

## ANNUAL REPORT: BONCUKLU PROJECT 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

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*Incised stone plaque of possible dancing figure*

### **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.

### **2014 season**

In the 2014 season we reopened 4 trenches and newly opened 2 trenches on site and opened a new off-site trench. The onsite trenches were designed to further explore the nature of the Boncuklu houses and sequences of houses, along with an investigation of an extensive open air area in the centre of the site and its uses. 2 new trenches allowed us to investigate the extent of the Neolithic settlement on its eastern side. The off-site trench aimed to understand local landscape formation processes and palaeoenvironmental conditions during, and immediately post-dating the site's occupation.

We were thus able to excavate 5 Neolithic buildings, 2 of which were exceptionally well preserved. These last 2 showed a classic arrangement of domestic space with dirty north-western kitchen areas and clean southern well plastered floors. One of these buildings, seemed to be transitional between circular and rectangular floor plans and had an unusually elaborate hearth structure remodelled several times, the other was filled with burnt roof collapse, giving us unusual degree of insight onto roofing of the buildings. The best preserved of these 2 buildings had a wild cattle horn core, probably originally built into the wall collapsed on the floor, an example of the bucrania that seem to have decorated some of these houses. The 2 other buildings each had occasional red painted floors also evidence of the sporadic symbolic elaboration of these structures. The best preserved building and one of the others had burials in the clean south eastern area. In Building 12 the burial was that of a child who had a marine shell bead necklace of over 170 shells.

The open spaces we excavated showed accumulation of midden deposits with occasional hearths, but also a large number of burials in these open spaces. This is the first time we have found significant numbers of burials not under house floors. Grave goods seem to have been more common in these open air burials, with 1 individual with a mass of shell, stone and ochre beads, another with other stone tools. In addition some of these graves were not the usual single inhumations, but also included a mass of disarticulated human bone from several individuals, with one example including a stack of skulls which had clearly been cached, as part of a ritual focus on skulls previously documented at the site in open areas. The extensive pathology on some of the disarticulated remains was very intriguing, attesting to some of the earliest records of distinctive diseases which have dogged humanity over the past 10,000 years. More research is being conducted before we make definitive statements about these diseases.

The trenches on the eastern side of the mound show the presence of later aceramic Neolithic deposits buried under mound colluvium. These seem to include site edge elements such as a plastered trench or ditch. These date to the period immediately preceding the occupation of Çatalhöyük and further

excavation in these areas is likely to give important information about the beginnings of that site and the appearance of animal herding in the area.

16 specialists studied a range of animal and human remains, carbonised plant material and artifacts. This confirms our evidence of the small scale adoption of some of the earliest domestic cereals documented by local forager groups. Exciting developments were analyses of built areas and human coprolites and the documenting of a large assemblage of prehistoric finger prints which will allow us a better idea of whether males, females, children or all ages and sexes were involved in the manufacture of clay objects, figurines and SW Asia's earliest pottery.

### **Outputs:**

The following publications are planned:

1. A PNAS article on the spread of farming is currently being written using some of these results.
2. An article for *Antiquity* on the earliest pottery in the Near East.
3. A general article for the British Institute at Ankara, *Heritage Turkey* publication.
4. Some of this season's data will be incorporated in the *Boncuklu Volume* monograph to be completed December 2015, but most will be incorporated in the second *Volume* to be completed 2018.

Planned presentations in 14/15 include:

2 presentations in Turkey in December 2014, and 1 in May. 1 paper at the SAAs

### **Student experience**

IFR students were able to participate fully in the site research, being trained in fine scale stratigraphic excavation by professional archaeologist supervisors and experienced PhD students. They worked with the environmental sampling activities as well. Because of the suite of specialists and PhD students present conducting research on the site they were able to benefit from tailored training in zooarchaeology and palaeobotany and benefit 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 “fantastic” quality of the experience.