A Newly Documented Settlement in the Mountainous Interior of Central Lycia: Kepez

Abstract

This study examines the settlement of Kepez, documented during the 2026 Arneai Archaeological Survey, in relation to its archaeological remains, the regional road network, and its possible connections with neighbouring settlements. Located approximately 6.5 km northeast of Arneai, near the mountainous route leading to Elmalı via the Ördübek Plateau, the settlement extends across a terraced hill at elevations of 1,706–1,731 m. Field observations, measurements, photography, and photogrammetric documentation based on aerial photographs enabled the architectural remains and stone artefacts to be examined within their topographical contexts. North–south wall alignments, east–west terrace arrangements, and worked bedrock surfaces indicate a settlement layout adapted to the terrain. Finely constructed wall remains, bossed blocks, moulded and decorated architectural elements, and altars of different types attest to varied forms of construction and use. However, the fragmentary condition of the remains and uncertainty concerning the original positions of the finds hinder the reliable identification of building plans and functions. Kepez's ancient identity is discussed through inscriptions documenting Arneai's *sympoliteia* relationships and proposed new readings of the Patara Road Monument. Its identification with Koroa and its association with an intermediate settlement on the Podalia–Arneai route whose name is partially preserved are considered two independent and as yet unconfirmed possibilities. The study contributes new evidence to the settlement pattern of the mountainous interior of Central Lycia while highlighting the need for further research to clarify Kepez's chronology, road connections, and political relationships.

Keywords: Central Lycia, Arneai, Kepez, Koroa, *Sympoliteia*, Stadiasmus Patarensis.

1 Introduction

Lycia, which constitutes the western part of present-day Antalya and part of eastern Muğla, has been one of the well-researched and notable regions of Anatolia since the 19th century. In these investigations, which have continued uninterrupted to the present day, the main focus has been on Lycia's magnificent coastal cities, harbour settlements, and monumental centres. Even the studies conducted in mountainous Lycia have concentrated on the cities of monumental scale located in this region, while the settlement pattern of the interior and the political, economic, and spatial relationships among the communities there remain less well understood. Identifying the ancient names of these settlements, defining their territories, and determining their institutional ties to larger cities often require inscriptions to be evaluated alongside archaeological field evidence. Arneai and its surroundings, where we have been continuing our work since 2025, offer a setting in which these questions can be examined.

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Arneai, located within the present-day boundaries of Finike district, on steep terrain commanding its surroundings south of Ernez, is just one of the relatively understudied cities of Central Lycia. (Arlı, 2025). Charles Texier, who visited the region in 1836, associated the remains he observed at Ernez with Arneai, as recorded by Stephanus of Byzantium. (Texier, 1862). A few years after Texier, T. A. B. Spratt and E. Forbes adopted the same identification based on the observations of Löw, who had previously visited the site; however, an epidemic in the region prevented them from examining the settlement firsthand (Spratt & Forbes, 1847). In the same century, Schönborn reached Ernez from the direction of Arykanda via a route that he described as "Yazır Yaylası" and that may be associated with the Ördübek Plateau. The value of this journey lies in its indication that the mountainous areas to the north and northeast of Arneai were important for travel even in the 19th–20th centuries. At the settlement, Schönborn recorded fortification walls constructed, in his own words, from large and, in places, exceptionally large stone blocks, as well as the remains of gates and towers (Ritter, 1859). Following these visits by the early travellers, epigraphic investigations conducted by Austrian researchers in the late nineteenth century expanded the available data on Arneai. The inscriptions recorded in 1892 and 1898 were later published in the Tituli Asiae Minoris corpus (Kallinka, 1944). During his visit in 1906, K. Michel recorded the remains in the city and its surroundings, focusing particularly on the Byzantine period (Rott, 1908). Following these studies, E. Bean produced a further comprehensive assessment based on earlier observations and publications (Bean, 1962). Although the work undertaken as part of Tabula Imperii Byzantini (Hellenkemper & Hild, 2004) and Sencer Şahin's epigraphic and historical-geographical research further developed this literature, systematic investigations of the city remained extremely limited. This situation changed with the initiation of an archaeological surface survey in the city in 2025.

The epigraphic studies carried out provide information not only about the city but also about the settlements located around it, as some of these studies also explicitly document Arneai's sympoliteia relationships (Dinç, 2010, pp. 86-91). Among these, TAM II/3, nos. 765–767 are particularly important, as they indicate that Arneai participated in a shared political organisation with some of the surrounding communities. TAM II/3, no. 766 demonstrates that the citizens of Arneai and the communities sharing citizenship with them could be referred to collectively, while TAM II/3, no. 767 similarly indicates that the people of Arneai and those sharing citizenship with them acted jointly. However, these documents do not clearly specify all the communities involved in this political association, the nature of the legal relationship between its members, or the geographical locations of these settlements. Determining how the epigraphically attested sympoliteia relationship was reflected in the landscape therefore constitutes one of the central research questions in understanding Arneai's territory. Koroa is one of the settlements explicitly named in this context. The honorific inscription TAM II/3, no. 765 records an origin associated with Koroa alongside citizenship of Arneai; in particular, the phrase *Ἀρνεάτης ἀπὸ Κοροῶν* indicates a direct social and political connection between Koroa and Arneai. However, the inscription survives on a block reused in Arneai's southern fortification walls; therefore, its findspot cannot be used to establish Koroa's location. Consequently, Koroa's location has not yet been confirmed, and the settlement has been regarded as a centre of unknown location to be sought in the mountainous parts of Central Lycia, near Arneai.

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The existence of the epigraphic evidence in question was already known during our 2025 fieldwork, and while our work in 2025 concentrated on the interior of the city, in 2026 it focused on the sympoliteia relationships mentioned in this evidence, with the aim of identifying settlements around the city that may have had a direct sympoliteia relationship with it. In line with this aim, an ancient settlement was documented during the 2026 Arneai Archaeological Survey in the hilly area known locally as Kepez, northeast of Arneai, near the route towards Elmalı via the Ördübek Plateau. The site had not previously been recorded in detail. Terraces, masonry displaying different construction techniques, worked bedrock, moulded and decorated architectural elements, altars, and an inscribed altar indicate that this was a more complex settlement than an isolated rural findspot. A fragment was also interpreted as part of a stone table used for measuring capacity (sekoma). The architectural remains in the northwestern sector prompted consideration of a possible production or workshop function, although this interpretation has not yet been confirmed.

This study examines the archaeological character of Kepez, documented during the 2026 Arneai Archaeological Survey, and its place in the historical road network of mountainous Central Lycia. By presenting the newly documented remains, the study reassesses both the mountainous corridor between Podalia and Arneai and the settlement geography around Arneai.

Kepez Settlement: Location, Topography, and Research Methodology

The 2026 Arneai Archaeological Survey documented an ancient settlement at Kepez Mevkisi, approximately 6.5 km northeast of Arneai in a straight line, that had not previously been recorded in detail. A recorded point in a central sector lies at X: 761433, Y: 4042047, at an elevation of 1,731 m. Elevations recorded elsewhere range from 1,706 to 1,731 m, showing that the remains occupy several parts of the hill. Initial observations traced sections of masonry with isodomic characteristics, built from bossed stone blocks, along the settlement's main north–south axis. Kepez extends across a hill measuring 290 × 260 m (Figure 1). Its commanding position bears on the arrangement of the settlement and its relationship with the surrounding mountain passages. Overlooking natural routes northeast of Arneai, the site needs to be assessed within the regional road and transport network. Proximity alone, however, can not establish an association with an ancient route. Such an assessment must also consider natural passes, surface traces of roads, and distances recorded in ancient sources. The road connections are examined separately below.



Figure 1: Photogrammetric view of the Kepez settlement.

The survey recorded the locations and elevations of the remains, measured and photographed architectural remains and stone artefacts, and described selected finds in detail. Photogrammetric documentation from aerial photographs was used to assess the settlement layout. Terrace systems, wall alignments, and traces of structures were examined alongside field observations, while worked bedrock, detached architectural blocks, and stone artefacts were recorded in their topographical contexts. These records allowed possible elationships among apparently isolated surface remains to be considered within the wider layout.

Numerous diagnostic pottery sherds were observed across Kepez and photographed during the survey. They provide evidence for the settlement's occupation history and chronology. As surface finds lack stratigraphic context, the pottery was not directly correlated chronologically with the architectural remains or stone artefacts. The different groups of material were assessed independently, while also being considered as complementary evidence.

The north–south axis, east–west terraces, masonry at different elevations, and distribution of architectural remains and stone artefacts suggest a more complex layout than that of a simple, dispersed rural settlement. Surface evidence does not, however, permit a full reconstruction of the site's boundaries, internal circulation, or the functional relationships among its structures. The following sections examine the architectural remains and stone artefacts by form and topographical context before considering them together to assess the settlement's character and possible ancient identity.

Settlement Layout Architectural Remains and Stone Artefacts

Surface remains at Kepez are sparse, and no coherent structures survive from which building plans can be traced. The visible evidence consists of scattered architectural fragments, worked bedrock and roughly traceable wall remains. The surviving walls indicate a terraced layout adapted to the topography. North– south wall alignments define the settlement's main orientation. East–west terrace walls intersect this axis, particularly in the northern and northeastern sectors (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Detail of the photogrammetric orthophoto showing architectural spaces and wall alignments at Kepez.

These alignments are intermittent in the field, but their arrangement is clearer on the photogrammetric orthophoto. The terraces follow the natural slope, creating successive levelled surfaces at different elevations. Where east–west terrace walls intersect north– south walls, they appear to define separate spaces on the terraces (Figure 3).



Figure 3: View of the north–south walls intersecting the east–west terrace walls at Kepez.

The discontinuous wall sections make the boundaries of these spaces difficult to establish. Their dimensions, plans and total number remain uncertain, and even wall thickness cannot be measured reliably in some areas.

A wall remnant in the central part of the settlement displays finer stonework than the terrace walls (Figure 4). Only a short section survives, consisting of carefully dressed blocks with bossed faces laid in horizontal courses. The wall's total length, thickness, orientation and possible corners or junctions cannot be established, nor can the plan of the structure to which it belonged. Its central location and lack of an apparent connection to a defensive line make a fortification function less likely. The block dimensions and fine workmanship suggest that it may have belonged to a more carefully constructed building than an ordinary terrace wall or a simple domestic structure. A public building is possible, but the surface evidence does not allow its plan, function or architectural character to be defined more closely. Numerous worked architectural elements were found scattered across the surface, detached from their original structures. They include bossed blocks, stones with smoothly dressed surfaces, moulded elements and blocks with traces of joining techniques. Their present locations do not identify their original positions or the buildings to which they belonged. Their workmanship nevertheless indicates that some structures at Kepez employed carefully worked stone alongside buildings of simple rubble masonry.



Figure 4: View of the surviving wall section with bossed stone blocks laid in horizontal courses at Kepez.

Some of the isolated bossed blocks have carefully dressed edges and well-defined bedding faces, suggesting that they belonged to finely executed masonry. No original wall alignments survive around them to establish their building types or architectural phases. They therefore provide indirect evidence for structures with carefully worked masonry at Kepez (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Detail view of scattered bossed stone blocks at Kepez.

A scattered block has a dovetail-shaped clamp socket on its upper surface (Figure 6). The socket indicates that metal clamps were used to join blocks in at least some structures at Kepez. Because the block's original position and building are unknown, it cannot be assigned to a particular building group or type. It does, however, show the use of a joining technique beyond simply stacking stones in dry-stone masonry.



Figure 6: Detail of a dovetail-shaped clamp socket on a stone block at Kepez.

A block found immediately south of the inscribed altar with rosette decoration is interpreted as a frieze element (Figure 7). It has a preserved length of 91 cm and a width of 45 cm, with garland decoration below an undecorated crowning moulding. The element supporting the garland cannot be identified reliably because of the block's condition. The garland scheme and upper profile support the proposed identification as a frieze, but the piece was found in isolation, with no other architectural elements securely attributable to the same structure. Its identification therefore remains uncertain. The scattered architectural elements provide evidence for varied construction at Kepez: bossed blocks, carefully dressed stone, moulded and decorated elements, and clamp sockets document several aspects of its craftsmanship. They do not allow specific building plans to be reconstructed. Since they are detached from their original contexts, they help characterise the architectural remains but cannot establish building types or settlement status.



Figure 7: View of the frieze block with garland decoration at Kepez.

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Worked bedrock was also incorporated into architectural arrangements at Kepez. In places, the rock served as an architectural element delimiting spaces and their use, as well as a base for construction.

A rock-cut feature in the western part of the settlement was recorded at X: 761361, Y: 4042066, Z: 1,719 m. Steps rise immediately to its west. The upper part of the worked rock face resembles a triangular pediment with acroterion-like projections at the corners, and four sockets survive side by side in this section (Figure 8). Field observations suggested that the sockets might have held timber beams, cult figures or other portable objects. The façade-like upper section, sockets and adjacent steps suggest that the feature belonged to a more extensive spatial arrangement designed for a specific use.



Figure 8: Frontal view of the rock-cut feature at Kepez.

A second piece of evidence for the architectural use of bedrock is provided by a rectangular space identified in the northwestern part of the settlement. Its southwestern and northwestern boundaries were formed by flattening the bedrock, while its south-eastern and northeastern sides were completed with rubble masonry walls. This reveals a mixed construction technique combining natural rock surfaces with masonry walls. A cavity affected by natural deterioration was also documented in the southwestern rock wall. Given its position and height above the ground, a possible association with a fulcrum was discussed; however, this interpretation cannot be confirmed on the basis of the available evidence. A possible workshop function was also considered, but no lithus, trough, grinding stone, or similar production equipment that would directly substantiate such a use was identified nearby, weakening this interpretation. By contrast, the presence of numerous brick and roof tile fragments within the space suggests that it may have been roofed during at least one phase of use. The function of the northwestern space should therefore remain an open question for the present; it should be regarded as an important example of the deliberate incorporation of bedrock into architecture (Figure 9).



Figure 9: General view of the rock-cut feature (workshop?) at Kepez.

4 Individual Stone Artefacts

Among the stone artefacts documented at Kepez, altars displaying different forms and decorative features constitute an important group. The first example identified along the settlement's main axis is an altar carved from local stone, with a cylindrical body and a moulded upper rim. It has a preserved height of 111 cm and a width of 67.5 cm, with a dowel hole on its upper surface. A fluted column drum with a preserved height of 37 cm and a width of 43 cm was also documented in the same area, indicating the presence of worked architectural stone elements alongside the altars.

A second altar, identified west of the main axis, differs from the first example in its prismatic body and moulded lower section. Measuring 50 cm in preserved height and 46.5 cm in width, it features rosette motifs arranged opposite one another on its lower moulding and an inscription on its front face. Sculptural fragments thought to represent an animal's paw, possibly that of a lion, were also identified nearby.

Another altar documented at the settlement has a cylindrical body and is distinguished by its upper section terminating in an oval form and its decorated mouldings. It has a preserved height of 86 cm and a width of 41 cm. Stylised vegetal motifs adorn its base, while tongue motifs

appear on its upper moulding. Certain decorative elements have been tentatively interpreted as bucranium or boukephalion motifs; however, this interpretation should be treated with caution owing to surface wear and the stylised character of the decoration.
The presence of several altars with differing typological characteristics within the same settlement area indicates the prominence of stone artefacts associated with ritual practices at Kepez. However, whether these artefacts were found in their original positions and which buildings or activity areas they were associated with have yet to be securely established. The presence of altars alone therefore does not allow the boundaries or character of a particular sacred area to be defined.

5 Discussion of the Ancient Name, Sympoliteia and Location

While numerous remains were documented at the settlement as part of our 2026 fieldwork, the fact that no evidence was recovered that would directly name (localise) the settlement means that its name remains uncertain. Possible identifications must therefore be assessed through comparison with the known settlements of the region, examination of road networks, and consideration of epigraphic evidence. The settlement of Kepez, located on a road extending to Elmalı via the Ördübek Plateau, lies 6.5 km from Arneai (Arlı, 2025) and 11 km from Podalia (Tek, 2020) in a straight line (Figure 10). Indeed, the connection between Arneai and Podalia can be traced through family and citizenship ties documented by epigraphic evidence, as well as through geographical proximity. The fact that some members of the Teimarchos family are referred to as citizens of both Podalia and Arneai points to social ties between the two cities (Şahin, 2006, p. 35). It is thought that the family's roots should be sought in Arneai, and it has been suggested that one of its female members may have settled in Podalia through marriage in the mid-second century AD (Şahin, 2013, p. 40). These relationships should be taken into account when assessing the mountainous route on which Kepez is located and the settlement's possible connections with the surrounding cities.

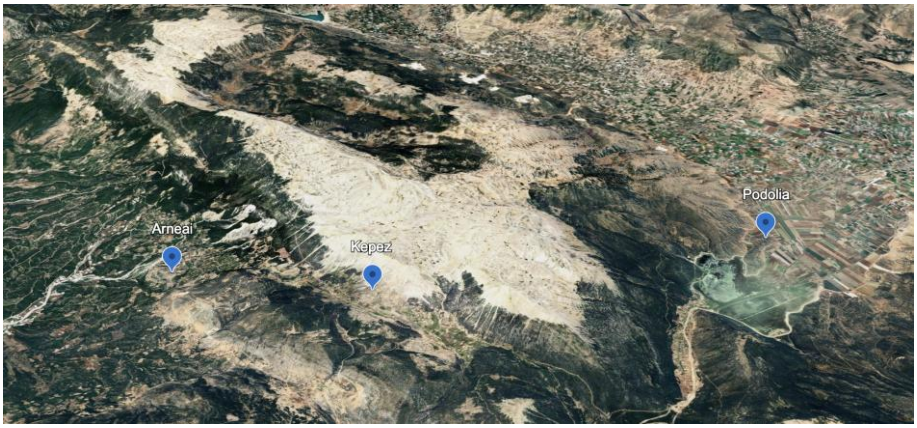


Figure 10,: Google Earth view of Settlements

Given the settlement's location in relation to these two settlements in central–northern Lycia, evidence concerning the settlement should be sought in these cities. In this context, the finds from Arneai are noteworthy in an initial examination of the epigraphic evidence. At this point, the three epigraphic finds identified among the finds from Arneai should be considered. The first of these is the find listed as no. 766 in Tituli Asia Minoris II/3 (TAM II/3) (Kallinka, 1944, p. 283). The inscription on a moulded limestone base found in front of the city's western fortification walls records the joint honouring of Lalla by the Arneaians and the community's

sharing citizenship with them. The opening phrase of the inscription, "*[Ἀ]ρνεατῶν καὶ τῶν συνπολειτευομένων οἱ δῆμοι*", attests a sympoliteia involving Arneai, although the names and locations of the participating communities are not specified (Şahin, 2013, p. 42). TAM II/3, 767 records (Kallinka, 1944, p. 283) that Teimarkhos, son of Dioteimos, commemorated his deceased wife Aso. The phrase *Ἀρνεατῶν ὁ δῆμος καὶ οἱ συνπολειτευόμενοι πάντες* states that the people of Arneai and all those sharing citizenship honoured her with a gold wreath and a bronze statue (Şahin, 2013, p. 43). The wording differs from that of no. 766: there, οἱ δῆμοι refers to the civic communities of the Arneaians and those sharing citizenship with them, whereas no. 767 mentions the people of Arneai together with all the participants in the association. Both inscriptions record joint public actions. Of these three inscriptions, only TAM II/3, 765 (Kallinka, 1944, p. 282) explicitly names another settlement associated with Arneai. The expression *Ἀρνεάτης ἀπὸ Κοροῶν*, meaning "a citizen of Arneai from Koroa", records an origin in Koroa alongside Arneaian citizenship. The epigraphic evidence in question clearly demonstrates the city's sympoliteia relationship (Dinç, 2010, pp. 86-91). Although no direct evidence establishing the location of Koroa, the only other settlement named, is currently available, it has been emphasised that the settlement should be sought in the vicinity of Arneai (Hellenkemper & Hild, 2004). In this context, Koroa may be proposed as a preliminary identification for Kepez, first documented by us during our 2026 fieldwork, although no concrete evidence supports this proposal.

Another group of epigraphic finds in which the name of Arneai appears is the Stadiasmus Patarensis (Şahin, 2014). Of particular interest to our subject here is the road route between Podolia and Arneai. Although the section recording this road route was recovered in a damaged state, Şahin proposed restoring line 41 on face B as *ἀπὸ Ποδαλί[ων εἰς Ἀρνέας στ]άδια ρ* (Şahin, 2014, p. 45). At this point, according to this proposed restoration, Podolia and Arneai are connected by a direct road network. However, recent rereadings propose alternative readings for lines 41- 43 on face B (Onur, 2026). The entry previously understood as a direct connection between Podalia and Arneai now appears to record two successive links: from Podalia to a place whose name is partially preserved as ?ΟΠΟ…, followed by a link to Arneai. This intermediate location must be sought in the mountainous area between the two centres. Kepez's position within this corridor makes it a possible candidate.

The surviving letters restrict possible restorations. The securely read Π in ?ΟΠΟ… rules out a direct restoration as ΚΟΡΟ…. The sequence might alternatively be restored as [Τ]ΟΠΟ…, connected with τόπος, but this proposal remains uncertain without a parallel for such a use of the word in road records formulated with ἀπὸ and εἰς. A restoration such as τόπον Κοροῶν cannot establish a connection with Koroa unless it can be justified both by the available letter space and by the formula of the road entries. Kepez's location provides grounds for investigating it as a candidate for the ?ΟΠΟ… entry between Podalia and Arneai. Its possible identification with Koroa is a separate hypothesis arising from the settlement network and shared citizenship around Arneai. Neither hypothesis is confirmed by the present evidence. Further work should reassess the surviving letters, establish Kepez's chronology, and document its road connections in both directions.

6 Results

The 2026 Arneai Survey documented Kepez as a settlement adapted to the mountainous terrain of Central Lycia. Terrace arrangements, wall alignments and bedrock modifications extend across different elevations. Carefully worked stone, moulded and decorated architectural elements, and several types of altar attest varied building activities and uses. The fragmentary surface remains and scattered architectural elements prevent the reconstruction of precise building plans or the assignment of functions to particular structures.

The altars indicate ritual practices, but their sacred or funerary use remains uncertain, and the inscription has not yet been deciphered. On the new reading of lines 42–43 on face B of the Patara Road Monument, the route included an intermediate settlement between Podalia and Arneai. Kepez's position within this mountainous corridor makes it a candidate for the location whose name is preserved as ?ΟΠΟ…. Confirmation requires evidence for road connections with both centres and occupation during the relevant period. TAM II/3, 765–767 attest shared citizenship around Arneai and Koroa's relationship with the city. They provide a basis for considering Koroa as a possible name for Kepez, subject to new epigraphic evidence. The securely read Π in ?ΟΠΟ… does not support a direct restoration as ΚΟΡΟ…, so this hypothesis must be assessed independently of the Road Monument identification. The evidence does not establish Kepez's membership in the sympoliteia or define the boundaries of Arneai's territorium. Detailed analysis of the surface pottery is needed to establish Kepez's periods of use. Fieldwork should trace the routes towards Podalia and Arneai separately, documenting passes, gradients and possible road remains; distance comparisons should follow documented or topographically justified routes. The shared-citizenship inscriptions also require assessment in their historical contexts before the road network and political organisation can be linked chronologically. These investigations will test Kepez's proposed identifications and clarify its place in the settlement network around Arneai.

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