

Broad horizons? The exchange of ideas from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age

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Turkey is a notable crossroads; it is the dividing line between the East and West, between the continents of Europe and Asia. In archaeological terms, Turkey is known as a place of many 'firsts'. It is home to the beginnings of agriculture and the domestication of animals, and host of the technological revolution which resulted from the use of metals for the first time. Thus, a project which combines questions of movement and innovation, and looks at their long-term dynamics, is well suited to a country of such archaeological vibrancy. In dealing with Turkish prehistory, my project ('The dynamics of marginality: the exchange of ideas from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age') probes archaeological data to ask what we can understand about how and why material-culture change occurred. Acknowledging and accepting the complexity of Turkey's early communities, among them some of the first settlements ever known, and also finding ways to bring to life the silent artefacts are crucial to the process of understanding such processes of transformation. Change has often been assumed to be inevitable. The spread of agriculture and the use of metal, for example, have been seen to be of such economic and social advantage that they were highly desirable to all. I have set out to question how and why new things, practices and technologies were adopted, adapted or rejected.

As one of the areas of the world with the greatest history of archaeological research, Anatolia has been both a pioneering area of enquiry and a partial victim of its own successes. The heavy focus on both the classification of artefacts with a culture-historical perspective (Harris 1994) and the tracing of new inventions (Mellaart 1962; Yener 2000), of which there is a particularly high incidence in Anatolia, has affected the way that evidence is treated. In breaking down the boundaries of previous research paradigms, I hope to promote a rethinking of the way in which archaeologists of Anatolian prehistory approach some aspects of data interpretation.

This work was inspired by my own specialist area of research – the study of prehistoric personal ornamentation – which has already begun to disclose some stories of complex inter- and intra-regional relationships and strength of local tradition. It has also shown that communities were not as open to change as has often been assumed. The depth of material tradition seen in the central Anatolian Neolithic is surprising; there are material procurement patterns that had already existed for more than 4,000 years by the time the first settlements were founded in the Konya plain during the

ninth millennium BC (Baysal 2013a; 2013b). When looked at in this perspective, taking account of deeply conservative traditions probably related to value systems not identifiable from the archaeological record, change processes can be seen as only one aspect of relatively stable social and technological organisation.

Identifying interactions between individuals and groups in prehistory relies on a detailed understanding of the materials, technologies and styles that were used. Technology and style have long been relied upon as defining characteristics of culture areas. In some cases it is simple to identify a material that has limited availability. Often a single artefact type, such as ceramics, has become predominant in identifying affinities and changes. Obsidian (volcanic glass), used in the manufacture of chipped-stone tools, is an example of such a material on which Turkish archaeology has relied since its inception. This single-material approach to material-cultural affiliations does not account for the interactions of individual settlements where products and influences were likely to originate from a number of directions. Taking account of the complete range of a settlement's likely contacts, whether in terms of physical movements of materials and products or the influences indicated by changing technologies, forms, functions and styles, gives a multifaceted picture of the constitution of social identity. It has become clear that a number of materials and products not traditionally considered in material-cultural affinities might give clues to the procurement and use practices of inhabitants of some areas. Advances in our ability to identify scientifically exact sources of materials and products have significantly changed the range of materials that can offer information to the archaeologist.

This general improvement in the understanding of material culture, in conjunction with a theoretical framework that is well suited to the nature of the data, taking account of its limitations and factors beyond the physical appearance of artefacts, allows for an improved understanding of transforma-



A Chalcolithic stone bracelet, broken during production, from Kanlıtaş Höyük, Eskişehir (courtesy of Ali Türkcan, Anadolu University)

tions. Approaching material culture through an inter-regional perspective accounting for agency, identity and social memory draws on all these factors to look ultimately at the way in which communities viewed themselves in relation to others.

In addition to identifying a suitable theoretical framework for use with the available evidence, my project also uses a variety of case studies, dating between the Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age, to explore the various aspects of interactions and material-culture change. Important in this approach is the attribution of equal weight to stasis and change, understanding that some things remained constant, even when new technologies or products were available. This continuity, when seen in the broader regional perspective, may have slowed or stalled the adoption of new ideas or perhaps changed the pattern of their spread. The examination of such a broad time frame is rarely undertaken in archaeology; however, in order to avoid period-specific biases and to take account of the legacies of preceding events in this context, it is important to be as broad-ranging as possible.

Overall, the juxtaposition of strong social identities, based in the active cultivation of social memory through reiterative material-cultural practices, with intensifying and increasingly complex social interactions through time allows a debate about the vulnerability of early social cohesion. Varying selectivity in the adoption of outside influences, coupled with population movements and manufacture for distant markets, gives a fascinating narrative of inter-regional interactions played out against often very conservative material-cultural traditions.

This research is still in its early stages; the amount of data to be collected and assessed, links to be established and innovations to be identified means that this project is scheduled to take another two years to reach completion in its final book form. In the meantime, I am beginning to publish articles on the subject from various perspectives and to present at conferences, which has, so far, proved very useful in terms of gathering feedback and new ideas.

In addition to work on this book, my specialist research on personal ornamentation also continues. Several articles will be appearing in the coming months on the subject, as well as two articles on the Alahan cemetery survey in collaboration with Hugh Elton. This year I have assessed an assemblage of Chalcolithic white marble bracelets from the site of Kanlıtaş (survey directed by Ali Turkcan, Anadolu University, Eskişehir) and written them up as an example of an incipient craft specialisation. This work has been complemented by an assemblage of beads and bracelets of stone and shell from Uğurlu on Gökçeada (excavation directed by Burçin Erdoğan, Trakya University, Edirne) which is beginning to tell a story of intensive and highly specialised interactions in the Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic spreading across the Aegean, northwestern Anatolia, into the Balkans and around the western Black Sea. A further picture of the western Anatolian Neolithic is beginning to emerge from the

bead assemblage of Barcın Höyük (directed by Fokke Gerritsen and Rana Özbal, Netherlands Institute in Turkey). Having previously concentrated on the archaeology of central Anatolia, the transition to looking at the personal ornamentation traditions of the western and north-western regions is giving an insight into a world of material-cultural interactions that was more closely related to the Aegean region than to southeastern Anatolia. This work is also pioneering in that assemblages of personal ornamentation in Anatolia have received virtually no previous research attention. In the coming year I hope to start work on a variety of assemblages of Bronze Age beads from southeastern Turkey, thereby broadening both my horizons and the horizons of this research field even further.

References

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A large Neolithic disc bead from Barcın Höyük, Bursa (courtesy of Fokke Gerritsen, Netherlands Institute in Turkey)



A tomb block in the cemetery at Alahan (courtesy of Hugh Elton, Trent University)