

HABITAT & SETTLEMENT IN PREHISTORIC, HISTORIC & CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

This strategic research initiative supports research focused on assessing long-term change from prehistory to the present day. Anatolia has one of the best-defined long-term records of settlement during the Holocene period, and its study is central to a range of questions in prehistory, including the changing relationships of humans with the environment, the formation of large-scale settlements and shifts in urban-rural relationships. Developments in the Black Sea coastal region sometimes ran parallel to changes in Turkey, but followed a different course at other periods, creating interesting comparisons, parallels and alternatives. Of particular interest are mankind's attempts to live in as well as adapt to and change conditions set by the environment through time and also the effect of human beings on their natural environment and landscape.

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The Boncuklu project 2020: Boncuklu through four objects

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Obviously, it has been an odd year for the Boncuklu project. Due to COVID-19, for the first time since 2006 we did not go into the field to excavate and study. Consequently, this is not the usual annual update on excavation, study, experimental work and visitor centre development. Given the circumstances, I thought I would take the opportunity to present some of our artefact discoveries, which there typically has not been enough space to consider in previous reports in *Heritage Turkey*. So, this is my personal selection, in which I aim to present Boncuklu through four typical objects and to reflect on some of the implications of these objects for our understanding of this Neolithic community and Neolithic society more generally.

Beads

Boncuklu means 'beady place', so it seems appropriate to start with beads. These are common finds at many Neolithic sites, but Boncuklu certainly deserves the name given the large number we have found, running into the many hundreds. They are made of a range of materials: stone, shell, bone and clay.

One of the most common materials is shell, and *Nassarius gibosulus* is one of the most common species found at Boncuklu, along with dentalium. These are sea shells, and almost certainly came from the eastern Mediterranean. Whilst we cannot rule out occasional trips to the coast to acquire such materials, this seems unlikely to account for the quantities – they are well distributed through all phases of occupation and so were regularly procured – considering the distance and intervening mountains. The most obvious route would have been through the Taurus via

the Göksu valley, although other routes were clearly also possible. If much of this material did come up the Göksu route, then it travelled ca 220km over passes at ca 1,800m to reach Boncuklu. It seems most likely that the bulk of these marine shells, of all types, passed through intermediate communities between the coast and the Konya plain and also across the plain. We do not currently know of communities of the same date as Boncuklu in the Taurus mountains and its passes or at the coast (some of the early Holocene coast is now submerged) but the movement of these shells attests to such communities indirectly. Their lack of visibility could relate to insufficient survey using the most suitable methods, but also the potential mobility of such communities, which perhaps left archaeologically ephemeral settlements. These communities, then, were part of extensive networks linking coast and plain, incorporating contemporary communities such as Pınarbaşı as well. Central Anatolia was certainly not isolated by the Taurus in the period 8500–7500 cal. BC.

These are one of the more common Palaeolithic to Epipalaeolithic shell beads and suggest persistence of Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic traditions at Boncuklu, showing local traditions of interaction over the long term. Marine-shell bead Small Find 4392 illustrates a number of features common with these types. A piercing for stringing or attaching the bead has been created by cutting and/or grinding away the humped dorsal surface of the shell, creating a quite large hole (some examples have more classic smaller piercings). This creates an annular flatter bead, which was probably very easy either to string or to attach to clothing. These beads are naturally light coloured, but as the



Marine-shell bead (Small Find 4392).

photograph above indicates, on this example traces of red ochre can be seen over the whole surface. We see this on other beads too, and so it is clear that some of these *Nassarius* shells and also the dentalia were coloured red. In addition, ochre was sometimes used to fill the hole in the shells, giving further variety. This created ornaments of two colours that could be put together to create a variety of multicoloured patterns, especially when combined with beads of other shell types and other materials.

These beads are found all over the site in caches in external areas, presumably stored for future use, and in midden contexts, where they had been either lost or dumped after being caught up in domestic debris cleaned out of the houses. This shows that their regular use in social contexts was widespread and not uncommon. In particular, we have found large numbers in some burials, where they were components of ornamentations and clothing accompanying the dead. This evidence reveals that the marine-shell beads, including *Nassarius* specifically, were worn on necklaces, belts and bracelets, as lone pendants and also in numbers on the head, likely attached to the hair or as part of headgear. They have also been found on various parts of the body, where they seem likely to have been sown onto clothing. Whilst these are components of the clothing of the dead, and so not necessarily indicative of the clothing of the living, their frequency in the occupation deposits suggests they were worn by the living too.

A striking feature of these sets of marine-shell and indeed other ornaments is the great variety of arrangements that we have found. There is little evidence of very standardised or repeated sets of ornamentation; thus individuals would have stood out in terms of the body ornamentation they displayed. There seems a real focus here on individual identity at death, and very probably in life, too. Such individual identity seems a stronger reason for this variety than features related to age or gender. It also echoes features of other aspects of the artefact repertoire, especially those with strong symbolic content.

Despite the high number of shell beads, the most frequent category is those made of a range of stones, notably small disc beads of grey, red and white limestone that are common at contemporary sites such as Pınarbaşı. Alongside these

fairly similar small beads (that surely made up the bulk of a number of ornaments) are larger and more striking individual beads, many made of green or red fine-grained stones, such as Small Find 4301. A range of shapes characterises these bigger beads; lozenge-, oval- and barrel-shaped examples are the most frequent. Small Find 4301 is a flattened lozenge-ovoid, ca 2cm long. As with other examples of this type, it has a piercing through its length, and this was more complex to achieve and required more skill than the piercings of the limestone disc beads. Whilst at Pınarbaşı disc beads are frequent finds and these larger beads are much less common, at Boncuklu the latter have a significant presence.

The green stone may have come from the hills to the north or the southern edge of the Konya plain, and such pebbles would have been washed down in the main channel of the Çarşamba river, judging by materials in the riverbed today. It is likely that the plain's inhabitants would have had to go some distance upstream to find suitably large pebbles to abrade and polish down to distinctive shapes. It is plausible that the inhabitants of Boncuklu may well have travelled to the sources of these stones to the north or south, and that such trips might have been combined with hunting expeditions to the hill areas. On such trips, wild cattle, the occasional deer and onager encountered en route may have been hunted and some suitable pebbles picked up. These journeys to the hills could also have been used to bring back terebinth, almonds and hackberries in late summer and early autumn.

Equally, some of the stones or finished beads may have been exchanged within the network of communities that is very apparent from the circulation of marine shell. Given that, compared to Pınarbaşı, these larger beads are common and elaborate at Boncuklu, it may well have been the case that different communities participated to different degrees in different parts of these networks.

The burial evidence suggests that the large beads, whilst sometimes being components of clothing or strung with other beads, may quite often have been worn singly like pendants. This was perhaps another distinctive identity marker of individuals, but it may also have marked out the Boncuklu group from its contemporaries.



Stone bead (Small Find 4301).



Bone anthropomorphic figurine (Small Find 3231).

Figurines

Figurines at Boncuklu are made from low-fired clay (most frequently), bone and stone. They include anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms, also possibly hybrid forms and ambivalent figures.

One distinctive category of apparently anthropomorphic figurines is made from the phalanges of equids, almost certainly onager that were hunted by the community on the steppe, probably to the north of the site. These utilise the natural shape of the bone, which was typically ground, polished and incised to enhance its natural shape in an eye-catching way. Small Find 3231 is ca 7cm long, the typical size of these objects. One end of the bone is the lower part of a seated figure, with stumpy legs and rounded buttocks shown; the surface of the narrower end has been flattened, and suggests a schematic head/face area. The incisions, singly or in multiples (as in this case), across the narrow part of the shaft of the bone seem to represent a human-like waist. These items are carefully if not elaborately worked.

Such artefacts have been found in several areas of the site, and a number have turned up in caches. This suggests that they were produced and possibly utilised together in groups, and, bearing in mind that some animal bones have been found within deliberate ritual depositions, that the figurines were possibly deliberately deposited, too. The caches we have found may well, however, be related to the bone workers, since not all the items seem to be equally finished. More will be reported on this in due course.

An additional point of interest is that highly similar figurines have been found at broadly contemporary Euphrates sites. Thus these figurines attest to long-distance contacts and the spread of symbolic expression and inter-related technologies through the networks within which obsidian and sea shells circulated.

Grooved stones

No account of the Boncuklu artefacts would be complete without considering the grooved stones that are such a common and typical feature of the site.

Small Find 3113 is an elongated rectangular stone object. It is ca 6cm long, with a square cross section and a polished groove along its length on one edge, apparently the upper surface. These objects are typically made of fine-grained and hard igneous stones that are found mainly on the edge of the Konya basin, typically at the edge of the volcanic massive of Karadağ, ca 35km southeast of Boncuklu, or on the hills to the west of Konya, ca 40km from the site. Procurement trips to source such stones directly are highly plausible, although some could have been acquired from the community at Pınarbaşı, at least during the early phases of occupation at Boncuklu. Such hard stone would have required a significant degree of flaking, grinding and polishing to achieve its final form.

Within the groove there are two much thinner lines cut into the polished surface. There is no obvious sign of decoration on this object, and so it seems to be a classic undecorated example of the Boncuklu grooved stones that seem to have performed multiple functions. The main wide, long and deep groove is always heavily polished. The size of the groove and high degree of polish would have made them very suitable as 'shaft straighteners'. Ethnographically, such igneous shaft straighteners were heated and used to straighten reed shafts in particular. Reeds were abundant nearby and used extensively at the site, as demonstrated by large quantities of reed phytoliths. Given the amount of hunting attested at the site, the straightening of reed shafts for projectiles seems highly likely as one function of these artefacts. They could equally have been used for polishing bone points, although sandstone abraders were used for this. The very fine, thin grooves may have been used for working sinews or fine threads. We should see these as portable multifunctional tools that were carried by people as they foraged in the landscape around Boncuklu. They differ considerably in size and shape, and some are decorated. Whilst clearly utilitarian objects, they also seem to be closely tied up in the expression of individual identities.



Grooved stone (Small Find 3113).