

HABITAT & SETTLEMENT

Anatolia has one of the best-defined long-term records of settlement during the Holocene and its study is central to a range of questions from changing relationships with the environment, to the formation of large-scale settlements and the changing of 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 people's attempts to live in as well as adapt to and change conditions set by the environment throughout time as well as the effect of human beings on their natural environment and landscape. Research focused on assessing long-term change has recently been supported at the sites marked on the map below, as detailed in the following reports.



The Boncuklu Project: the spread of farming and the antecedents of Çatalhöyük

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Arguments have raged about the mechanisms by which the earliest farming spread around the world. Some researchers suggest colonising farmers transported farming practices along with domestic plants and animals, others that indigenous foragers adopted farming through exchange and communication networks. More recently, researchers have suggested a mixture of these processes. Central Anatolia may well be one of the earliest instances in the spread of farming from the Near East into Europe, and we are investigating this issue at the site of Boncuklu in the Konya plain, about 40km southeast of the modern city of Konya. Part of the problem with many of the debates about the spread of farming is that

there are few sites where we are able to observe directly evidence for the early adoption or development of farming, and a focus on the mechanisms of spread may have distracted from understanding the significance of the adoption of farming for those caught up in the process. At Boncuklu we have previously demonstrated the adoption of farming by indigenous central Anatolian foragers (Baird et al. 2012), so the on-going project provides the opportunity to understand what this uptake of farming meant for such foragers, in terms of their household organisation and practices, engagements with the landscape, ritual and symbolism. This last is especially intriguing given that Boncuklu is located just 9.5km north of the famous World Heritage site of Çatalhöyük and appears to be a direct predecessor of Çatalhöyük.

In the flowing sections, we review the principal discoveries of 2012 in relation to key issues of investigation at the site of Boncuklu.

Settlement organisation

In the central and southern parts of the site we excavated two trenches, Areas M and P, to see whether possible domestic residences were to be found all over the site and how densely packed households might have been. In addition, we wanted to understand whether different areas of the site were used in different ways and whether there were non-residential structures.

In Area P we confirmed that there were structures on the southern edge of the site by revealing two buildings, one at least with features of domestic residential structures. Building 13 was a small oval structure, one of the smallest detected, but it nevertheless showed features typical of other buildings we interpret as domestic dwellings, with relatively high-quality plaster floor surfaces in the southeastern area of the building and ashy areas relating to food preparation in the northwestern 'kitchen' area. To the north of this and slightly later was a building constructed on several occasions. The latest phase of this has a gently curving or straight southern wall. Further work may reveal a building of different shape and size to the classic oval residential structures that typify Boncuklu.

In Area M we excavated elements of structures and buildings which probably had lightly constructed superstructures, and floors and features that suggest they were distinct from the more standardised, probable residential structures in the north and south sides of the site. For significant periods of time, open spaces characterised this central area of the site, spaces in which midden deposits accumulated. Thus a picture is emerging of a site with quite modest densities of dwellings and thus probably quite a small community overall: c. 100–200 inhabitants. The residential structures were probably grouped together in small clusters around the peripheries of the settlement, with more central areas of the site given over to distinct activities carried out both in the open, where midden deposits were dumped, and also in distinctive sorts of structures whose use contrasted with the structures to the north and south.

Use of space within structures

We excavated 11 structures in whole or part during the 2012 season. The accumulating evidence bears out earlier observations that shared expectations and practices shaped the use of much residential architecture. There were also interesting new elements to this and some idiosyncratic practices reflecting household developments during the occupation of particular structures.

Previously we have noted standardised arrangements in what are presumably residential structures – sunken northwestern or western 'kitchen' areas have a hearth and evidence for food preparation. Such a pattern is apparent in most structures, but with some interesting variations. Thus in Building 14, excavated this year in Area H, in the northern part of the site, there was a small hearth in the western part of the building from its earliest phase, set in floors sloping to the west, equivalent to other sunken kitchen areas in other buildings. However, this was joined by a much bigger hearth a little later in the life of the

structure and a more marked northwestern sunken area was cut out of underlying deposit to the northwest of the hearth. Both hearths appear to have continued in use during the life of the building. The scale of cooking activity appears thus to have increased through time in the house, perhaps as the household was augmented as adults joined it, hinted at also by the burial repertoire (see below). Interestingly this building, 14, was replaced by Building 12, which also ended up with two hearths in its western area, at least at the end of its life.

We continued excavation of Building 6, our best preserved building. This showed significant differences between the northwestern hearth area and the southeastern cleaner floors. Notable were several lines of small post-/stake-holes parallel with the long axis of, and close to, the hearth. These arrangements seem plausibly related to food preparation, perhaps installations for roasting and racks for smoking foods. Some, for example a line of 14 stakeholes a little further away from the hearth than other groups, may represent partitions to separate off activities. Some of these lines of stakes clearly existed for a period of time, probably several years, since the floors were plastered up to them several times.

The Building 12, 14 and 6 evidence indicates that, whilst broad patterns of activity structured the use of space to a significant degree, there were still distinctive household-specific variations to these practices, particularly in those areas related to food preparation within domestic residences.

Next to the entrance of Building 6, a small sub-oval structure was set against the southeast corner of the building. In previous seasons, storage arrangements have been far from clear at Boncuklu, whether within or outside structures. We have assumed some baskets were used within buildings and possibly clay bins externally. The modest size of this structure (Building 15), length c. 1m, and lack of internal fixtures, suggests this may have been a storage structure, a large bin in effect, linked to Building 6. It is interesting that so far this is the only such structure we have observed and that it is connected to a residential building. It seems likely that not all co-resident households may have used such facilities. A further notable feature of this structure was the presence within it of an element of the skull of a large animal, deliberately installed in the wall. This echoes the bucrania of Building 4 and it is intriguing that rituals connected with the residence are also applied to apparently distinct storage entities, further singling this structure out as a highly significant element of this household's arrangements.

Structures in various phases of Area M show notable contrasts with the more standard residential buildings described above. These Area M structures are characterised by silty floors, a dense array of frequently repositioned features, including small hearths, fire pits, plaster basins, pits and reed floor surfacing, and evidence of much burning. Associated with these structures was at least one plastered channel, presumably for channelling liquids, again pointing to distinctive activities in this area. Even though the floors of these structures are distinct

from those of the residential structures found in other areas, it seems likely that these structures were roofed in some fashion for the floors to have survived. In one case, some sort of brick walls or mud roof had burnt and collapsed onto burnt floor material. The burnt material on the floors suggests a wood and reed floor surfacing, perhaps required due to the silty character of the floors. The latest structure in Area M had a flimsy mud-brick boundary wall with bricks set on edge. Thus these seem to be roofed structures with thin brick or organic walls, possibly wood and reed roofs, distinctive floor surfaces, often covered with reeds, and an array of processing activities, perhaps involving both fire and liquids. This raises interesting questions about who used, or possibly even may have resided in, these structures, given their contrast to surrounding, relatively standardised and more obviously residential buildings.

Mortuary practices

For Building 14, we have now been able to document the people associated with this house in death (study by J. Pearson, Liverpool). Unusually, a burial was located under the northwest sunken area of the structure, but this grave was cut before the first floor and quite likely predates the building. The first burial unequivocally associated with the building was cut from the very first floor of the building and was of an adult female and neonate buried simultaneously. This burial was followed several floors later by that of a small child. This was in turn followed by the burial of a c. 10-year-old child, followed towards the end of the life of the building by an adult male and female. One small burial related to the building remains unexcavated. The mortuary history of the house consisted of the burial of one adult male, two adult females, two very young children and one older child, with probably another child burial as yet unexcavated. The building continued to be occupied after the death of the adult male and female. If these people lived in Building 14 during its life, already a substantial assumption, this hints at a household composition of one to two adult males and females and some children, perhaps with some people marrying in on the deaths of other adults and/or as some children in the house reached the age for forming partnerships.

Interestingly, the burials of this single household showed much variability in body orientation and head position, and there was little in the way of significant grave goods deployed by this household. In contrast, as further evidence this year revealed, there may be inter-household variability in some aspects of mortuary practice. We excavated the upper part of Grave 16 cut down from Building 4 in previous seasons, but this year we were surprised to discover that there was an earlier burial in the grave. The participants apparently arranged the second burial with reference to the first. The lower burial was an older male. He showed interesting pathologies on head and sternum related to injury and/or disease. The male was buried with red ochre next to his skull, a bone point on his chest, a large obsidian core and blades near his legs. He had been placed on his back, legs akimbo and

then covered with soil. The second burial, an adult female, was laid face down, over the soil covering the man's body, with her head next to and facing his. She was buried with an obsidian scraper and pig scapula. These bodies were carefully arranged with respect to each other, presumably in a fashion symbolic of their relationship. Additionally, it is intriguing that they were both accompanied by grave goods, including some of the largest obsidian tools and raw material we have found. It seems, therefore, that there was some variability of mortuary practice relating to households, with grave goods more appropriate in some houses than others.

Plants and animals

Studies have continued on the question of the appearance of farming in central Anatolia and the nature and consequences of its adoption by indigenous foragers, as previously established at Boncuklu. Domestic cereals and legumes, studied by A. Fairbairn, remain a regular albeit not abundant feature of the Neolithic deposits. This evidence, along with isotope work by J. Pearson, suggests that the initial adoption of agriculture may not necessarily have radically transformed people's diets. Rather, the restricted distribution of storage facilities, and ritual and symbolic practices connected with them, may suggest other importance for agricultural adoption. Ongoing studies also suggest the assembly of a classic Anatolian early crop package can be fruitfully explored at Boncuklu.

Studies of animal bones by L. Martin (UCL) and C. Middleton (Liverpool) and isotopes by J. Pearson continue to indicate the importance of two principal hunted species, as major contributors to the diet: aurochs and boar. This season the presence of other animals has been documented, notably bear, whose bones and possibly pelts seem to have been subject to distinctive treatments. This is especially interesting given the importance of the bear in the symbolism of later Çatalhöyük, where it is represented by the famous splayed figures on walls and in other figurative art at the site. Fish remains are also frequent at Boncuklu and may have had some importance in human diets. Their symbolic role too may be indicated by a possible fish depiction on one of the decorated stones that so typify the site.

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Bibliography

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