

### The first farmers of central Anatolia: the Boncuklu Project

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The two major goals of the Boncuklu project are: (1) to document the appearance of sedentary, cultivating and herding communities in central Anatolia and thereby also develop more broadly-based and convincing explanations for the early appearance of these phenomena in southwest Asia; and (2) to investigate the antecedents of Çatalhöyük, helping to explain its large size and distinctive ritual and symbolic practices. The site of Boncuklu is 9.5km from Çatalhöyük and may be an immediate predecessor.

Work in Area N this year focused on excavating the interior of Building 6. This exemplifies some of the repetitive features of the houses in this Neolithic community and the way the households used domestic space. Building 6 was divided into a sunken northwestern cooking and activity area, Space 7, and an area in the southeast of the building of slightly higher, relatively flat, clean floors, Space 8.

Intriguingly, as with the sequence of six buildings in Area K, the main posts in the building seem to have existed as single entities on the south side of the building for much of its life. We detected a sequence of three postholes in the southern edge of the structure in the middle and late phases of use of the building, with only one corresponding post in the north in the last phase. This is a repetitive feature of these buildings, and suggests distinctive constructional arrangements, the need for more support for the roof or related features in the south and perhaps a special symbolic role for the large posts in this southern area, which were probably made from wood such as oak or juniper from surrounding hills, documented at the site by our charcoal expert Eleni Asouti.

Unusually, and in contrast to other structures, Building 6 had a number of hearths in Space 8, the cleaner area, in the middle phases of the building's life. These started in the southern area of the building, but then shifted to the northern part of the floor. Each of these was irregularly sub-square, filled with fine, ashy material and used in conjunction with just one of the plaster floors, then plastered over. These seem to have existed when the main hearth of the building, in Space 7, was poorly defined and saw only sporadic use. It is intriguing that relatively standard practices of space use, seen in many buildings, were transformed in the middle phases of the use of this structure. Specific events in the household may have affected the way the building was used – perhaps it was not occupied year round during this phase, for example.

On occasion, certain areas of the floors in Space 8 were painted, but the paint did not always survive well. One floor in these middle phases had a discrete area of red paint in the central area of the boundary between Spaces 7 and 8, in the Space 8 area, demonstrating the symbolic significance of the space division for the occupants, as so obviously did the bucrania in Building 4 excavated in 2010. This 'clean' area of Space 8 was

also on occasion covered with mats, in one case placed on the floor plaster when this was still wet, leaving clear impressions of a classic tabby weave mat such as those seen in Building 1.

In the final phase of the building, three distinct floor ridges emphasised the boundary between Spaces 7 and 8. In each phase the boundary was reconstructed with a thick plaster packing layer. Contemporary with these ridges was a well-constructed hearth with raised plaster rim and carefully laid river pebbles which were covered with ash, quite a contrast with the middle phase hearth.

The earliest structure we excavated in Area H this year was Building 12, which seems to have been a typical oval structure. As is usual in many buildings, an ashy hearth area is located in the northwest and burials in the southeast floor area; the burials had caused major slumps in the floor of Building 12. The penultimate floors of Building 12 seem to be made with red pigment mixed in with the flooring material. This was also observed in the building we excavated to the north of Building 12 in Area H last year – an interesting localised feature on the site, perhaps typical of households in this area. A distinctive sub-rectangular raised plaster feature is located on the south-central side of the building. This is directly under the plaster basin that was located in front of the bucrania in Building 4. Thus the plaster basin in Building 4 seems to echo deliberately this earlier feature in Building 12. This is especially intriguing since a minimum of 50cm of midden build-up, with numerous trampled external surfaces and indeed another building, Building 11, separate Building 4 from Building 12. The placing of such features was obviously specifically remembered for deployment in later buildings in the same area, even though continuous building construction is not attested. Previously we have seen how buildings constantly reconstructed in the same location preserve earlier features, here we can see how memories of earlier households' practices are preserved even after a significant lapse of time, all features strongly echoed by symbolic practices at Çatalhöyük.



Building 6, middle phases: ill-defined main hearth (in foreground) and subsidiary hearths in Space 8

We also excavated the earliest phases of Building 4, the building with bucrania we excavated in 2010. This demonstrated a significant divide between the southwest and southeast parts of Building 4 marked by the bucrania. An earlier phase of plaster feature clearly underlay the basin in front of the bucrania. To the east were the earliest plaster floors, and to the west the earliest hearth, with a large animal rib built into its wall, had been largely truncated by a later hearth. Animal bones seem to have been deployed in various ways in 'symbolic' and 'utilitarian' structural elements, indeed suggesting there was no simple distinction between the utilitarian and symbolic. The later hearth saw continual building of the hearth rim, after major rake out episodes, by the continual addition of clay around the hearth over the rake out.

Louise Martin examined and conserved the Building 4 bucrania this season, working out that they had been carefully manipulated to be placed in the wall in order to achieve a specific effect. They were probably wild bulls. The front of their nasal areas had been chopped off, so the skulls could be placed in the cut for the wall, tilted forward with frontlets towards the wall face. The left-hand side of the right skull and the right-hand side of the left skull had both been chopped away, certainly removing horns, so the skulls could be placed directly against each other. This probably means only two of the horns projected out of the wall around a double-headed plaster feature. This would then have had the appearance of a double-headed horned bull, or an especially large single animal, depending on how the wall plaster was modelled. Unfortunately, the upper areas of skull and plaster did not survive due to erosion of the mound slope. This is one of the earliest sets of bucrania constructed into walls yet discovered, as opposed to instances of cattle or caprine skulls simply hanging from walls. It also suggests a deliberate attempt to evoke a mythical animal or an important early manifestation of the symbolism of paired animals seen in the double leopards at Çatalhöyük.

Area Q was a new 5m by 10m trench in the southern area of the site. It revealed important new sorts of spaces on the Neolithic site. Previously we had documented buildings or areas of loosely structured midden, such as in Area M or H. Most of Q consisted of areas of thick build-up of external, relatively thick, sloping clay surfaces into which several small cylindrical pits had been cut. Given the lack of storage features elsewhere on the site in buildings or middens it is tempting to see these as small storage features, perhaps deliberately constructed in these solid clay surfaces, rather than the less consolidated open middens. Cut into this area also was a series of burials. These may have been external burials, but it is equally likely that they cut down from buildings that have now disappeared. These, like most Boncuklu Neolithic burials, were single inhumations, except for Grave 22 which was a more complex burial. An adult burial seems to have been chopped through and a series of perinatal children placed within the probably recut grave. There were at least three such infants, but probably four or five.

Figurines have been rare finds at Boncuklu to date. This year a more numerous but still low-frequency presence of small clay figurines was noted. These include animal figurines and horns, but also anthropomorphic figures that, where recognisable, include schematic female types. None of these figurines were more than 10cm in original maximum dimensions, most probably somewhat smaller. They were discarded in and around domestic contexts.

In addition to this we confirmed the presence of clay vessels on the site. There is no evidence currently for systematic pottery production, but some of these sherds were baked, possibly accidentally or possibly as part of occasional experiments with vessel firing. In previous years we have documented both rare, small, fine bowls and larger hole-mouth shaped vessels that may well have been part of clay storage vessels. This year we had more sherds of the hole-mouths and one related rim sherd that may have been from a rectangular-shaped storage vessel. These larger vessels were coil built and the rim of the rectangular vessel was notably thickened with incisions on the top of the rim. These provide very important indications of what may have been a relatively common use of clay vessels preceding pottery production, burning and other factors leading to their sporadic preservation.

A new artefact category is a series of small and slightly larger stone hooks, presumably items attached to and used for fastening clothing, or, in the case of the smaller, for body ornamentation. Some were certainly of exotic stone material from a distance.

Studies of animal and plant remains confirm the picture we have been building – that much of the area around the site was wetland. Large quantities of reeds, phytoliths and carbonised material, seeds from plants growing in standing water and marshland, many water birds and large quantities of fish bone as well as wetland microfauna and amphibians were present on the site. Louise Martin and Caroline Middleton confirm the dominant large mammals were aurochs and boar, both of which would have been at home in the broader wetland context. There was a focus on exploitation of marshlands then, although people certainly ranged much further in the landscape.

Andy Fairbairn confirms the regular presence of domesticated cereals, so this was a community of marshland forager-farmers. It is interesting that domestic plants appeared at Boncuklu by at least 8300 BC cal., almost as early as any domesticates in southwest Asia. The presence of emmer certainly suggests the adoption of non-local species in central Anatolia and a rapid spread of these species through some indigenous Anatolian forager communities.

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