

## ANNUAL REPORT: TURKEY-BONCUKLU 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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*Boncuklu Building 21*

### **Project aims**

There has been much controversy about the mechanisms by which the earliest farming spread around the world. There are few sites where we are able to observe direct evidence for earliest adoption or development of farming. In addition a focus on how the spread of farming occurred has distracted from understanding how the adoption of farming affected those caught up in the process and changed the relationships between people, plants, animals and landscapes. At Boncuklu we have demonstrated adoption of farming by indigenous central Anatolian foragers (Baird *et al* 2012) so the project gives us a chance to understand what this uptake of farming meant for such foragers, in terms of their household organisation and practices, engagements with the landscapes, ritual and symbolism, as well as understanding the spread of farming 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 located only 9.5 kms to its north and we can thus investigate the factors involved in the appearance of large population aggregations that typify the Neolithic of SW Asia.

### **2017 Season**

We excavated in 3 main areas of the site, Area P and Area M and a new Area, R. In Area P we investigated 1 building, which appear to be standard Boncuklu houses, with the intention of learning more about the domestic activities in these houses and the deployment of ritual and symbolism within the structures. In Area M we investigated open areas between buildings as well as one building that does not appear to be a standard domestic house. In M we aim to dig a sounding to natural through what is likely the full sequence of the site to study evidence of changing economy and environment through time. In R we aimed to examine the possible presence of a large building detected by magnetometry.

## **Area M**

In this area we excavated several external hearths including 2 hearths seem to have been constructed at the same time, next to each other, with linings made of lumps of clay mixed with silt. A neat burnt rim separated them, they presumably served for more complex food preparation activity than normal. We have continued to excavate extensive midden deposits in the south-eastern part of M. They relate to the upper part of the midden that is rich in human coprolites excavated in previous season, in effect a Neolithic human toilet area in the south east part of the trench. In one area of this midden was a phytolith covered surface, showing that temporary surfaces existed in this toilet area.

The earliest phases of midden reached in the western part of M had a distinct very fine laminated character, but were nevertheless quite extensive. These must have built up under very particular depositional conditions in perhaps a sheltered or roofed but unwallled open space.

These fine laminated middens in west of M were cut into by a series of adult burials, further attesting to the existence of areas on the settlement outside houses and in middens in which the dead were buried contemporary with the sub-floor house burials. We will continue to investigate these variations in mortuary practice.

In M we also excavated part of a building, B24 with distinctive mortuary practices, with disarticulated human bone mixed with plaster in the fill of a pit in this building.

Later phases in M saw the use of a light structure, apparently used as a work building with a dense set of pits and hearths in its floors.

In summary the work in this trench illustrated the diverse range of activities in central open spaces at Neolithic Boncuklu, and the use of these spaces for specialized buildings, food preparation areas, toilet areas and ritual practices, areas key to understanding inter-household interaction in this community.

## **Area P**

Area P saw the excavation of Building 21. We excavated successive small floor patches and packing areas from the south-western part of the 'dirty' kitchen area in this building. Earlier examples of these ran up to a narrow linear depression separating the hearth area from the rest of the dirty area, forming an earlier boundary to the hearth area. This linear u-profile cut had been packed with plaster into which had been set a series of stakes, indicated by stakeholes. This gully was predated by a series of burnt floor patches to its south.

In the south-west corner of the building, was a burial cut, Grave 54. We have exposed an articulated adult burial and an accompanying child burial in this grave. The adult was oriented with upper body at the eastern end of the cut. The child was buried on the south side of the cut slightly overlying the adult, i.e. had been placed after the adult. The adult and child were both largely articulated. We have also discovered parts of a second adult individual directly underlying the first, including at least parts of 2 legs. Postdating this and close by was a further burial cut containing a perinatal child.

The burials in the 'clean' area of this building confirm the pattern attested at Boncuklu of regular sub-floor burial in house clean areas, contrasting with contemporary external burials in middens. It also attests to the highly ritualised use of space in various parts of the houses and open spaces.

## **Area R**

This area revealed large Byzantine or later pits. These cut midden deposits which overlaid extensive areas of structural debris that may relate to the large building indicated by the geophysics in this area.

Specialist studies of animal bone, archaeobotany, human teeth, figurines, beads, chipped stone, worked bone all continued this year. Conservation work on a large clay figurine indicates it may well be a combined human/animal representation.

### **Experimental Archaeology**

A series of experiments aiming to understand manufacture and plastering of floors, use of hearths and fire places, use of dung as fuel and in plasters, characteristics of different other fuel types and cooking experiments using facilities like those on site were conducted to explore materials and their manipulation, cooking methods and the way the Neolithic buildings might have operated in terms of heat and smoke within the structures.

### **Student Experience**

IFR students were able to participate fully in the site research and all the excavation activity documented above, being trained in fine scale stratigraphic excavation by professional archaeologist supervisors and experienced PhD students. They worked with the environmental sampling activities as well. They participated in the experimental work. . Because of the suite of specialists, post-docs and PhD students present conducting research on the site they were able to benefit from tailored training in zooarchaeology, archaeobotany, lithic studies and human osteoarchaeology and from a series of presentations about the specialist research. Very positive student feedback attests to the quality of the training – with 100% satisfaction. The free form feedback indicates the high quality of the experience.

### **Publications:**

4 papers were published about Boncuklu in 2016, 1 in World Archaeology on special depositions and the symbolism of the buildings, 1 in Current biology (on our ancient DNA results), 1 on the experimental archaeology in Turkish, 1 in Turkish in the Turkish Annual archaeological symposium volume. 3 were published in 2017, 1 in Cambridge Archaeological Journal and 1 in Journal of Archaeological Science, both these deal with different aspects of our early pottery, 1 in the Turkish Annual Symposium volume. 1 has been submitted to PNAS and is undergoing minor revisions after review. 1 will be submitted to antiquity on a decorated stone. Volume 1 of the Boncuklu monograph has made some good progress.

Papers will be presented at the Directorate General Annual symposium of Excavations in Turkey and at METU in Turkey in the course of the next 8 months.