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ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SPATIAL EVALUATION OF THE TRIAL EXCAVATIONS FROM THE AMISOS NECROPOLIS¹

AMİSOS NEKROPOLİSİNDEN SONDAJ KAZILARININ ARKEOLOJİK VE MEKÂNSAL DEĞERLENDİRMESİ

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Abstract

This study presents an archaeological evaluation of the spatial data obtained from three trial excavations carried out in 2005, 2010, and 2020 in the necropolis of the ancient city of Amisos (modern Samsun). Far from being merely a burial ground, the Amisos necropolis reveals an infrastructure linked to the city's social and economic life. The excavations uncovered a stone-paved road, a water basin and water channels constructed with Khorasan mortar, drainage systems, and architectural wall remains, all of which indicate that building activity continued in the area from the Roman Imperial Period into the Early Byzantine Period. In particular, the findings from the 2020 excavation point to the presence of a tile workshop or an associated waste dump in the vicinity of the necropolis, suggesting that the site also served a production-related function.

¹ This study was prepared in accordance with Article 15, paragraph f, subparagraph 6 of the General Directorate of Cultural Assets and Museums' Directive on the Execution of Surface Research, Sounding and Excavation Works Related to Cultural and Natural Assets, and in line with the "Scientific Museum Research" permit included in the annex of the Samsun Museum Directorate's letter dated 05/04/2022 and numbered 2372025. Primary sources for the study are the archives of the Samsun Museum Directorate, and personal archive. This study has been compiled from excavation reports to contribute to urban archaeology. Therefore, it is not presented within a broad analytical framework.

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Overall, the data reveal that the necropolis of Amisos constituted a dynamic urban landscape that integrated burial practices, transportation, and production activities.

Keywords: Amisos, Necropolis, Architectural Remains, Roman Imperial Period, Early Byzantine Period.

Öz

Bu çalışma, antik Amisos kentinin (Samsun) nekropolisinde 2005, 2010 ve 2020 yıllarında gerçekleştirilen üç farklı sondaj kazısından elde edilen mekansal verilerin arkeolojik değerlendirmesini konu almaktadır. Amisos nekropolisi, sadece bir mezarlık alanı olmanın ötesinde, kentin sosyal ve ekonomik yaşamıyla ilintili bir altyapı sergilemektedir. Kazılar sonucunda ortaya çıkarılan taş döşeli yol, horasan harçlı su havuzu ve su kanalları, drenaj sistemleri ve mimari duvar kalıntıları, bölgedeki imar faaliyetlerinin Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nden Erken Bizans Dönemi'ne kadar devam ettiğini göstermektedir. Özellikle 2020 yılı verileri, nekropol çevresinde kiremit üretimine işaret eden atölye veya atık alanlarının varlığını ortaya koyarak, alanın üretimsel bir işlevinin olduğunu da desteklemektedir. Sonuç olarak bu veriler, Amisos nekropolisinin defin ritüelleri, ulaşım ağları ve üretim faaliyetlerini birleştiren dinamik bir kentsel dokuya sahip olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Amisos, Nekropolis, Mimari Kalıntılar, Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi, Erken Bizans Dönemi.

1. Introduction

During the expansion of Milesian colonization along the Pontic coast in the 6th century BC, Amisos emerged as one of its key centers. Based on archaeological evidence, the site of the city's earliest settlement is located within the present-day boundaries of Büyükoymca Neighborhood, Atakum district, Samsun, in the area known as the Çakalca-Karadoğan Mound, and is dated to the mid-6th century BC.²

Historical data indicate that the city entered its urbanization phase in 564 BC and expanded its territory following the regional power shift in 546 BC.³ The second development phase (or re-foundation) of the city is dated to 437 BC. During this period, Athenian colonists from Sinope established a new center at Toraman Tepe, situated today within the boundaries of Cedit Neighborhood, İlkadım district, Samsun.⁴ Over time, the settlements at both locations were incorporated into the city's territory.⁵

Under the rule of the Kingdom of Pontus, Amisos went through notable political, social, and economic growth. Especially during the reign of Mithridates VI Eupator, the city became a major regional power center and experienced its “golden age,” reaching the height of material and cultural prosperity.⁶ It maintained its strategic and commercial importance throughout the Roman Imperial Period and enjoyed a period of stability that continued into the Byzantine era.⁷

Today, the city's main necropolis is located within the area occupied during the settlement's second phase of development (Cedit Neighborhood in İlkadım district). Extending northward from the acropolis, this necropolis encompasses the neighborhoods of Karasamsun, Baruthane, Kalkanca, Kadifekale, Selahiye, Cedit, and Liman. Evidence of

² Şirin-Kolağasıoğlu 2016, 37; Şirin 2024, 80-81; Şirin-Yiğitpaşa 2023, 15-48; Yiğitpaşa-Şirin 2024, 57-85.

³ Şirin-Kolağasıoğlu 2016, 37.

⁴ Şirin-Kolağasıoğlu 2016, 38; Şirin 2025, 3.

⁵ Şirin 2024, 83.

⁶ Şirin 2024, 83.

⁷ Şirin-Kolağasıoğlu 2016, 38.

burial activity, however, is not confined to this zone; it can be traced across a broad corridor stretching from Atakum to Tekkeköy.⁸

The trial excavations conducted in three different seasons in the necropolis of ancient Amisos constitute the core of the present study. The first was carried out in 2005 on block 2435 in Karasamsun Neighborhood; the second in 2010 as part of a general trial excavation covering blocks 2400 and 2435 in the same area; and the third in 2020 on a protected tumulus on block 4875 (Map 1). The trial excavations were not expanded beyond their original limits and are presented here in numerical order for greater clarity.

2. The 2005 Trial Excavation

Following the discovery of a grave at block 2435 and the adjacent road corridor within a third-degree archaeological site in Karasamsun Neighborhood in İlkadım district, Samsun, trial excavations were conducted under the direction of the Samsun Museum Directorate. These yielded architectural remains (Trial Excavation 1) and a cist grave (Trial Excavation 2) at two different locations (Fig. 1).

The area excavated due to the presence of grooved stone blocks on the surface was designated Trial Excavation 1 (Fig. 2). Beneath the surface, ceramics dating broadly from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine periods, wall remains, and a large quantity of tile fragments were identified (Figs. 3-4). Underneath this accumulation of stones, a solid floor measuring 2.30×8 m and constructed with Khorasan mortar was revealed (Fig. 5). The floor is oriented north-south and widens toward the west. Extending along the slope, evidence of burning (burnt layer) was identified 10 cm above the floor (Fig. 6). Further excavation northward from the floor revealed remains of an ancient north-south stone-paved road constructed of dressed stones, together with a water channel (Fig. 7).

Adjacent to the road lay a water channel made of grooved stones, designed to drain rainwater. A column base, apparently a later addition, rests atop the channel. A wall, notable for its architectural technique, stands on the northern side of the road, at a higher elevation. Its foundation consists of natural stones, topped by four courses of flat tiles. The upper part is coated with a sturdy 20 cm-thick lime plaster (Fig. 8). The wall extends westward.

In Trial Excavation 2, located 2 m south of Trial Excavation 1, a cist grave carved into the bedrock was identified. From the surface down to 1.26 m, the bedrock was hollowed out into a rectangular chamber measuring 0.86×2.50 m. The upper edges of the walls were lined with bricks, while the floor was paved with square tiles (32×32 cm). The interior was plastered with Khorasan mortar similar to that used in Trial Excavation 1. The grave was covered by three large rectangular stone slabs. Uncremated (inhumation) skeletal remains of more than one person were discovered inside. The grave yielded no personal items or grave goods (Figs. 9-11).

3. The 2010 Trial Excavation

The 2010 excavation was conducted as part of a general trial excavation within the third-degree archaeological site in İlkadım district, Samsun, that includes the neighborhoods of Karasamsun, Kalkancı, Selahiye, and Baruthane, under the direction of the Samsun Museum Directorate, with the author serving as coordinator. A total of eight excavations were carried out within the boundaries of the third-degree archaeological site in Karasamsun Neighborhood: Trial Excavation 3 on block 2400 and Trial Excavations 4-10 on block 2435. These excavations, located in the same general area as Trial Excavations 1 and 2, also yielded architectural remains.

⁸ Şirin 2017, 169.

At a depth of 20 cm, Trial Excavation 3, located 30 m north of Trial Excavation 2, yielded a water settling basin measuring 30–40 × 80 cm and 55 cm deep, built of natural stones with an interior lined with Khorasan mortar. The basin has two straight and two L-shaped channels, each 10 cm deep, positioned on opposite sides (Figs. 12-13). In Trial Excavation 4, 40 m southwest of Trial Excavation 3, the remains of a 20 cm-wide and 20 cm-deep water channel, constructed of natural stones and plastered with Khorasan mortar, were revealed after removing 1 m of fill soil (Figs. 14-15).

Located 15 m south of Trial Excavation 4, Trial Excavation 5 contained the remains of a natural stone wall at a depth of 1 m (Fig. 16). Thirty meters east of this, Trial Excavation 6 yielded another wall segment at a depth of 1.80 m, forming a corner of a structure built with natural stones (Fig. 17). Trial Excavation 7, located 15 m further south, revealed additional collapsed wall remains at a depth of 70 cm (Fig. 18).

Further wall remains were also encountered in Trial Excavations 8, 9, and 10. Trial Excavation 8, located 12 m west of Trial Excavation 7, revealed wall remains at a depth of 1 m (Fig. 19). Trial Excavation 9, located 17 m south of Trial Excavation 8, yielded similar remains at a depth of 70 cm (Fig. 20), while Trial Excavation 10, located 23 m northwest of Trial Excavation 9, revealed wall remains at a depth of 1.30 m (Fig. 21).

4. The 2020 Trial Excavation

In 2020, under the direction of the Samsun Museum Directorate, a trial excavation was conducted on a registered tumulus within a first-degree archaeological site on block 4875 in Karasamsun Neighborhood, İlkadım district, Samsun. In order to ground-truth the geophysical data obtained from Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) surveys conducted for archaeogeophysical research, two trial excavations were carried out at separate locations, one of which (Trial Excavation 11) yielded architectural remains.⁹

During the geophysical survey, anomalies with high resistivity values were detected in ERT profiles 12–13, prompting Trial Excavation 11 in this area (Fig. 22). At a depth of 1.50 m, remains of a stone-built wall extending east–west with a slight inclination parallel to the terrain were revealed. The exposed portion of the wall runs 3.10 m eastward before turning northward at a right angle. Within the excavated area, the wall measures 1.10 m in height, 4.70 m in total length, and 80 cm in width. At a depth of 2.60 m, a floor hardened with lime was uncovered.

The wall was constructed using natural stones of various sizes, together with scattered flat tile fragments. The stones were bonded with lime mortar. Additionally, dressed stone blocks were also observed alongside natural stones within the wall fabric (Figs. 23-26). North of the wall, a stone column base of the same form as that found in Trial Excavation 1 was uncovered (Fig. 27). The excavation also yielded a large quantity of roof-tile and *kalypter* fragments, along with ceramic sherds, including amphora, *unguentarium*, and *pithos* fragments (Fig. 28).

5. Evaluation and Conclusion

The architectural remains at the lowest level in Trial Excavation 1 consist of a road built of rectangular stone blocks laid on a bed of Khorasan mortar. Khorasan mortar, which is associated with water-related structures, also appears inside the cist grave uncovered in Trial Excavation 2. This type of mortar, particularly evident in the water settling basin in Trial Excavation 3 and the water channel in Trial Excavation 4, was commonly used during the

⁹ The electrical resistivity tomography and GPR (ground penetrating radar) measurements for the archaeogeophysical surveys were conducted by Expert Geophysics Engineer Özcan Özen in 2018.

Roman Imperial and Early Byzantine periods. Similar Khorasan mortar floors were also found in structures dating from the 2nd to the 5th centuries AD both on the acropolis and across the city's wider settlement area. In all instances, the use of Khorasan mortar appears to have been intended to provide waterproofing.

West of the stone-paved road in Trial Excavation 1, a drainage channel for rainwater was formed by aligning grooved rectangular stones parallel to the slope. However, the eastern side of the road had been damaged. In sloping terrain such as that of the Amisos necropolis, preventing rainwater flowing downslope from damaging architectural elements or road surfaces was just as important in antiquity as it is today. These grooved stones channeled rainwater in a controlled manner, thereby protecting the road foundation and stone paving.

The northern part of the stone-paved road connects to a wall built of large natural stones, topped by four courses of flat tiles and capped with a layer of plaster. To the south of the road, a cist grave was uncovered. Although the road appears to suggest a connection between the structure and the grave, no definitive evidence confirming this relationship has been recovered. Based on its construction technique and its association with the stone-paved road, the cist grave in Trial Excavation 2 is dated to the Early Byzantine Period.¹⁰

The plastered wall remains uncovered in Trial Excavations 5–10, together with tile fragments found both in the excavations and the fill, indicate that these were functional architectural spaces rather than simple structures. While the use of natural stone and mortar is consistent with local building traditions, the walls in Trial Excavations 1 and 2, which incorporate tiles in their construction, differ in technique from the natural stone-built walls in Trial Excavations 3–10. This suggests that the structures in the area were built in successive phases rather than contemporaneously.

Overall, the archaeological evidence from Trial Excavations 1–10 points to a space associated with the graves in the city's necropolis. The presence of water channels and architectural structures similar to those revealed in this study in or near necropolis areas is to be expected, as they would have supported the needs of visitors, grave masons, and those performing ritual washings, as well as the orderly conduct of funerary rites.¹¹

The use of lime mortar and the inclusion of tile fragments within the masonry of the wall uncovered in Trial Excavation 11 are highly consistent with Late Roman–Early Byzantine construction practices in the region. Notably, the quantity of tile fragments recovered far exceeds what would be expected from a simple roof collapse. In addition, the differences in form between the tiles incorporated into the wall and those recovered from the excavation suggest that the structure associated with the wall may have functioned as a tile workshop during the Roman Imperial Period, with a new structure possibly being constructed nearby in the early phases of the Byzantine period.¹² The presence of tile fragments within the stone deposits may also point to a waste dump in which defective tiles from the workshop were discarded and buried (Figs. 29–31). In such a scenario, a tile production workshop likely existed in the immediate vicinity. Notably, the remains exhibit strong similarities in both materials and workmanship with those of the architectural remains and cist grave in Trial Excavations 1–2.

In conclusion, the trial excavations conducted over several seasons in the Amisos necropolis demonstrate that this area functioned not only as a burial ground, but also as a dynamic zone of infrastructure and production serving the needs of the city. The data obtained

¹⁰ Şirin 2024, 69, Fig. 36.

¹¹ Şirin 2025, 27.

¹² Şirin 2024, 69–70, Figs. 37–39.

from these excavations suggest that the infrastructure established during the Roman Imperial Period in the Amisos necropolis continued to exist as part of the functional architectural spaces of the Early Byzantine Period. The remains reflect an urban setting that combined tile production, funerary architecture, burial practices, and facilities serving visitors and transportation, thereby supporting both the necropolis and the living city.

Geniřletilmiř zet

Karadeniz'in jeopolitik nemini yansıtan antik Amisos kenti, tarihi boyunca iki ana evrede geliřmiřtir. İlk evre, M 6. yzyılın ortalarında, bugn Samsun ilinin Atakum ilesi sınırlarında yer alan akalca-Karadoėan Hyė ve evresine Miletoslu kolonistlerin yerleřmesiyle bařlamıřtır. Bu dnemde kent, kk bir krfezin saėladıėı korunaklı limandan yararlanarak hızla řehirleřmiř ve M 546'daki blgesel g deėiřimlerine raėmen sınırlarını geniřletmeye devam etmiřtir.

Kentin geliřiminin ikinci evresi M 437 yılına dayanmaktadır. Sinope (Sinop) zerinden gelen Atinalı kolonistlerin, Samsun'un İlkadım ilesi, Cedit Mahallesi sınırlarındaki Toraman Tepe'yi yeni merkezleri olarak semeleri kentin konumunu deėiřirmiřtir. Pontus Krallıėı dneminde, zellikle VI. Mithradates Eupator dneminde Amisos; sosyal, siyasi ve ekonomik aılardan "altın aėını" yařamıřtır. Bu stratejik nem Roma ve Bizans Dnemlerinde de korunmuř, kentin hinterlandıyla olan gl baėları idari ve ticari canlılıėın devam etmesini saėlamıřtır.

Amisos nekropolisi, kentin ikinci yerleřim yeri olan akropolis evresinde (Cedit Mahallesi) yoėunlařmıřtır. Akropolisin kuzeyinden itibaren geniřleyen bu alan; Karasamsun, Baruthane, Kalkanca ve Selahiye gibi mahalleleri kapsayan geniř bir sahayı iine almaktadır. Ancak arkeolojik veriler, mezar buluntularının sadece bu alanla sınırlı olmadıėını, kentin izlerinin Atakum'dan Tekkeky'e kadar uzanan geniř bir koridor boyunca srlebileceėini gstermektedir. Bu baėlamda 2005, 2010 ve 2020 yıllarında yrtlen kazı alıřmaları, bu geniř nekropol alanındaki sosyal ve teknik yařama dair ayrıntıları gn yzne ıkarmıřtır.

Samsun ili, İlkadım ilesi, Karasamsun Mahallesi'nde gerekleřtirilen Sondaj 1 ve 2'de, yzeyin hemen altında Hellenistik'ten Bizans Dneminde kadar uzanan geniř bir seramik yelpazesi tespit edilmiřtir. Kazılardan elde edilen en nemli bulgulardan biri, kuzey-gney doėrultusunda uzanan kesme tařlardan yapılmıř tař dřeli yoldur. Yol boyunca grlen oluklu tař bloklar, yaėmur suyu iin bir drenaj sistemine iřaret etmektedir. Yolun hemen gneyinde, ana kayaya oyulmuř, zemini ve yanları kiremitlerle kaplı, ii horasan harcıyla sıvanmıř bir sanduka mezar aıėa ıkarılmıřtır. oklu inhumasyon (yakılmadan gm) tarzı ve kullanılan har yapısı bu mezar, Erken Bizans Dnemi'ne tarihlendirilmiřtir.

Samsun ili, İlkadım ilesi, Karasamsun, Kalkanca, Selahiye ve Baruthane mahallelerini kapsayan genel sondaj kazısı alıřmaları kapsamında 8 ayrı noktada yapılan sondajlarla kentin altyapısına dair nemli veriler elde edilmiřtir. Sondaj 3'te ortaya ıkarılan horasan harlı su havuzu ve bu havuza baėlı "L" řeklindeki kanallar ile Sondaj 4'teki harlı su kanalı, kentin su ynetimine ıřık tutmaktadır. Sondaj 5-10'te tanımlanan duvar kalıntıları ve sıva izleri, alanın sadece bir mezarlık deėil, aynı zamanda iřlevsel mekanlarla rl bir dokuya sahip olduėunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Samsun ili, İlkadım ilesi, Karasamsun Mahallesi'nde yer alan tescilli bir tmlste, yer radarı (GPR) ve ERT gibi modern arkeojeofizik yntemlerle desteklenen kazılar kentin mekansal yapısını aydınlatmıřtır. Doėal tařlar arasına kiremit kırıklarının serpiřtirildiėi Sondaj 11'deki duvar yapısı, Roma-Bizans geiř dneminin tipik inřa geleneėini yansıtmaktadır. Sondaj alanında bulunan yoėun atı kiremidi, kalypter, amphora ve pithos paraları, buranın bir kiremit atlyesi veya byle bir atlyeye ait bir atık alanı olabileceėini

düşündürmektedir. Kiremit formlarındaki farklılıklar, Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'ne ait bir üretim yönteminin Erken Bizans Dönemi'nde yeni bir mekansal kullanımla evrildiğine işaret etmektedir.

Amisos nekropolünde yürütülen bu üç farklı dönem kazısı, antik kentin sosyo-ekonomik yapısına ilişkin şu temel sonuçları ortaya koymaktadır: Roma İmparatorluk Dönemi'nde kurulan altyapı (yol, drenaj sistemleri ve su kanalları), Erken Bizans Dönemi'nde de kullanılmaya devam etmiştir. Nekropolis yakınında bulunan su sistemleri ve mimari yapılar, mezar ustaları, defin işlemleri ve dini ritüeller için gerekli dinamik bir hizmet alanının varlığını göstermektedir. Bir kiremit atölyesine ait bulgular, Amisos'un kendi yapı malzemelerini üreten, dışa bağımlılığı düşük ve üretim kapasitesi yüksek bir kent olduğunu desteklemektedir. Nekropoliste bulunan amphora ve pithos parçaları ise kentin deniz ticaretiyle olan bağlantısının ve depolama kültürünün mezarlara kadar uzandığını göstermektedir.

Figures



Map 1: Locations of the Trial Excavations (Source: Google Earth, accessed on October 12, 2025)



Figure 1: General view of Trial Excavations 1 and 2



Figure 2: Stone block at the surface in Trial Excavation 1



Figure 3: Natural stone wall remains in Trial Excavation 1



Figure 4: Numerous roof tile fragments in Trial Excavation 1



Figure 5: Khorasan mortar floor in Trial Excavation 1



Figure 6: Burnt layer in Trial Excavation 1



Figure 7: Stone-paved road in Trial Excavation 1 (Şirin 2024: 112, fig. 36)



Figure 8: The wall north of the paved road in Trial Excavation 1



Figure 9: Cist grave in Trial Excavation 2



Figure 10: Interior of the cist grave in Trial Excavation 2



Figure 11: Floor tiles inside the cist grave in Trial Excavation 2



Figure 12: Water settling basin in Trial Excavation 3



Figure 13: Water settling basin in Trial Excavation 3



Figure 14: Water channel in Trial Excavation 4



Figure 15: Water channel in Trial Excavation 4



Figure 16: Wall remains in Trial Excavation 5



Figure 17: Wall segment in Trial Excavation 6



Figure 18: Collapsed wall remains in Trial Excavation 7



Figure 19: Wall remains in Trial Excavation 8



Figure 20: Wall remains in Trial Excavation 9



Figure 21: Wall remains in Trial Excavation 10

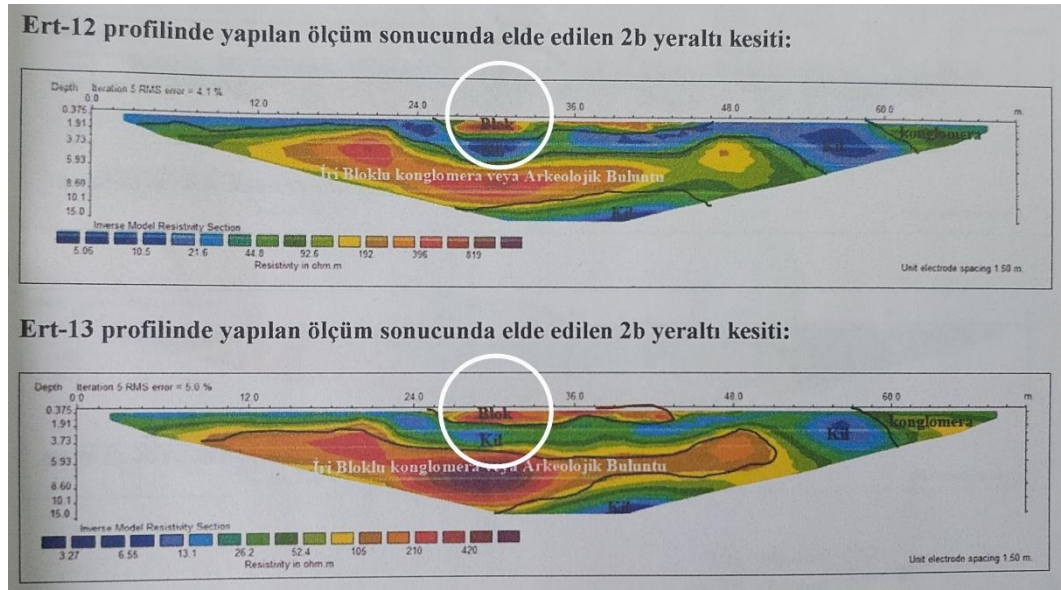


Figure 22: Geophysical data (ERT profiles 12-13) for Trial Excavation 11



Figure 23: Wall segment in Trial Excavation 11



Figure 24: Wall segment in Trial Excavation 11



Figure 25: Detail of the wall segment in Trial Excavation 11



Figure 26: Detail of the wall segment in Trial Excavation 11 (Şirin 2024, 112, fig. 38)



Figure 27: Column bases from Trial Excavation 1 (right) and Trial Excavation 11 (left), (Şirin 2024, 112, figs. 36, 38)



Figure 28: Ceramic and roof tile fragments recovered from Trial Excavation 11



Figure 29: Abundant tile fragments in Trial Excavation 11



Figure 30: Abundant tile fragments in Trial Excavation 11



Figure 31: Abundant tile fragments in Trial Excavation 11

Çıkar Çatışması / Conflicts of Interest: Yazar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan eder. / The author declare no conflict of interest.

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