

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 human relationships with the environment, to the formation of large-scale settlements and the evolution 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, and also the effect of human beings on their natural environment and landscape. Research focused on assessing long-term change from prehistory to the present day is supported within this Strategic Research Initiative.

Boncuklu: the spread of farming and the antecedents of Çatalhöyük

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The Boncuklu project offers the opportunity to understand what the uptake of farming meant for early Holocene foragers, in terms of their household organisation and practices, landscape engagements, ritual and symbolism, as well as to understand the spread of farming from the Fertile Crescent to points to the west, ultimately into Europe. The ritual and symbolic practices at Boncuklu are especially intriguing, given that Boncuklu seems to be a direct predecessor of Çatalhöyük and is located only 9.5km to its north.

Household archaeology

We excavated four buildings this season that seem to represent variants of the standard domestic residence: Buildings 20 and 21 in Area P, Building 24 in Area M and Building 25 in a new Area J.

Building 21 seems to have been a long-lived building with many floors, of which we have excavated so far only the final few. Building 21 well illustrates some of the dynamic features of these households, seeing significant remodelling. The western wall seems to have seen major remodelling for the final floor of the building, with the insertion of a row of bricks on edge against the earlier interior face of the wall, possibly to correct for slumping, and major remodelling of the wall around a post. The northwestern hearth was moved from an earlier position in the central part of the northwestern space, to one immediately against the northwestern wall in the last phase of the life of the building. A temporary final smaller hearth was also cut into the final floor. So at the end of its long life this building had two hearths, perhaps allowing extra

cooking or heating capacity. It is possible that these structural modifications were necessary to extend the life of the house or to accommodate a changing household in terms of size or composition.

There are a number of elements of evidence that suggest the end of the life of a house was a matter of some importance to the household concerned and that ritualised dismantling may have occurred at Boncuklu, as seen later at Çatalhöyük. Perhaps the physical house was symbolically closely associated with the living household and required its own distinctive mortuary rituals. These could include the retrieval of the dead, as evidenced in Building 21. A circular cut was located in the final floor of the building and had not been plastered over. This had the appearance of a burial cut, as seen in other buildings, but there was no articulated body within it, rather a few human remains were found scattered in the upper fill. It may well have been a grave reopened, with most of the body removed. The floors seem to have been chiselled away around the cut as if people were searching for the cut. It was partially open when the building collapsed or was dismantled, as bricks from the fill had fallen into the top of the cut. There was an additional small cut at the base of the pit, into which had been placed a canid jaw, in what appears to have been a deliberate depositional act of symbolic significance. In addition, there were several small postholes around the edge of the walls of the building; in two cases when posts were removed, special deposits of obsidian, a bone tool and a figurine, which we think represents a bear, were placed in these postholes (see photo to right). The occurrence of a bear within such a context is interesting, given the bear reliefs found at later Çatalhöyük. The symbolic significance of particular animals, also important later, is clear here. These 'magical' practices involve interesting symbolic exchanges – figurines, bone tools and obsidian for posts, canid jaw for human body – potentially designed to satisfy various cosmological forces.



Building 21 and its hearths

The pattern of decorating only specific parts of floors with red paint seems well established in Building 21; for example, a burial slump had an area of thick red ochre on the floor and other floors had more extensive patches of paint. In Building 20, areas around post slumps were painted. We also saw the same phenomenon in Building 24 in Area M, where even silty floors in the western, apparently ‘dirty’, area of the house seem to have been coloured red on occasion, by including ochre into the floor makeup; similar phenomena mark some floors in Building 25. The decorative function of these paint areas is unclear; they often seem irregular and limited. It seems likely that these might mark specific moments in the life of the household connected with different parts of the buildings, perhaps appropriate to the people involved in the events thus marked.



Figurine and obsidian in Building 21 posthole

Non-standard buildings

Some buildings do not have the characteristics of the relatively standard structures that are apparently domestic residences. We continued excavation of one of these in Area M this year – Building 23 – which seems to have preceded two similar buildings. Like the domestic residences, these buildings evidence long-term continuity. Building 23 is characterised by silty floors, which do not seem to have had the robusticity or marl plaster content of the domestic residences. These characterised the northern parts of the building, where there seems to have been a raised platform hearth. In the western part of this structure was a series of posts that changed position very regularly, as if the superstructure may have seen frequent modification. There were at least two temporary pit hearths and several small shallow pits that sometimes had phytoliths, probably from reed, lining them. These shallow features seem like settings for objects such as baskets. Some of these floors in the south were covered by dense reed phytoliths representing spreads of reeds on the surfaces. These floors seem crowded with features and the buildings seem much more dynamic, in terms of the moving of fixtures and fittings, and busier, in terms of the number of features in given floors. These seem to be structures where activities involving fire and storage may have been important; they were possibly kitchen structures or task-specific buildings. These conclusions raise interesting questions about who used these buildings and whether they were linked to a specific household or sets of households.

Ritual and other activity in open areas

We continued working in Area M to examine a sequence of external areas. In 2014 we found a series of burials in these areas and this year we strengthened the evidence for an area of regular mortuary practice in the open spaces in this part of the site. We found two adult inhumations in close proximity to those previously excavated. One of these had over 50 marine shell beads around its neck, many coated with red ochre. We also found further evidence of skull detachment, circulation and burial, with the deposition of skulls in pits near these burials; at least one skull displayed evidence of having been painted. We completed excavation of Grave 43 (started last year), confirming that a detached skull had been placed over a large polishing stone and mass of yellow ochre, which in turn had been placed over poorly-preserved human bone, around which were scattered marine shell beads. Further work by Jessica Pearson, on a skull excavated last year, confirmed that the head area was covered with red ochre beads and – a surprise – two red ochre pendants/large beads. It is clear that, in terms of grave goods, these open-air burials could be as richly adorned as examples in houses. Indeed they were possibly more richly adorned, providing further evidence for our considerations about who these individuals might have been.



Marine shell beads around the neck of a burial in Area M

We excavated a 7m × 5m area (Area J) to the north of Area M to see how much buildings may have encroached on this central area. The eastern part of this trench represented a new building – Building 25 – with many characteristics of the standard domestic residences. Thus it seems that buildings did occur in these central open spaces, and it appears probable that there was little demarcation of open space, in that domestic structures seem to be found over the whole site and could encroach on previously open spaces, as suggested by Building 24 in Area M as well. Whilst the use of external areas seems structured, little sign of patterning in the location of structures is suggested by the current evidence.

Geophysical survey

Kelsey Lowe and Aaron Fogel conducted magnetometry and ground-penetrating radar surveys of the site. The initial magnetometry results seem very promising, with probable hearths and pits showing along with anomalies that have a very similar sub-oval shape and orientation to our buildings, with possible hearths in the northwestern areas of the putative buildings. Very excitingly, there is variation in size in these structures, with the possibility of the presence of significantly larger buildings than those excavated to date. We plan to follow up the survey work with ground-truthing next season in order to test the survey findings.

Electronic recording

Our testing of the field recording tablet application developed by the Federated Archaeological Information Management System (FAIMS) continued with a redesigned app. As in 2014, the app allowed structured recording of all our field data, reducing by ca 90% the time required for data input and verification. The system worked well for much of

the season, but, with up to ten tablets simultaneously synching with the server, it is clear that Boncuklu has exceeded the current server capacity. 2016 will see significantly upgraded server and tablet hardware.

Experimental archaeology and outreach activities

Experimental work aimed at helping us understand the buildings and open spaces at Boncuklu continued this year. The buildings had stood up well to the year's rain, strong winds and snow, and needed only limited repair around the base of the exterior walls. Water seemed to have percolated along some of the roof beams where they protruded from the roof eaves and created drips on the floors, replicating some of the 'rosette' features we have observed on the Neolithic house floors. Dripping around the hearth through the smoke-hole, which remained open through the winter, was much less than expected, but also created some putative 'rosette' features.

We created a screen wall around one of the hearths, replastered the floors of the two houses, painted red bands using ochre along the clean/dirty floor division, created a bucranium in one house at the base of one of the walls and created a burial in each of the houses. Readers will be pleased to learn that these burials were not of enthusiastic



The experimental area at Boncuklu



Replastering and painting the floor of an experimental house



Rush matting and bucranium in an experimental house

experimental team members but rather two lambs that had died of natural causes, provided by local shepherds. The back-filled cut did not evidence any smell of decay initially, but after several days cracks appeared in the soil of the backfill and the smell of decay was noticeable but not strong. When the cuts were then plastered over as part of the floor replastering there was no smell. We also tried various fire experiments in the houses. Reeds, which do seem to have been a common element of fuel loads, as suspected, created very smoky fires, which made staying in the house unbearable; slow-burning embers, however, were much less problematic. Perhaps the reeds were used to start fires in the house hearths but not used constantly. In the external areas we created light structures and fire pits like those seen in the open spaces, and tried a number of cooking experiments to the considerable satisfaction of those members of the team with a penchant for barbecued animal head and marrow!

The Boncuklu visitor centre continued to welcome a steady stream of visitors. Among the visitors were more than 25 children at the Hayıroğlu village summer school, who were taken on a tour of the site and took part in art activities with the dig team. As the result of a successful AHRC grant application, Jessica Pearson is developing a new interpretation project to extend the existing education materials and displays in the visitor centre, focusing on the people of Boncuklu, including their diet and physical wellbeing. This project will also help to link Boncuklu to the story unfolding at Çatalhöyük.

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New discoveries and our interpretations of Çatalhöyük

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This has been a season of remarkable finds and new insights. The excavations took place between 25 June and 22 August with about 110 researchers and excavators on the site at any one time. Work continued in the South, North and TPC areas, and exceptional finds were made in all. For example, in the TPC area, in the rubble infill of a late building, a stone figurine was found that ranks with the best that have ever been found at the site. As in many examples, the head was removed at some time before deposition, but the body is well formed. The team has suggested for some time that the well-modelled figurines that occur throughout the occupation of the site, but especially in the later levels, tend to focus on bellies, buttocks and breasts of older or mature individuals. While the new figurine emphasises legs and buttocks, it also has a very marked pubic triangle although the central vertical line is less carefully executed than the rest of the figurine. The fact that such figurines tend to occur more commonly in the upper levels of the site fits in with other evidence of social changes that emphasises domestic production rather than rituals associated with wild animals.



Stone figurine found in the TPC area of excavations by the team led by Arek Marciniak (photo by Jason Quinlan)

A remarkable find was made in the North area too. In Building 132 a painted, modelled plaster head with inserted obsidian eyes was found. While a Neolithic statue with obsidian eyes has been found at Şanlıurfa, parallels for the Building 132 head are rare. Building 132 occurs probably in North F level, roughly comparable to James Mellaart's Level VII. The head had been replastered multiple times, and in