

HABITAT AND SETTLEMENT

IN PREHISTORIC, HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

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 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 mankind'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 social practices, landscape engagements, ritual and symbolism, as well as to study the spread of farming from the Fertile Crescent and 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.

In 2017 work on site took place in Area P, Area M and a new sector, Area R. In Area P we are investigating a structure, Building 21, with the intention of learning more about the domestic activities undertaken in Boncuklu houses and the deployment of ritual and symbolism within them. In Area M we are investigating open areas between buildings as well as a sequence of buildings that does not appear to be composed of standard domestic houses. We also aim to dig a sounding here, down to natural and through what is likely to be the full sequence of the site. In Area R we are investigating a distinctive anomaly revealed during earlier geophysical survey, carried out in 2015 by Kelsey Lowe and Aaron Fogel; magnetometry suggests there may be a larger than normal building here. In addition to excavation work and sample processing, we continued to experiment with use of the tablet-based recording system for direct data collection on site developed by Field Acquired Information Management Systems (FAIMS). We also continued to develop the experimental archaeology programme and the visitor centre, including hosting a community open day. This report will, however, focus on the household archaeology.

This year we worked on two buildings that seem to be variants of the typical Boncuklu residential structures: Building 21 in Area P and Building 24 in Area M. All buildings showed evidence of ritual practice and symbolic elaboration.

The excavation of Building 21 has allowed us to investigate the use of the kitchen areas of the Boncuklu buildings, which we refer to as 'dirty' areas. These kitchen spaces saw repeated patching of floors with much greater frequency than elsewhere on the main, 'clean' floor areas. For example, this year we excavated eight patches in sequence in just the southwestern part of this kitchen space. Some of these ran up to a narrow linear depression separating the hearth area from the rest of the dirty area, forming an early boundary to the hearth area. This linear u-profile cut was then packed with plaster into which had been set a series of stakes, indicated by 20 stakeholes in a double line. The linear gully and its plaster fill further evidence the use of regular wooden structures around the main hearths of these buildings.

In addition, we were able to explore further the ritual practices observed in these buildings. In the southwestern corner of the building, cut from the earliest floor of the clean area reached to date, was a burial cut, Grave 54. We have exposed an articulated adult burial and an accompanying child burial in this grave. The child was buried on the southern side of the cut, slightly overlying the adult (that is, it had been placed after the adult). We have also discovered parts of a second adult individual directly underlying the first, including at least parts of two legs. Further work will be needed next year to confirm whether more of this third individual remains in the grave. The use of multiple, more or less synchronous, burials is now established as a common feature, both inside houses and externally, at Boncuklu and clearly emphasises how the close personal relationships of the Boncuklu inhabitants were expressed in mortuary practices.



Building 21.

We found further evidence relating to cache pits and ritual deposits in postholes and pits around the edge of the floors of Building 21. This year we found an emptied cache pit, cut by a burial for a perinatal individual. An animal figurine was excavated from a late posthole in 2015 which dates to the end of the use-life of the structure. Conservation of this figurine this year has allowed us to see that this is not a simple zoomorphic form, but has elements of human anatomy as well. This is presumably some sort of ‘mythical’ creature or a symbolic representation of a spirit animal, and thus provides intriguing insight into Neolithic beliefs.

In Area M we are excavating the western edge of a probable residential structure (Building 24) in the western deep sounding. This building had a hearth, remodelled twice, with a line of stakeholes along its western edge, as seen in other buildings. Nevertheless, some of the earliest floors we have reached in these ‘dirty’ areas, or adjacent to them, show extensive areas of red paint. This was notably the case in one feature which had a thick marl plaster plug. The first two to three floors overlying it and the floor preceding it were painted both orange and red. It is exceptional to find red painted areas within a northwestern, ‘dirty’ kitchen area; indeed, this feature may have been at the edge of the dirty floor area. Given the repetitive nature of red painting in this area, it seems that the usual categorisations of space as appropriate for symbolic practices could be modified in a systematic way, in particular circumstances. The excavation of the plaster plug this year revealed the presence of disarticulated human bone within it, extending the range of mortuary practices seen at the site and within its buildings.

In the northern part of Area M we have been excavating structures with particularly silty, coarse, plaster floors that must have been roofed, but seem to have had flimsier walls and non-standard sets of fixtures within them. The earliest such building in this area has been labelled Space (rather than ‘Building’) 22 because only floors, and not walls, were found defining its perimeter; the walls were probably removed in the course of later activity in this area. Excavation of these structures has revealed a notable density of pits and floors

with dense layers of phytoliths (silicified plant cells), showing they were covered with reeds. The northwestern part of Space 22 seems to have had a series of burnt floors, relating to repeated burning events in this part of the structure, cut through by a small pit. In total, we have excavated at least 16 successive surfaces in the eastern part of Space 22 and there were 18 contemporary burnt floors in the northwestern sector.

These features all suggest that large wooden posts, frequent fire installations and small storage pits were regular features of these buildings, which were probably kitchen and/or work buildings. It is interesting to consider whether such buildings served several households or only one.

In the new excavation sector, Area R, several Early Bronze Age and Byzantine or later pits were noted. The latest Neolithic archaeology consists of a series of midden deposits with dense concentrations of large animal bones filling a depression in a mass of structural debris overlying plaster floors. These confirm the presence of a building or buildings in this area, as indicated by the previous magnetometry survey. At the moment, it is unclear whether the evidence represents one large building or a series of superimposed smaller buildings, slightly overlapping each other in a sequence, as seen elsewhere on the site. If it represents a larger building, this could be a grander version of our standard domestic habitation structures or, alternatively, it might be some form of public or communal building, as seen at other early Neolithic sites. We will continue to investigate these possibilities – which have exciting implications for our understanding of Neolithic society – in future seasons.

As noted above, 2017 also saw continued development of the public engagement and heritage programme at Boncuklu. Throughout the season a steady stream of visitors came to the site, including local community members and both Turkish and foreign tourists, many of whom were combining a visit to Boncuklu with one to Çatalhöyük; this, of course, is especially appropriate given the continuities between the two sites and the importance of Boncuklu for understanding the archaeology of Çatalhöyük. Continued development of the experimental area and houses has added further to the visitor experience. We ran a formal open day in September which saw over 50 people from our local village of Hayıroğlu and surrounding areas come to the site and take part in a range of activities. Finally, funding from the University of Liverpool covered the cost of printing a large batch of interpretative children’s booklets in Turkish and English for distribution to visitors and local families.

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