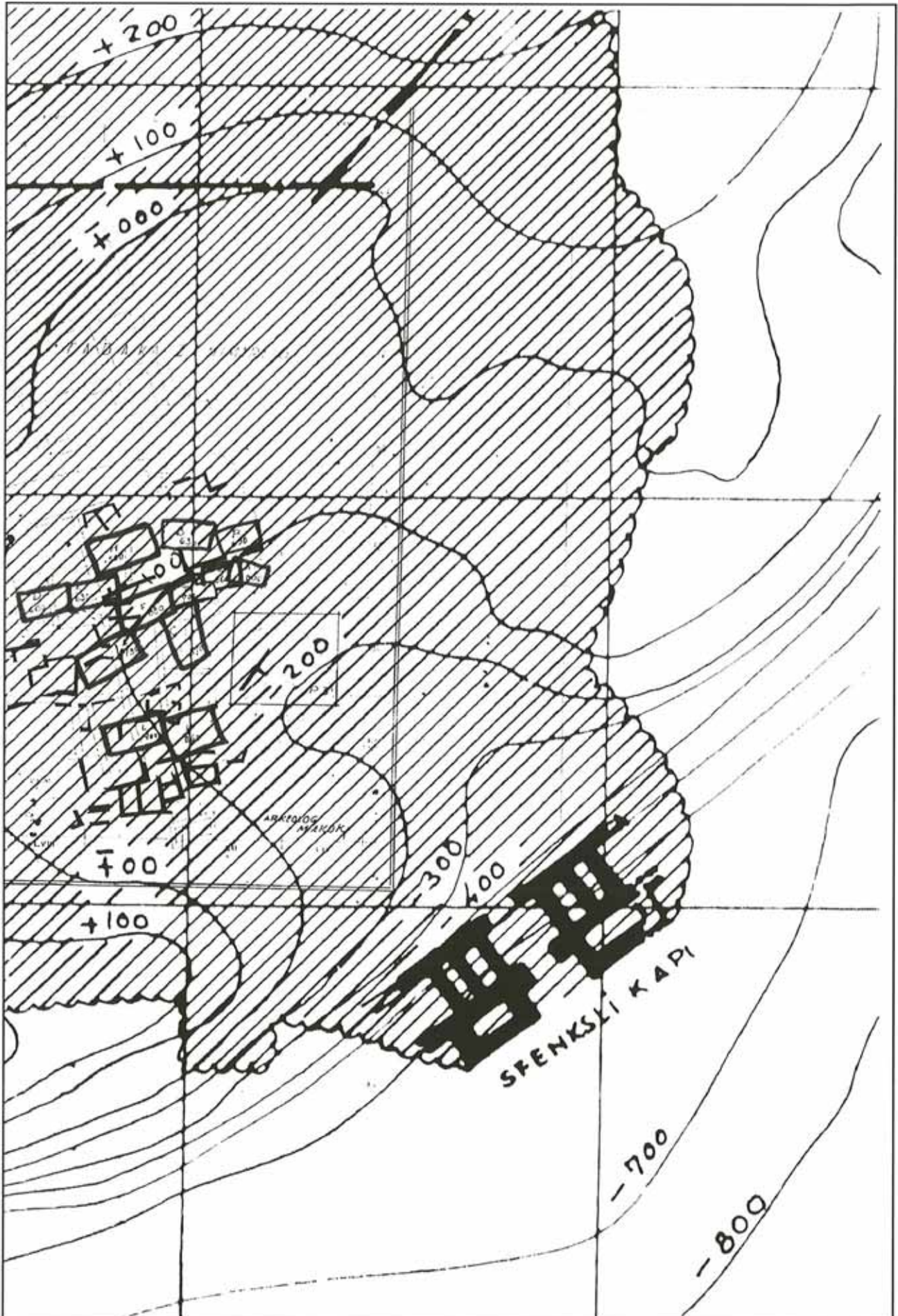


Figure 2: Location of the tombs in red, from H.Z.Koşay, 1966, pl. 135, superimposed on an enlarged version of pl.147, the contours map.

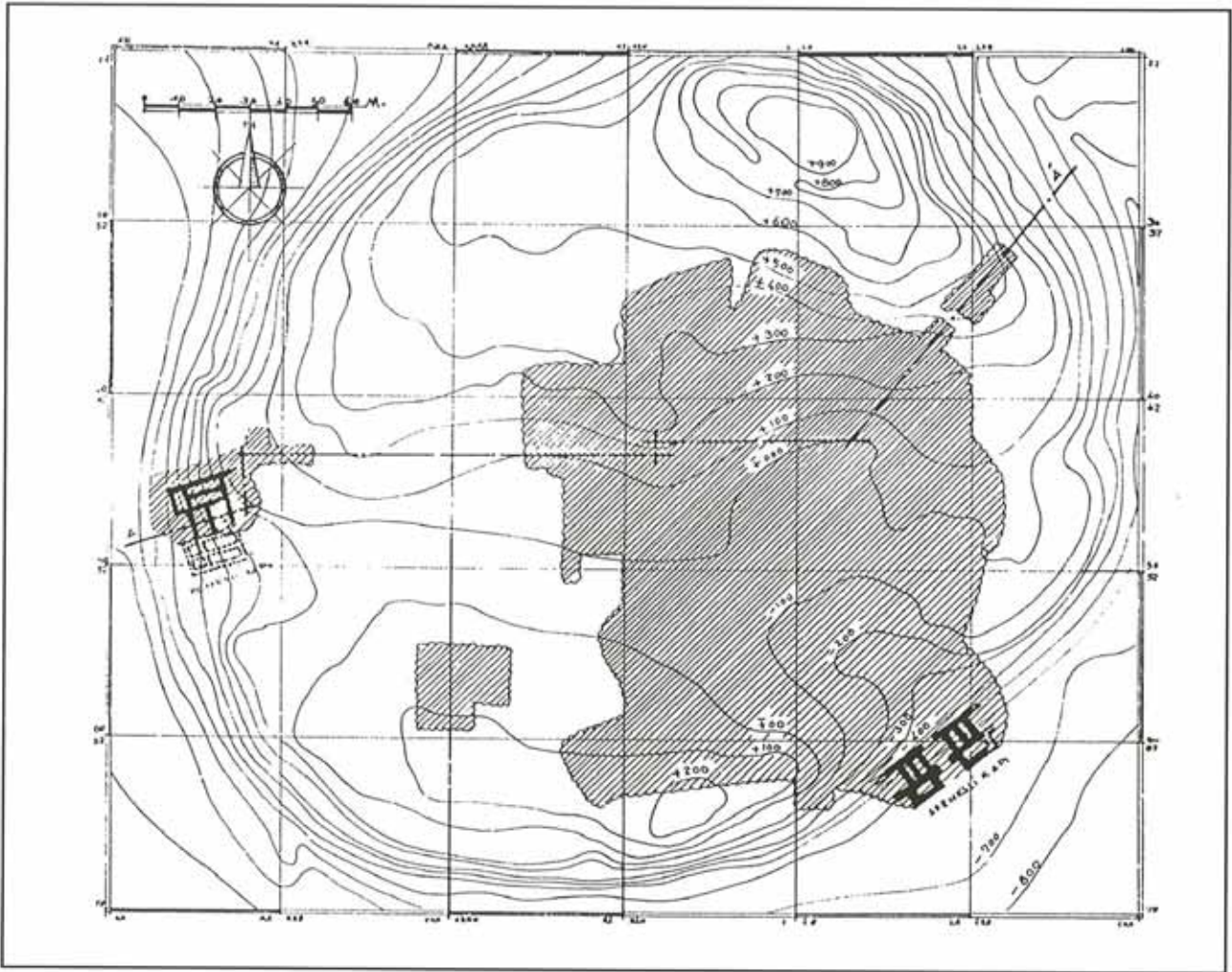


Figure 3: H.Z.Koşay, 1966, pl. 147.

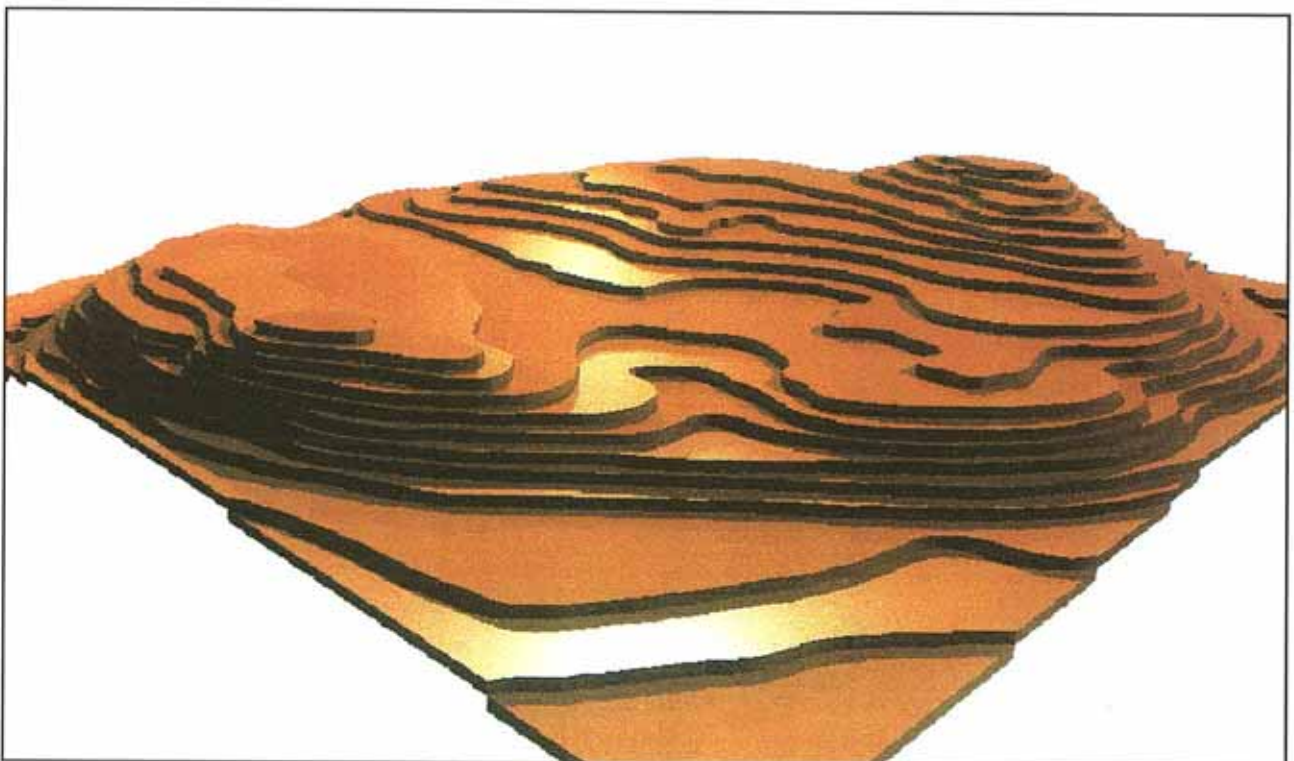


Figure 4: Computer generated view of Alacahöyük in relief, based on contours map in Fig.2. View from the East. Scale 1:1250