

The Anatolian archaeobotany (ANAR) research network

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In Farsi, ANAR means ‘pomegranate’ and it is found in a similar form in Turkish (*nar*). In folk traditions, mythologies and religious texts across the region and beyond the pomegranate (‘seeded apple’ is the meaning of its Latin binomial *Punica granatum*) is a symbol of abundance, bountifulness, prosperity and ambition. Given the astonishing richness of Turkey’s cultural heritage and the ever increasing number of excavated archaeological sites sampled for plant remains, it is difficult to imagine a better term for describing the Anatolian archaeobotany research network. Our aim and ambition is for the same to prove true for the potential that this new network holds for the future development of archaeobotanical science in Turkey.

The idea for ANAR originated in a rather modest intention to create a small, informal network of specialists working in Turkey where we could share new results and ideas, and find solutions to unresolved questions and analytical challenges. In recent years there has been an amazing expansion of the categories of plant remains sought by archaeobotanists in order to understand past plant uses and people-plant interactions: the study of macro-remains such as seeds (usually the remains of plant foods and condiments but also of fuel and the preparation of secondary products such as olive oil and wine), wood and charcoal (the remains of wooden artefacts, timber and fuel use) has been increasingly complemented by that of micro-residues invisible to the human eye without the aid of high-power microscopy: phytoliths (plant silica skeletons) that may be preserved in archaeological sediments and pollen grains deposited in lake and marsh sediments that can provide unique information on local and regional vegetation histories and climate change. Integrating these diverse categories of botanical evidence and examining them against other categories of archaeological evidence (human remains, zooarchaeology, stable isotope analysis, material culture and architecture) has thus become an increasingly complex task, requiring high levels of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary communication.

However we also realised very quickly that it was worth trying to develop something ambitious in its scope and aims, yet still informal in its lack of hierarchical structures and user-friendly nature: that is, to create an open network, accessible to all scholars, researchers and students regardless of specialism and academic status. The only condition for membership should be to have an active interest in the study of ancient plant remains from all periods of Turkish archaeology, and in the history and palaeoecology of the Anatolian landscapes. This general principle guides and focuses our work in the ANAR network. In initiating the network we also move beyond it to embrace a set of specific aims that we feel are directly relevant to the present as well as the future of archaeobotanical sciences in Turkey, and their relevance to its cultural life and prosperity and the preservation of its ecological heritage.

First, to communicate within the ANAR network as well as nationally and internationally the latest results of current archaeobotanical research in Turkey, and their scientific and cultural importance. Second, to raise the profile of archaeobotanical sciences in Turkish archaeology and contribute to improvements in fieldwork and laboratory practices, including sampling and analytical techniques. Third, to foster closer links between Turkish and foreign colleagues leading to the development of mutual research collaborations and knowledge exchange networks. These networks should enable and facilitate the training of Turkish and foreign postgraduate researchers in seed archaeobotany, wood and charcoal analysis, phytolith and pollen analysis, and related disciplines, both in Turkey and abroad.

The first workshop of the ANAR network was generously sponsored by the British Institute at Ankara and held at the Institute’s premises on the 20–21 July 2012. Workshop activities included 15 presentations on recent research undertaken on ancient charred plant remains, phytoliths and pollen analysis across Turkey including Epipalaeolithic and aceramic Neolithic sites in central and southwest Anatolia, Neolithic sites such as Aşıklı höyük and Çatalhöyük, the recently excavated site of Körtik Tepe (Epipalaeolithic/aceramic Neolithic) and the Assyrian city of Ziyaret Tepe in southeast Anatolia, the Hittite levels of the multi-period site of Kaman-Kalehöyük in central Anatolia and the Byzantine port of Yenikapı in Istanbul. Presentations were accompanied by thematic discussions involving 30 archaeobotanists, palaeobotanists and other archaeologists from Turkey and abroad. Every effort will be made to produce a bilingual English-Turkish publication of the proceedings of the first workshop. We also agreed that meetings will be held biennially.

The workshop concluded with agreement for the need to offer continuing support to Turkish archaeobotanists, thus increasing public awareness of the enormously diverse ecological heritage of Turkey and its direct relevance to the economic, social and cultural life of the country.



Professor Ünal Akkemik of Istanbul University presenting on the Yenikapı shipwrecks