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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Invisible Archaeologies of Decolonization: Western Asian Archaeology, a View from Türkiye

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The discourse on decolonization in Western Asian archaeology continues to be shaped and evaluated predominantly from outside the region. This external framing views Western Asian archaeology as a separate entity from Western Asia itself, rarely centring the perspectives of local archaeologists or the needs of the communities directly affected by archaeological research. Progress is often measured through activities rooted in Western academic structures — conference organization, publishing, and systems of gatekeeping that define research agendas. In this article, we respond to B. S. Düring's [2024. 'Gatekeepers, Geographies, and Access in the Archaeology of West Asia', *Public Archaeology*, 23(1–4): 109–21] assessment of decolonization efforts in Western Asian archaeology. We offer a perspective from within Türkiye, a country frequently homogenized or marginalized in regional debates, to critically examine the internal dynamics of decolonization. Drawing on some parameters engaged in decolonization debates, including academic genealogies, publishing practices, visibility, and public engagement, we explore the disconnect between externally constructed narratives and local realities. We argue for a reorientation of the decolonization debate that centres the perspectives, challenges, and priorities of those living and working in the region. Ultimately, we highlight the need to recognize and engage with the specific historical, institutional, and political contexts that shape archaeological practice in Türkiye and rethink what meaningful decolonization might look like from within.

KEYWORDS decolonization, publishing, engagement, academic genealogy, education, language

Introduction

Most discussion on the colonial history of archaeology in Western Asia and the ongoing power imbalances within the discipline has been articulated by scholars situated outside the region (Düring, 2024: 110), as a privilege of viewing the issue as a discrete and remote entity. Having read with interest Bleda Düring's (2024) assessment of decolonization efforts in the traditionally colonial Western Asian archaeology practised by the West, we thought it would be fruitful to add perspective to the discussion from within the region and, more specifically, from the country where we live and work, Türkiye. In his article, Düring discusses a single branch in the study of the archaeology of what was known as the Near East — that carried out by those working in countries outside the region and located to its west (see Bernbeck, 2012: 88) in which, as Porter (2016: 51) describes, the Near East is 'not so much a place to be located on a map as a discursive formation consisting of assemblages of ideas, peoples, and things fixed in the minds of scholars'. Düring poses an important question: 'What is the power relation at present between archaeologists from the rich and formerly colonial states ... and their colleagues living in West Asia?' (Düring, 2024: 109). As scholars living and working in West Asia, we aim to contribute to this discussion by reflecting on whether, in practice, there is, as Nicholas and Hollowell (2016: 62) describe, 'an ethical commitment to address and transform relations of inequality'.

While the research agendas and funding opportunities that frame the decolonization debate may largely be situated in the West, the archaeological practice itself, its fieldwork, material engagement, and institutional contexts, takes place here in Western Asia. Yet, the dominant Western vision of archaeology is still deeply rooted in histories of appropriation (Hamilakis, 2005: 96) and the concept of 'access' looms large in discussions in which '... the old but ever-present colonial belief that the Western academic has the ability and the right to represent the global' (Hamilakis, 2005: 98) is still a given. A key premise in Düring's analysis is that control over access to archaeological sites and materials in Western Asia now more strictly rests with national authorities in the region, and that this shift challenges previous asymmetries of power, requiring scholars from outside the region to engage with the new, more strict local regulatory frameworks in order to conduct research. Without access and permits to work, researchers must rely on colonial museum collections and legacy data, and the discipline in its current form effectively ceases to exist. These dynamics merit closer attention, not only in terms of practical implications for archaeological research but also in relation to the broader ethical and political commitments of the discipline.

The value of, and the discourses on, decolonization efforts are framed within a Western Asian archaeology as perceived from outside Western Asia, without reference to either their value within the countries that are the subject of research or acknowledgement and acceptance of the experiences of the local archaeologists (Nicholas & Hollowell, 2016: 74). Düring frames his discussion in terms of past

colonial practices, defining the current decolonization process as ‘a post-colonial reassessment of the role of foreign versus national archaeologists’ (2024: 111). This narrative is based on continuing colonial perceptions of the practice of archaeology in which the ongoing subalternity of ‘national archaeologists’ is a primary premise. The uncritical use of the term decolonization itself has sparked significant debate (Lemos, et al., 2025), particularly given the term’s strong association with nationalism (Lemos, 2023: 20) — a particularly pertinent relationship given the past and continuing structure and perception of archaeology in Türkiye. Here, acknowledging the longstanding link between decolonization and nationalism in Türkiye, we take a long-term perspective on what the external decolonization initiatives, described by Düring, mean within the country. We also consider where power lies in the practice of academic archaeology in the long shadow of a colonial past and a nationalist post-colonial decolonization project.

Türkiye occupies a poorly defined position within the traditional boundaries of the Near Eastern Archaeology debate. Notably, in the *Handbook of Postcolonial Archaeology* entry for the Near East, the country is almost unmentioned (Porter, 2016). The claim that ‘scholars working in Western institutions have taken the lead in decolonizing the discipline’ and that ‘non-native scholars continue to guide research agendas in the region as they have for the last two centuries’ (Porter, 2016: 57) reflects a limited perspective. Overlooking scholarship produced in the region and in local languages inherently reinforces the ongoing subalternity of archaeologists practising in their native post-colonial context, removing their agency in choices related to whether and how they should be distanced from the ‘colonial matrix of power’ (Lemos, et al., 2025: 294). Often, Türkiye has been lumped in with wider evaluations of Arabic-speaking countries (Bernbeck & Pollock, 2005: 44), linking it to wider perceptions of the subaltern while conflating regional identities, despite having considerably different cultures and histories of archaeological practice (Özdoğan, 1998: 112). These observations highlight the need to examine the specific historical and institutional context of archaeological practice in Türkiye, to clarify how and why the current international relations have come about, which we address in this paper.

It is clear that a set of assumptions still exists about how and where standards are set and the rules of engagement, ranging from academic conformity to conference and journal engagement, collegiality, and language. Here, we choose a number of perspectives through which to offer some thoughts on the prevailing paradigms. Although we provide a brief discussion of the history of archaeological practice to set the scene, this subject has already been covered in depth elsewhere, we focus our discussion, therefore, on examples of local academic lineages in archaeology, the invisibility of local archaeologists in projects and their outputs, the archaeological publications produced in Türkiye, and local engagement initiatives, both Turkish and foreign. Returning to Trigger’s (1984: 368) assertion that ‘archaeology does not function independently of the societies in which it is practised’, we discuss the current post-colonial situation in Türkiye, framed in a way meaningful for those living and working in the country, advisedly, in terms of decolonization. Our perspective is based on the current situation in academic archaeology, with acknowledgement of the history of current practice, and we juxtapose our results with those presented by Düring. We situate our discussion in terms of debates

that exist within the country, the invisible archaeologies, which we suggest have remained largely unnoticed outside Türkiye. We argue that, however much debate may be taking place outside the country, the agenda is, and at least for the duration of the country's existence, always has been, set within the political framework of the day by the archaeologists of the country itself, who are the vast majority of those working on archaeology in Türkiye.

The Turkish context

Archaeological practice in Türkiye has a complex past, creating a unique set of circumstances in the present. The history of archaeological education, practice and heritage law in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republican periods has all been described in detail elsewhere (Atakuman, 2008; Dinler, 2018; Eldem, 2010, 2011; Erciyas, 2023: 64–65; Gür, 2007; Özdoğan, 1998; Pulhan, 2003; Tanyeri-Erdemir, 2006). The Ottomans had established their own systems of control over excavation, artefacts and heritage that might be prone to looting, and the archaeology of the early Republican era was a combination of nation-building and procurement of training from the West that built on the Ottoman heritage legacy. Indeed, archaeology became, and has remained, a cornerstone of nation-building in Türkiye, and it has been exploited for political ends since the later Ottoman Empire (Dinler, 2018), after which 'archaeological knowledge was used to create citizens out of the subjects of the fallen Ottoman Empire' (Tanyeri-Erdemir, 2006: 381).

The importation of Western archaeology was an important tool as part of the Republican westernization project (Atakuman, 2008: 216, 224; Özdoğan, 1998: 111), in which arguably little effort was made to critically reflect on or adapt these practices to local needs (Özdoğan, 1998: 113). However, archaeology in Türkiye developed beyond simple methodological adoption; it was also shaped by a desire to gain legitimacy and scholarly value on the international stage. This mirrors the dynamics described by Fanon, and interpreted by Sardar (2008), in which the 'black man', the non-Western subject, must emulate and become like the 'white man', the 'civilized' European/Western, to gain recognition and acceptance. As such, archaeology became a marker of Türkiye's modernity, and early efforts were made to prove that the results of excavations and analyses of materials were of an international scholarly standard (Tanyeri-Erdemir, 2006: 381). The Second Turkish History Congress hosted a significant line-up of foreign delegates and speakers, nearly half of those who spoke being foreigners and among the delegates such familiar names as Gordon Childe, Henri [Abbé] Breuil, John Garstang, Spyridon Marinatos, and Wilhelm Dörpfeld (İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi, 1943). Both the first and, particularly, the second Turkish History Congresses were designed to demonstrate to the listening attendees and reading public that the early Republican excavators had a remarkably good grasp of the workings of archaeology. By the mid-1930s, reports presented detailed evidence of methodical and well-documented excavation, as archaeologists had already become qualified through international degrees and experience working with foreign excavation teams (Tanyeri-Erdemir, 2006: 384).

In a popular publication, *Ülkü*, Remzi Oğuz [Arık], a nationalist and later Professor of Archaeology who was educated at the Sorbonne, made clear the scientific role of excavation in understanding the past roles of discovered objects and emphasized how difficult it is to learn, particularly about prehistory, without the correct methodological approach, with which, ‘The scientific nature of the excavations’ method and technique has gained infinite value and importance in this field’ (*‘Kazımların metodundaki, tekniğindeki bilimsellik işte asıl bu alanda sonsuz bir değer ve ehemmiyet almıştır’*) (1935: 97). He noted with disdain the great difference between this newly technical archaeology and that which came before, at a time when mounds could be ravaged for the recovery of attractive artefacts while everything else was left behind: ‘Previous excavations were carried out to find large, beautiful, valuable statues and frescoes’ (*‘Daha önceki kazıları büyük, güzel, para eder heykeller, fireskler bulmak için yapıldı’*) (1935: 98; see also Özdoğan, 2006: 33). He criticizes by name the ‘tablet-hunters’ Makridi and Winkler at Kültepe-Kaneş who failed, in his view, to understand the fundamental role of the pottery that they threw away in the process ([Arık], 1935: 99).

The positive examples of archaeological practice offered by [Arık] are Western, drawing on Pompeii and Rome as cases where, already in the 1930s, there was fruitful state investment in excavation. He was also alive to the economic development already resulting from excavation work in the newly formed Turkish Republic, both from the presence of archaeologists in the region and from the potential of national and international tourism (1935: 99–100). Tanyeri-Erdemir (2006: 385) notes that ‘This emphasis on the importance of conducting archaeology properly is noteworthy. It marks a novel indigenous development that encouraged scholars to foster national pride through the performance of archaeology’. While national pride may have been novel under the new Turkish Republic, archaeology drew inspiration from Europe, and archaeologists in Türkiye became accustomed to measuring themselves against their European colleagues, a practice which became sublimated into the archaeological psyche (e.g. Özdoğan, 2014).

In 2005, Bernbeck and Pollock (2005: 43–44) asked: ‘Would a Near Eastern archaeology entirely in the hands of archaeologists from the Middle East provide the solution?’. Apart from the obvious need to unpack the terminology used in their question, we can evaluate what that situation looks like on the ground. Until the late 1960s, archaeology in Türkiye was largely the domain of independently wealthy, well-educated (predominantly) men, and few could afford to commit to it full-time (Özdoğan, 2006: 56). Excavations were typically conducted in remote rural areas by archaeologists from more developed cities, who faced considerable logistical and financial challenges. These conditions helped sustain a romanticized image of archaeology, both in its practice and its symbolic cultural value (Duru, 2013). Following the initial momentum of Republican reforms, Türkiye entered a period of considerable academic isolation, in which

... archaeology, like other social sciences, went through a period of introversion, almost totally closing its eyes to what was happening outside of Turkey. This is rather regrettable, as the 1950s and 60s were a time when archaeology in the West underwent fundamental conceptual and methodological changes. Thus, archaeology abided in Turkey in the mode of pre-World War II ... (Özdoğan, 2014: 4)

We might thus identify consequences of a situation in the 1950s that rendered archaeology in the country a separate entity but not devoid of its shared history with the West from which it took its inspiration and against which it measured itself.

The Republican westernization project in Türkiye has led to what might now be considered a hybridized local archaeological tradition (Özdoğan, 1998: 111). Since the early Republican days, this tradition has developed in parallel, but not always in dialogue with, its international peers and has benefited from the enormously rich archaeology of the country. Trigger (1984: 357) observed that, 'It is simply not true that local traditions of research reflect the isolation of archaeologists from each other, either in the past or at present'. In these terms, Türkiye presents a complex case: a mixture of nationalism and ongoing colonialism in an unresolved hangover from the post-Ottoman nation-state creation project. It is a country in which the incoming (foreign) archaeologists had no ties with the people (or archaeologists) of the place they were studying, and imperialist narratives made claims to the past that they may have felt were not shared by the current residents of the areas in question (Trigger, 1984: 365).

Access to archaeological fieldwork in Türkiye has long been selective, with significant efforts made to ensure that only those sufficiently qualified are permitted to engage in effectively destructive archaeological activities, resulting in generally low overall numbers of excavations (Özdoğan, 1998: 118). This changed in the late 1960s with the advent of large-scale dam projects primarily in eastern Anatolia, which led to a sudden increase in both the number of permits issued and the number of foreign teams effectively engaging in rescue archaeology. While on the face of it a positive development, it raises concerns that, in retrospect, archaeologists did not question how these developments impacted the region's ethnically diverse, bilingual communities (Duru, 2013), a situation that was addressed later in the early 2000s by some exemplary projects (e.g. Pulhan, 2019). It was furthermore unsettling to an archaeological community that had felt little influence from the outside world for many years, perhaps forcing confrontation with the developing discipline for the first time for many academics in Türkiye (Özdoğan, 2014: 5). The frustrations felt during this period of relative isolation are well documented (Dinçol, 2003; Dinçol & Kantman, 1968) and to some extent its effects are still felt today, for example in the only recently burgeoning engagement with international conferences (Özdoğan, 2006: 58).

Foreign archaeologists continue to be viewed with suspicion in Türkiye, a sentiment shaped by a history of overt archaeological malpractice — such as that carried out by Schliemann (Silberman, 1990), suspicions of covert government-sponsored activities (Özdoğan, 2006: 11–12; Richter, 2008), or the less malevolent but no less serious indirect encouragement of looting as in the case of Mellaart (Özdoğan, 1998: 115–16). Özdoğan (2014: 3) reflects candidly on these tensions, noting: '... keeping collegial relations and developing personal friendships with foreigners on equal terms while at the same time preventing those with malevolent intentions, nevertheless set the foundations of Turkish scholars [*sic*] outlook on foreigners ...'. He also acknowledges that the presence of foreign archaeologists can serve as a motivation for younger generations of archaeologists to maintain high professional standards (Özdoğan, 2006: 57), inherently acknowledging a differential in

expectations resulting from internalized subalternity. Beyond archaeology, a public opinion poll conducted by Gürsu and colleagues (2019) illustrated that the opinion on this matter is somewhat divided, with almost half (49%) of the respondents approving the work of foreign archaeologists in Türkiye (Gürsu, et al., 2019: 20). At the political level, however, the situation seems less friendly. Nationalistic responses to foreign archaeological missions in Türkiye are deeply rooted and manifest across both local and governmental levels, impacting archaeologists' engagement with local communities, as we discuss further below.

As Düring (2024: 112) demonstrates, foreign engagement in archaeological fieldwork in Türkiye has declined over the last two decades. This can be attributed to several factors, including the introduction of (deliberately) onerous regulations, and the gradual decline in available international funding, potentially a reflection of less willingness to fund colonial projects. A deliberate policy shift by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has further accelerated this decline, with a clear aim to reduce the number of foreign-led excavations and transfer control of existing projects to Turkish directors, which essentially seems like a nationalization project (Erciyas, 2023: 67). Likewise, the issuing of permits to foreign missions has increasingly been linked to repatriation efforts, and in some cases, permits are cancelled or transitioned into Turkish directorship (Gürsu, 2013). In parallel, the increasing emphasis on tourism over the last two decades has diverted attention away from scientific practice, rewarding speed of physical 'results' (Duru & Koparal, 2019: 191–92; Özdoğan, 2006: 9).

At first glance, these shifts may represent a form of disciplinary nationalization or even decolonization within a nationalist framework. Yet, they are more accurately understood as a complex relationship between archaeology and the state's broader political and neoliberal economic agenda. The proliferation of nationalistic narratives at the local, civic level reflects broader political and economic instability — visible in electoral fluctuations and financial crises — which fuels the state's drive to assert control over the material past, in practice and discourse.

Decolonization on the inside

One of Düring's central questions (2024: 112), 'we should ask whether the changes in the archaeology of West Asia, as manifested in the rebranding of journals, institutes, and organizations, are substantial enough to ensure continued access to sites and assemblages in the future', is fundamentally colonial in nature, framed around an imbalance between countries who might seek to 'secure access' to others' sites and assemblages and those who have neither the will nor the possibility to do the same. The power structures discussed are those outside Western Asia, taking no account of the region's complex political and academic structures or the local practices that shape archaeology there. Here, we explore Türkiye's archaeological practice as seen from within the country.

Internal power structures and academic genealogies

Substantial power structures exist within Western Asia, not only through political institutions that control access and permissions, but also through entrenched

academic hierarchies. Düring (2024: 112) asks ‘... whether the archaeology of West Asia — as practised in universities in Europe, North America, and Japan at present — has a future’. His observation that a few senior, predominantly male scholars in key universities control access to PhD programmes, which are essential for a career in the discipline (Düring, 2024: 114), resonates locally as well.

In Türkiye, these dynamics manifest through institutional inbreeding, closed academic networks, limited faculty positions, and a lack of postdoctoral opportunities for early-career researchers, all of which persist and are becoming increasingly burdensome. As Erciyas (2023: 67) notes,

... in-breeding in academia ... has led to amplified conservatism in archaeological thinking and lack of freedom in choosing subject-matter for advanced research. This also contributes to restricted access to data and information since regions, periods, sites are parceled out among departments and professors.

To examine how these patterns play out in Türkiye, we analysed the Council of Higher Education’s (YÖK) open-access dissertation database (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>). Our survey of 745 archaeology PhDs tracked supervisor–student relationships, institutional affiliations, and current employment (Tables S1 and S2). Of these, 71% ($n = 530$) hold faculty positions. Among them, 34% work at the same institution where they earned their doctorate, while 66% are employed elsewhere. Table 1 presents a breakdown by institution, showing that inbreeding is more prevalent in older, more established departments.

Our network analysis (Figure 1) reveals strong institutional clustering. Many faculty members originate from long-standing programmes at Ege, Ankara, Istanbul, and Atatürk universities, later spreading to departments across the country.

To illustrate these patterns, we examine the academic genealogies of three scholars from Ege University: Tomris Bakır, Güven Bakır, and Altan Çilingiroğlu. Having earned their PhDs abroad (T. and G. Bakır from Heidelberg; Çilingiroğlu from Manchester), they began their academic careers in Erzurum (Atatürk University) before moving to Ege University, where they spent most of their careers. As shown in Figure 2, their academic lineage, comprising both their direct PhD students and subsequent generations, continues both within Ege and across other universities in Türkiye, shaping the field of archaeology. A similar pattern is also visible in other long-standing programmes at Ankara, Istanbul, Selçuk, and Atatürk universities.

There has been a notable increase in the number of PhDs in archaeology over the last decade. However, this increase has not been matched by a corresponding increase in employment. Between 2000 and 2011, 90% of archaeology PhDs secured academic positions (26% within their alma mater). In contrast, for the 2012–24 cohort, only 64% obtained permanent academic positions, although the inbreeding rate remains stable at 23% (see Table 2 for a breakdown of numbers). The widening gap between the number of PhDs and the number of available academic posts (Figure 3) is a growing concern.

Invisibility and isolation

The invisibility of regional archaeological practice from the outside takes several forms. Modern Western Asia, as opposed to the fantasy of past worlds, is a scene

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF REGISTERED ARCHAEOLOGY PHD DISSERTATIONS AND FACULTY EMPLOYMENT BY INSTITUTION IN TÜRKİYE. ONLY DISSERTATIONS LISTED IN THE YÖK DATABASE ARE INCLUDED; EARLIER DISSERTATIONS (OFTEN FROM FIRST-GENERATION ARCHAEOLOGISTS) ARE NOT REPRESENTED.

University	Total number of archaeology PhDs registered in the YÖK database	Total number of PhDs with a tenure/faculty position in Türkiye	Tenured/faculty (other than the PhD institution)	Tenured/faculty (same institution as their PhD)
Adnan Menderes University	23	13	5	8
Akdeniz University	46	36	22	14
Anadolu University	11	4	2	2
Ankara University	98	77	59	18
Atatürk University	65	51	35	16
Batman University	3	1	0	1
Dokuz Eylül University	42	25	16	9
Ege University	123	95	65	30
Gazi = HBVU	25	20	18	2
Hacettepe University	33	25	19	6
İstanbul University	89	63	44	19
İTÜ	2	0	0	0
Kafkas University	1	1	0	1
Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University	1	0	0	0
Koç University	12	3	3	0
Kocaeli University	1	0	0	0
Mersin University	13	10	6	4
METU	20	11	7	4
MSGSU	8	4	4	0
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University	7	5	1	4
Ondokuz Mayıs University	1	0	0	0
Onsekiz Mart University	10	8	3	5
Pamukkale University	26	18	7	11
Selçuk University	55	39	26	13
Süleyman Demirel University	4	2	0	2
Trakya Üniversitesi	1	1	1	0
Uludağ University	10	5	1	4
Yüzüncü Yıl University	15	13	6	7

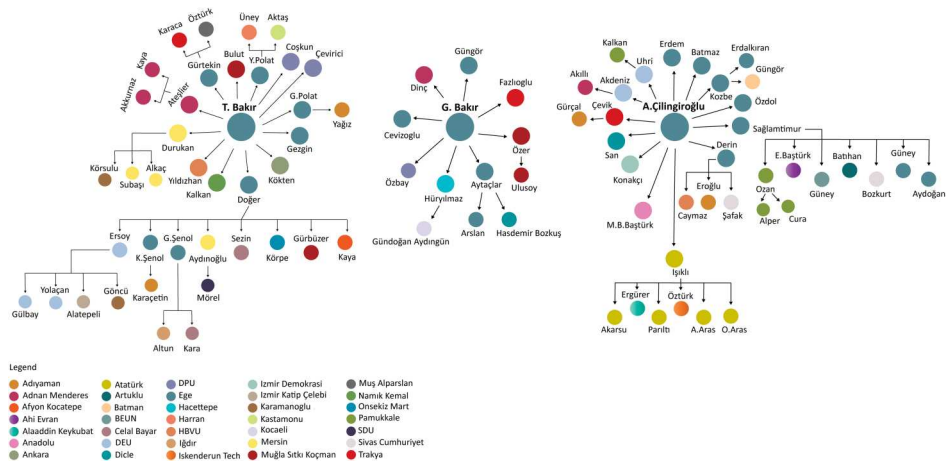


FIGURE 2 Academic genealogies of three archaeologists, showing intergenerational academic lineages across departments. Based on the Supplementary material, visualized in Adobe Illustrator.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF PHD GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT AND INBREEDING RATES BETWEEN 2000–11 AND 2012–24.

Years	Total number of PhDs	Employed	Unemployed	Employed in the same institution as their PhD
2000–11	167	150	17	54
2012–24	483	309	174	92

work in any capacity with cultural heritage in the country. It is not, therefore, something to be discovered or explained, as this article does from an outside perspective without engagement. Indeed, the authors early on lament the publication of national statistics in Turkish (Bonini Baraldi, et al., 2013: 729) and the consequent

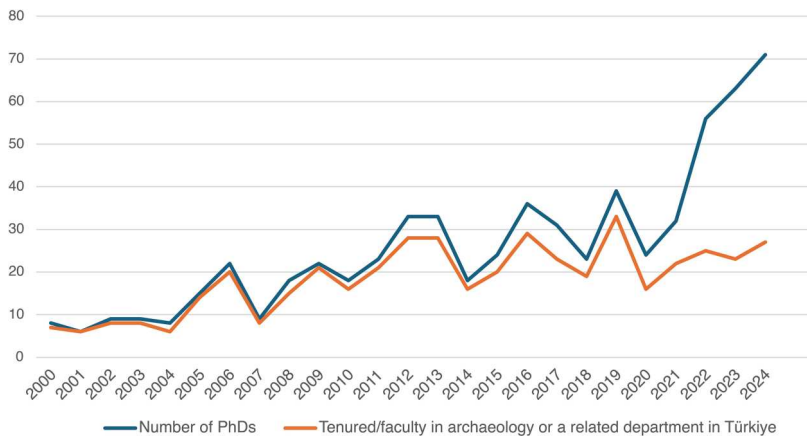


FIGURE 3 Trends in the number of archaeology PhDs versus faculty appointments over time.

lack of accessibility for foreigners. In this case, the perceived insufficiencies in the system are differences of approach, in combination with a significantly different culture, not systemic inadequacies or problems to be solved.

Some years ago, Bernbeck (2012: 95) described the Çatalhöyük excavation as both ‘introverted’ and a ‘gated community’ that has had little influence on its region as ‘a globalized, locally disconnected project’ despite its size and theoretically innovative approach. In revisiting these comments, we wanted to evaluate to what extent they could be justified beyond the feeling of disconnection between excavation and local context. The large number of publications of the project by the project team are a source of data about interaction with the region at large, particularly given that the printed word offers opportunities for remote interaction now that access to texts is widespread and automated translation has, at least in the last few years, removed accessibility barriers. We have analysed the integration of the archaeology of the region into the results of the Çatalhöyük project through a statistical analysis of the bibliographies of fifteen edited volumes published about the site (Figure 4). References to publications about archaeological sites or regions located within Türkiye but excluding Çatalhöyük itself have been recorded, including whether the lead author was Turkish and whether the referenced publication was in Turkish.



FIGURE 4 Çatalhöyük edited book reference statistics showing engagements with sites within Türkiye in referenced publications written by non-Turkish authors and by Turkish authors through time.

Although a somewhat blunt instrument with which to measure any form of engagement, given its lack of nuance or explanatory power, for example that almost all references by Turkish authors in one volume belong to a single chapter written by a Turkish author, the result is useful in addressing Bernbeck's assertions. There is overall little engagement with sites within Türkiye and a preference to reference publications about the region written by foreign scholars (on average 7.5% of all publications vs. 4.6% to Turkish authors). Perhaps most interesting is that this was persistent through the twenty-five years during which these volumes were published, which might be taken as the most telling confirmation of Bernbeck's 'globalized, locally disconnected' theory.

The language, a barrier?

Düring emphasizes the role of some of the larger regional journals 'central to the practitioners of the archaeology of West Asia' (2024: 116). The ongoing deference to publications seen as prestigious is another aspect of scientific colonialism's legacy in which, even though artefacts themselves may no longer be able to move, the products deriving from them are still located (and controlled) outside the research area (see Nicholas & Hollowell, 2016: 60–61). But it is arguably the smaller and more local journals that have shaped the discipline. Journals, both scientific and popular, were knowingly used in the establishment of the discipline of archaeology in Türkiye, as we have already seen above in the popular writing of Remzi Oğuz [Arık]. The Turkish History Congress was likewise consciously founded with a very significant contingent of foreigners, both presenting papers and as attendees, a tradition that was successfully upheld in subsequent decades and declined only in the new millennium (<https://ttk.gov.tr/kongre-sempozyum/>).

A number of archaeology journals still active today have their roots in the early Republican era. *Türk Arkeoloji ve Etnografya Dergisi* (first published in 1933), *Belleten* (first published in 1937), and the Turkish History Congress publication series, which started in 1932, still continue. There are currently more than twenty journals based in Türkiye that identify themselves as publishing work on archaeology, and many more which cover archaeology among other topics. All these journals facilitate publication in Turkish and English, and some also support other European languages. All are fully open access, and three of the journals are listed in the Arts and Humanities Citation Index, indicating their international reach. The annual Excavation Results Meeting (*Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı*, since 1980), Research Results Meeting (*Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı*, since 1983), and Archaeometry Results Meeting (*Arkeometri Sonuçları Toplantısı*, since 1985) organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism are made accessible by open-access publication (<https://ukaas.ktb.gov.tr/>). Although not completely comprehensive in their representation of ongoing field and lab work in the country, as participation is voluntary, they provide a large archive of the annual progress of projects.

Publication accessibility might be divided into several categories: being able to read articles, being able to publish on an equitable basis, including gold open-access routes, and being referenced with the frequency of authors from elsewhere. There is a well-documented inequality in referencing rates between the global north and south (Collyer, 2018), meaning that even those who follow the idealized publishing

path gain less attention than their counterparts, and this is very much felt in Türkiye. A proactive approach within the country has been the provision of journal support via Dergipark (<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/>), a platform run by TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye) designed to facilitate the publication of open access journals complying to a set of standards and

to ensure that academic periodical publishing develops in Türkiye in a quality and standardized manner, to increase the visibility and use of national academic journals worldwide, to ensure widespread and advanced use of a system that enables journals to be managed electronically. (translated from Turkish, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/page/about>)

This free-of-charge service has significantly positively impacted the visibility of journals published in Türkiye, largely by increasing their visibility in search engine results such as Google Scholar, in conjunction with a drive to ensure that more national journals are able to attain indexing credentials.

There remains, however, the question of language and its role in suppressing engagement with publications internationally. Returning to the reference data from the Çatalhöyük volumes discussed above, there is very little engagement with Turkish-language literature about archaeology in Türkiye. On average, 1.1% of the referenced texts are in Turkish, and three volumes reference no Turkish texts. Notably, this situation did not change during the course of the Çatalhöyük project, despite both increasing awareness of decolonization and the promotion of multivocality within the project's theoretical framework (Hodder, 2008). Düring (2024) very effectively highlighted the lack of engagement among the 'big' regional journals of Western Asian archaeology with the archaeologists of the region within their organizational frameworks. Mirroring this approach, Table 3 provides similar information for a sample of eight well-established fully open-access (including archive issues) archaeology journals published in Türkiye. With a single exception, editors, conversely to the international example, are all from Türkiye, while advisory boards show varying intentions in their make-up, with conscious effort on behalf of some journals to internationalize and the older journals understandably more tightly welded to their national identity. The same pattern is borne out in foreign language submissions to the journals. The more conservative publications receive fewer submissions, although overall the figures are high. In a somewhat simplistic summary, the outside world is more cut off from Turkish academic publishing than Turkish academic publishing is from the outside world.

Another set of journals are those of the foreign missions in Türkiye, initially designed for the publication of the results of research projects funded by their respective countries as a showcase for Western research in Western Asia. Both the research institutes in question and their publications have changed their operations in recent years, primarily as a result of the decline in opportunities for foreign archaeological projects in Türkiye through changes in government policy. This has resulted in diversification of research topics into modern politics, history and social issues, with archaeology playing an increasingly minor role as the older projects come to their natural end and new projects are no longer forthcoming. Given the climate of decolonization and the pressure towards integration, there has, in most cases, been minimal impact on journal authorship. The only upward trend

TABLE 3

TURKISH ARCHAEOLOGY JOURNAL STATISTICS, BASED ON EIGHT WELL-ESTABLISHED FULLY OPEN ACCESS (INCLUDING ARCHIVE ISSUES) JOURNALS BASED IN TÜRKİYE.

Journal	Number of editors	Number of foreign editors	Number of advisory board members	Foreign advisory board members (%)	Foreign language articles in last 5 years (%)
Adalya*	3	0	8	25	100
Anatolia	11	0	11	73	21
Arkeoloji Dergisi	4	0	12	8	21
Belleten* (also publishes history)	1	0	20	0	17
Höyük	1	0	8	0	7
Olba*	4	1	11	18	44
Tüba-AR	12	0	81	17	25
Türk Arkeoloji ve Etnografya Dergisi	2	0	17	0	9

*AHCI indexed. Data designed to be comparable with Düring, 2024 Table 2.

in the last ten years in the journals sampled here is in *Anatolia Antiqua* (Figure 5). Over its publishing history, Anatolian Studies has shown a very gradual but significant increase since the beginning of the 1990s, not only in the absolute number of Turkish authors but also in their percentage of the overall authorship of the journal (Figure 6).

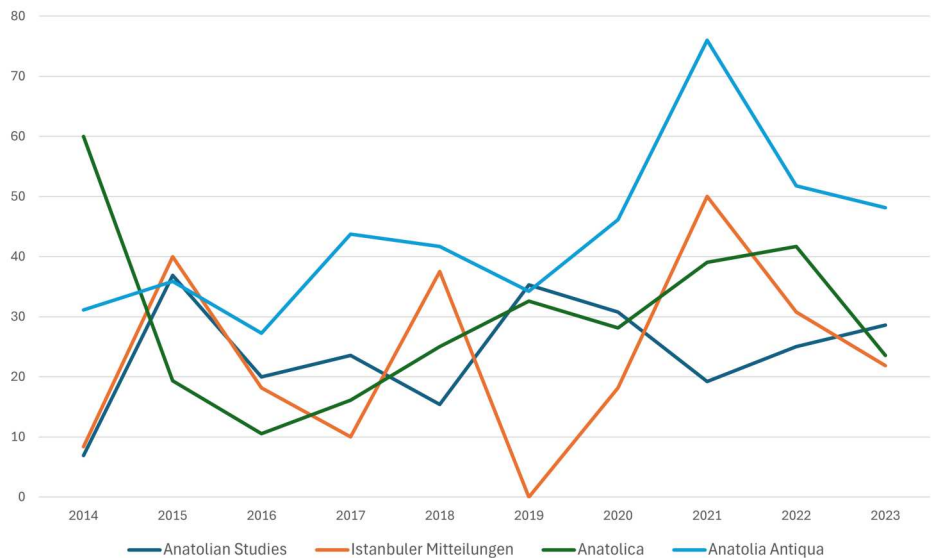


FIGURE 5 Percentage of Turkish authors in four journals produced by foreign missions in Türkiye (British Institute at Ankara, German Archaeological Institute, Netherlands Institute in Turkey, L’Institut Français d’études Anatoliennes) over the last ten years.

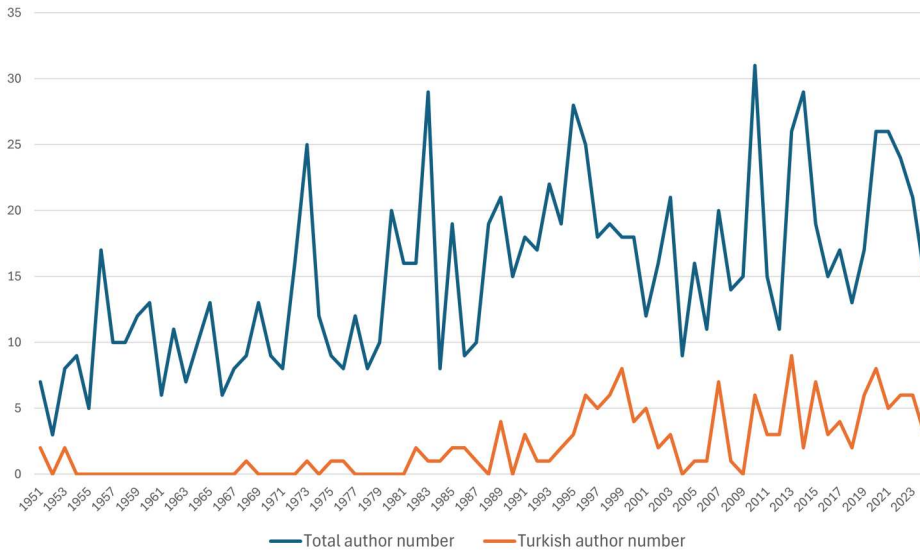


FIGURE 6 Anatolian Studies comparative research article author numbers over time showing a slow increase in Turkish authors through time, aligning to some extent with the decline in British archaeological projects in Türkiye.

Although poor access to journals and the high cost of open-access publishing are often cited as a significant disadvantage for the global south (Düring, 2024: 10; Ellers, et al., 2017), agreements with publishers mean that most academics in Türkiye have not only access to most journals but also access to gold route open access in many international journals. Driving Turkish authors' publishing decisions are the conditions of university employment where incentivization to publish in international journals via the introduction of performance related pay linked to various criteria including choice of publication venue (Akademik Teşvik Ödeneği Yönetmeliği, 2018) as well as significant increases to the promotion requirements in the state university sector, both of which drive authors towards Clarivate's Web of Science listed journals. These changes have had behavioural impact beyond publication. Conference participation has become largely irrelevant, not just because of the financial burden (travel costs, particularly since the pandemic), but because of the lack of internal academic recognition for conference engagement, even if international.

Local engagement and education programmes

In some areas of the decolonization debate, the situation is more complex, and one of them is public engagement. This has long been identified as an issue within a colonialist context, where any public engagement programme brings with it an inevitable inequality, no matter whether those executing the project are of the same nationality as the participants (Apaydin, 2016: 838; Baltalı Tırpan, 2022: 236; Bernbeck & Pollock, 2005: 43). Archaeologists, whether local or foreign, work on fieldwork for a short period each summer, joining an existing community

as outsiders, speaking the same language with a different accent and very different life experience. Even Turkish archaeologists are known by local communities as foreigners, as the gulf between their social worlds and education levels is vast (Atalay, 2010), rendering the colonial umbrella much wider in this context. This can be compounded by differences in political and economic outlook and a fundamentally opposing attitude to the value of archaeological sites, which might be more of a hindrance than a benefit to farmers wanting to plant their crops. Engagement and education programmes might fit an agenda of impact and inclusion imposed by funding bodies, but the history of an archaeological site as imposed by academic convention (see Lane, 2011) may hold little significance for local inhabitants (Baltalı Tırpan, 2022). A truly decolonial archaeology would envisage dialogues with interlocutors in which views could be heard and understood, and archaeology would not take precedence over local knowledge and experience (Cabral, 2014; Lane, 2011).

The irrelevance and unintelligibility of archaeology, and indeed outright hostility to the idea of others profiting from their locality, understandably work at odds with the imposition of archaeological agendas on local groups. In Türkiye, archaeologists have periodically incorporated public engagement activities into their excavation campaigns. To evaluate these efforts, we surveyed the annual Excavation Results Meeting (Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı) reports submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism between 2000 and 2024 (<https://ukaas.ktb.gov.tr>), searching for references to ‘education’, ‘presentation’, ‘local public’, ‘outreach’, ‘workshop’, and ‘cultural heritage’ programmes. Based on this keyword analysis, we identified the number of projects that included public engagement, outreach, or education initiatives (Table 4). Our findings show that, despite a slight increase over time, such initiatives remain very rare (Figure 7). Activities typically consist of presentations to local workers and residents or educational workshops for children living near excavation sites.

Among these projects, Kerkenes ran a structured, long-lasting cultural heritage and public engagement programme. However, evaluations of its community outreach revealed active resistance to the narratives offered by archaeologists, partly due to mistrust of foreigners and partly to the incompatibility of archaeologists’ work with local experiences. Efforts were made within the local community to offer counter-narratives based on their own cultural and historical ties, reimagining the site as part of Turkish-Ottoman heritage (Baltalı Tırpan, 2022: 247–48). At Çatalhöyük, another project with a long-running public engagement programme, local villagers identified the site as an area of local folklore and a picnic and cemetery area (Shankland, 2000), and also saw it as a potential source of income through tourism (Mickel, et al., 2020: 183). An array of engagement activities for children, workers, local women, and the community as a whole were carried out over the course of the twenty-five-year excavation project, but ultimately the impact was limited by differing interests and power struggles at various local, regional, and national levels that did not align either with each other or with the archaeologists’ priorities. The ongoing impact of the project has arguably been in some limited economic benefit to the local community and increased knowledge among

TABLE 4

ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION OF ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECTS IN TÜRKİYE REPORTING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES, AS RECORDED IN THE EXCAVATION RESULTS MEETING (KAZI SONUÇLARI TOPLANTISI) REPORTS SUBMITTED TO THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND TOURISM BETWEEN 2000 AND 2024.

Year of publication	Volume	Number of chapters reporting public engagement activities	Total number of chapters
2000	KST22	2	79
2001	KST23	1	71
2002	KST24	0	99
2003	KST25	1	96
2004	KST26	2	73
2005	KST27	1	79
2006	KST28	3	91
2007	KST29	2	107
2008	KST30	2	121
2009	KST31	3	107
2010	KST32	7	126
2011	KST33	5	117
2012	KST34	8	97
2013	KST35	2	105
2014	KST36	5	112
2015	KST37	3	109
2016	KST38	6	107
2017	KST39	6	113
2018	KST40	8	130
2019	KST41	5	146
2019–2020	–	5	133
2022	KST42	7	136
2023	KST43	9	126
2024	KST44	11	160

individuals, circumscribed entirely by their own direct engagement with the site. Reflecting on the academic isolation of the project, it is perhaps also isolated locally, just as at Kerkenes, by the fundamentally incompatible interests of the various communities involved and the lack of deeply community-oriented consultation (Apaydin, 2016: 840).

Structural issues such as the lack of archaeology within the national curriculum (2018 Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı Sosyal Bilgiler Dersi Öğretim Programı; Apaydin, 2016: 828, 832; Güler-Bıyıklı & Aslan, 2013) compound the problem. Gürsu and colleagues (2019) found that the least common source of information for the public to form an opinion about archaeology was school (Gürsu, et al., 2019: 19).

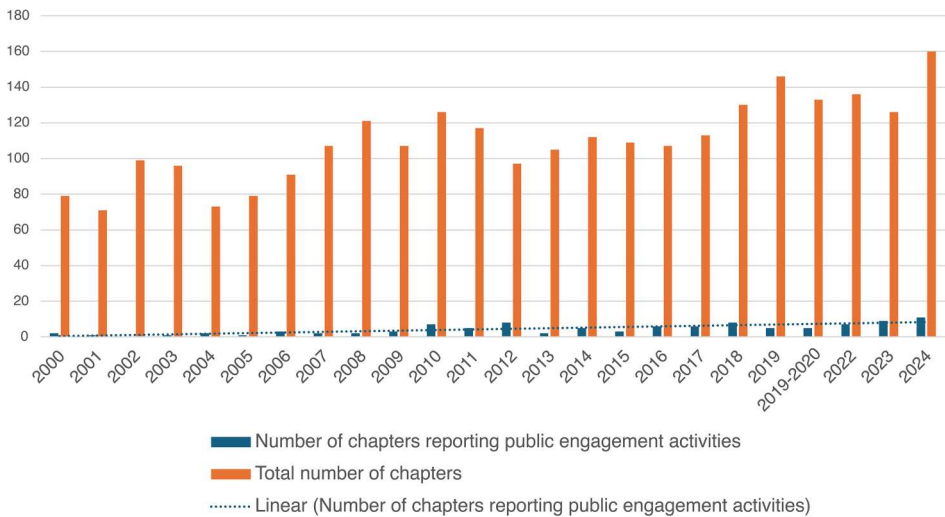


FIGURE 7 Projects with public engagement activities in Türkiye compared to the total number of excavation projects, as reflected in the annual Excavation Results Meeting (Kazı Sonuçları Toplantısı) reports submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism between 2000 and 2024. Projects were identified through a keyword search using the terms education, presentation, inform, local public, outreach, workshop, and cultural heritage.

Discussion and conclusion

Nicholas and Hollowell (2016: 61) identify an asymmetrical production of knowledge in post-colonial archaeology. In the case of Türkiye, there are effectively two different archaeologies, which largely lack any dialogue. The external is the direct descendant of the colonial tradition, and the internal is an archaeology of decolonization that is grappling, to a greater or lesser extent, with its nationalist foundations. The internal archaeology of Türkiye is largely invisible from the outside. The archaeology practised in the country by local archaeologists today is not ‘immature’ (Trigger, 1984: 368) but is a practice borne of its own context and historical background that has resulted in a different kind of knowledge production, the legacy of a more flexible way of understanding the past, ‘more putative than empirical’, founded initially on a less rigorous scientific method (Özdoğan, 1998: 113–14). Only to a limited extent have less extractive relationships been considered, but it is often still difficult to distinguish those who act with sincerity and those who act for personal/professional gain, perhaps yet another symptom of a post-colonial present in which nationalist decolonization efforts have continued to reproduce colonial relationships (for discussion, Lemos, 2023). Meanwhile, as we have described in our examples, archaeological practice in Türkiye faces its own set of complex challenges, many of which stem from outside expectations being superimposed on an archaeology that has a fundamentally different trajectory of development.

Returning to one of Düring’s (2024) central questions, whether the archaeology of West Asia has a future, our findings suggest this concern is even more pressing for those who live and work in Türkiye. Closed academic networks continue to dominate, with employment, fieldwork opportunities and access to research materials

largely mediated through personal and professional ties. These exclusive channels concentrate power among a group of insiders and inhibit wider participation, especially for early-career researchers. While institutional inbreeding remains a visible issue, the more pervasive barrier lies in informal network-based gatekeeping that influences hiring decisions and perpetuates academic hierarchies. Most critically, the last decade has seen a rise in the number of archaeology PhDs, yet a widening gap in academic employment. This imbalance, coupled with the near-total absence of even precarious postdoctoral opportunities, signals a profound structural crisis. Unless these exclusionary dynamics are addressed, the future of archaeology in Türkiye remains at serious risk.

Conversely, the publication picture is more stable with a selection of well-supported local journals adhering to open-access publishing principles and with all the ingredients for accessibility. Disincentivization within Türkiye is the major threat to their ongoing success, as pressure at both the national and university level to publish internationally drives the best research away from local publishing venues. Although this does not apply only to archaeology, in this specific context, it continues to encourage the invisibility of local academic activity and perpetuates the ongoing issue of archaeology seeking validation from the West. Invisibility remains a central problem, despite the ever-increasing availability of written sources and their translations. This must be attributable to a lack of will to engage, exemplified by the entirely disengaged decolonization described by Düring.

Decreasing presence of foreign archaeological fieldwork, as well as the increased attempts at local community engagement, have had little impact on local communities. Engagement projects, whether run by local or international teams, are documented as producing negligible measurable change in attitudes towards archaeological sites, compounded by the almost total lack of archaeology in the school curricula. Overall, research design is not yet centred on either the micro-locally culturally defined approaches of archaeologists in the region or on the needs of local communities implicated in the work (as discussed by Nicholas & Hollowell, 2016: 73). This is compounded by a lack of engagement with successful approaches from other post-colonial contexts around the world where work has been framed around indigenous groups and their pasts (Cabral, 2014; Lane, 2011), a terminology that may be alienating in the current context of discussion.

In making these few points, we have barely scratched the surface of what could be said, topics as diverse as press coverage, the political agendas and funding priorities of research institutes, access to funding, and even the definition of the basic aims of archaeological practice must all take their place within this debate alongside the bigger overlapping questions of the Global North/South divide. We prepared this text in the run-up to our planned attendance at the 14th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East held in Lyon between 2–7 June 2025, overlapping with the beginning of the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha, Kurban Bayramı), the most important of the religion's holidays and also a national holiday in most Western Asian countries. One of the authors of this article had to cancel her attendance at the conference because of a shortage of visa appointments for those wishing to travel to European countries from Türkiye, so her voice was not heard, a still common experience for those working in this region. This experience, though minor in scale, exemplifies the structural barriers that persist and illustrates

the disconnect between the rhetoric of inclusion and its actual practice. The conference might be about the region, but, in many respects, it still takes little account of the region or its people and the inclusion of their voices.

This leads us, through this conference microcosm of the shortcomings of decolonization efforts, to our final thoughts, as we return to our original motivation for writing a response to Düring's (2024) article. Until now, the debate has been *about* Western Asia, but not *of* Western Asia. The inherent assumption is still that the countries of Western Asia should want to be included within the developed/reformed incarnation of the colonial system, itself the crux of the initial problem. In this sense, despite apparent, albeit nationalist, decolonization, a post-colonial world (sensu Lemos, et al., 2025: 295) has not yet been realized in Türkiye, where two versions of the archaeology of the West, that of the early Republic period and that of the present, vie for attention alongside external colonial pressures. Despite the historical baggage and the ongoing Western hegemony in archaeology internationally, the evidence presented here suggests that the conditions are in place for a more truly local version of archaeology, based solidly on self-determination, to develop, if new generations of archaeologists are willing to embrace it.

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Supplementary data

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