

Woodland use and agricultural economies in Anatolia

Ceren Kabukcu | University of Liverpool

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The main aim of my current research project is to provide – through the collection of new data – comparative perspectives on the nature and development of late Neolithic/early Chalcolithic woodland use and agricultural practices in Mediterranean Anatolia. The British Institute at Ankara study grant awarded to support this work has enabled the preliminary analysis of charred plant remains from the late Neolithic/Chalcolithic site of Aktopraklık (Bursa) in the southern Marmara region, excavated by Necmi Karul of Istanbul University, and the Holocene deposits excavated at the Karain and Suluin caves by Harun Taşkıran of Ankara University. During the summer 2017 field season I spent time at both sites selecting archaeobotanical samples for analysis and overseeing the processing of flotation samples.

Both the Marmara region and the southern Mediterranean coast of Anatolia figure prominently in current debates concerning the spread of agriculture across the Mediterranean regions of Anatolia (for example Horejs et al. 2015; Hofmanová et al. 2016). This work aims to characterise crop choice and cultivation practices, and the use and management of wild-plant resources; it will also provide comparative data against which botanical assemblages from Neolithic sites in central Anatolia can be assessed (Fairbairn et al. 2007; Bogaard et al. 2017). Such evaluations will help trace the specific pathways (for example population movement, selective adoption and/or ‘acculturation’) through which agricultural economies spread into the Mediterranean biomes of Anatolia. Studying the nature of wild-plant use (especially wild-fruit and nut collection and woodland management practices) will also enable relevant questions of continuity of occupation and familiarity with the local landscapes to be addressed. Initially, analysis will focus on reconstructing the changing nature and use of oak and almond woodlands through time. Previously published preliminary anthracological analyses of material from Aktopraklık have indicated the presence of deciduous and evergreen oaks (Schroedter, Nelle 2015). Detailed analyses of archaeobotanical remains from late Palaeolithic horizons at Öküzini and Karain have also shown that both almonds and oaks were managed by the inhabitants of these sites (Martinoli 2004). The present project will undertake a detailed wood anatomical study of oak and almond charcoals which will be integrated with the analysis of the charred seed and nutshell remains from Aktopraklık, Karain and Suluin.

My doctoral research (completed in 2015), on anthracological remains from prehistoric habitation sites on the Konya plain of central Anatolia dated between ca 16000 and 6500 cal. BP, sought to reconstruct long-term shifts in woodland ecology and use (Kabukcu 2017a; 2017b). This research provided the first body of empirical evidence

demonstrating Neolithic woodland management practices akin to coppicing. Furthermore, the characterisation of almond wood anatomy demonstrated that wild almond growth conditions improved considerably during the early Holocene, likely resulting from management practices. Building on these results, my current project will transfer the analytical methods applied to central Anatolian assemblages to Mediterranean Anatolian sites, thus providing for the first time the opportunity to obtain a more holistic understanding of people-plant interactions during this important period for the spread of agricultural economies from Anatolia into Europe.

References

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