

Pınarbaşı

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Douglas Baird's excavations in 2003 and 2004 established the rock shelters at Pınarbaşı as the only excavated, and one of the very few known Epipalaeolithic sites on the Anatolian plateau. The occupation was dated to 14,000–11,000 cal BC, the late Epipalaeolithic. In addition, excavation on a small mounded open site projecting to the west of the cliff face identified tenth–ninth millennia occupation, which remains the earliest Holocene occupation documented in central Anatolia. These occupations are key to understanding the subsequent appearance of sedentism and agriculture in the area and are interesting in terms of relationships to Epipalaeolithic and earliest Neolithic of the 'fertile crescent'. Only a small area of Epipalaeolithic was excavated in 2004, but burials and a long occupation sequence were discovered. Given the small area sampled, questions remained about mobility/residential practices, the presence of structures and facilities on-site, the nature and degree of plant exploitation (it seemed very limited) and the extent of burials at the site. In addition, the latest dated occupation was just before the Younger Dryas, a 1,000-year cold phase just before the amelioration of the Holocene. It was important to know whether or not the high elevations of the Anatolian plateau in the Younger Dryas saw human occupation, not least in terms of understanding population expansion and the appearance of sedentism at the beginning of the subsequent Holocene. Further, we were not clear if we had reached the bottom of the Epipalaeolithic occupation in 2004, although deposits had changed in nature. Therefore, we wanted to investigate the possibility of earlier occupation.

The open site previously revealed wattle and daub structures, burials and middens, but more extensive excavation is required to understand the organisation of the settlement, degrees of sedentary behaviours and intensity of ritual and symbolic practice, especially compared to contemporary Boncuklu. In addition, the earliest phases were only exposed over small areas, and we need to learn more about these tenth-millennium occupations. The open mound has been subject to ongoing looting and therefore also requires rescue work. Overlying the tenth–ninth millennia occupation was a settlement of the Late Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age, and renewed work offered the chance to understand this better. The latest activity on the site is a later medieval to early modern (Seljuk to Ottoman-period) cemetery, which we are also exploring.

The major project aims are:

- 1) to investigate mobility and seasonality of exploitation of the Konya plain by Epipalaeolithic groups
- 2) to document the earliest occupation of the Pınarbaşı rock shelter
- 3) to understand the role of Pınarbaşı in the symbolic worlds of Epipalaeolithic and early Neolithic communities
- 4) to understand transitions to sedentism in the tenth–ninth millennia cal BC
- 5) to document changing exchange patterns 16,000–6000 cal BC, and
- 6) to understand the nature of Late Chalcolithic–Early Bronze Age occupation ca 3500–2500 cal BC at the site.

The renewed excavation focused on reopening and slightly expanding Area B to assess the nature of surviving Epipalaeolithic and Late Neolithic remains in the light of damage from the looters' pit. In addition, a new trench was excavated to the northwest of Area A in the open site, designated Area F. The intention was to investigate the sequence of occupation on the open site and especially the nature of the tenth–ninth millennia cal BC occupation.

Epipalaeolithic

The looters' pit left ca 2m by 0.8 m of Epipalaeolithic deposit between its southern edge and the north side of the 2004 sounding through the Epipalaeolithic. We were able to excavate several lenses of accumulated Epipalaeolithic sediment in this strip, to a depth of 0.30m. These were overlapping lenses of silty sediment with high concentrations of rock face shatter and variable quantities of ashy and artefactual material. Lenses varied between 2cm and 10cm in depth. Ashier lenses were often preceded and followed by lenses of lighter and sandier character. Nevertheless, artefacts and ecofacts were found in all contexts. The earliest feature identified within these deposits seemed to represent in situ hearths. Notable in the earliest lenses reached were what appeared to be coprolites, probably human or carnivore.

In 2004, the southern half of Area B was excavated until two burials were revealed, cut into and underlain by a distinctive yellow and sandier sediment than had characterised the overlying Epipalaeolithic deposits. We were able to open this part of Area B and confirm that it had not been damaged by the looters' pit. We were then able to continue to excavate here to ascertain if the distinctive yellower sandy sediment also contained occupation. A number of features were cut into this deposit, of which one, a large oval pit,



Epipalaeolithic burial.

contained the lower part of an adult human burial. The burial was lined with ochre. Given the two previous burials from 2004, the one from 2022 and the burials disturbed by the looters' pit, we can have some confidence in suggesting that there is an extensive Epipalaeolithic cemetery at Pınarbaşı dated to 14,000 cal BC and earlier, much of which remains intact in the south part of Area B and underneath the surviving Late Neolithic in its western parts. Further, we have demonstrated that there remains a sequence of Epipalaeolithic activity extending earlier than that documented in 2004. This is very promising for further excavation. We also reached in situ Epipalaeolithic deposits at the top of this sequence, directly underlying the Late Neolithic. These will allow us to date and document the final Epipalaeolithic, which was not possible in 2004, and so to understand if occupation continued into the cold dry Younger Dryas period at the site and on the Anatolian plateau.

The occupation deposits in situ are unique on the Anatolian plateau, and the existence of a complete cemetery unassociated with habitation structures is unique in the whole of Anatolia. This key site requires further rescue work as looting was ongoing even during our excavation season, albeit on the tenth/ninth-millennium BC mound.

Late Neolithic

Late Neolithic deposits were preserved in the western part of Area B, as excavated in 2004. Included were an oven built of upright slabs and set into the wall of B4, the Late Neolithic building identified during the 1994/5 and 2003/4 excavations, the continuation of B4 wall to the north, a remnant of the earliest deposits sloping into B4 and some deposits preceding B4. We excavated some of the deposits which preceded B4, investigating early fills of the oven or preceding it. Some plastered bones of the type previously documented were recovered from the earlier Late Neolithic deposits predating the oven.

To the north of the B4 oven and probably post-dating B4, we excavated an area that seemed to have seen repeated butchery events. In an area where we excavated an extension



Late medieval graves.

of Area B to the south, we documented two large hearths, likely of Late Neolithic date, and a small fragment of probably Byzantine wall.

Area F

We opened this new area to the west of the rock shelter area and close to Area A. Early Neolithic structures and burials were well preserved in Area A in 2003–2004 and we hoped to find a continuation of such structures and features. This season, we focused on dealing with overlying activity from the Late Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age (ca 3500–2500 cal BC) and the later medieval period (Seljuk to early Ottoman).

The Late Chalcolithic to Early Bronze Age on the Konya plain saw a proliferation of settlements including some large urban centres. This phenomenon in central Anatolia is barely understood, and our excavations will contribute insights. This season, we excavated part of a large building with a minimum of two rooms, with multiple plaster floors. This was cut into by a large storage pit and a smaller pit. Further excavation of these structures promises to cast light on the nature of settlement in this period of transition to urban communities.

In turn, these late fourth–early third-millennium structures were cut into by a series of graves dated to the Seljuk and early Ottoman periods. When coupled with data from 2003 and 2004, this is evidence of an extensive cemetery of this period. The three burials were distinctive in that the main burial chamber was cut into the side of the graves and covered with sloping slabs. The bodies were extended, with a raised left shoulder, and faced southeast towards Mecca. This suggests they were Muslim burials, probably belonging to some of the earliest Muslim inhabitants of the Karaman-Konya area. Intriguingly, no settlement of this period can be detected at the site.

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