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3. CİLT



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KÜLTÜR ve TURİZM BAKANLIĞI

Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü



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ANKARA-2009

BARCIN HÖYÜK EXCAVATIONS, 2007

Fokke GERRITSEN*

Rana ÖZBAL

Barcın Höyük is a 3 hectare, 4 meter high mound in the Yenişehir Valley south of the İznik Lake in northwestern Anatolia (FIGURE 1). Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Early Bronze Age and Byzantine periods of occupation are represented at the mound. It was discovered by James Mellaart (1955) in the early 1950s and described as being one of the few Neolithic settlements in the area by David French (1967) in the 1960s. Since then the mound has witnessed intensive agricultural activity and has lost its uppermost levels (Özdoğan 1986:13).

Two seasons of excavations took place at Barcın Höyük in 2005 and 2006 and were carried out under the auspices of the İznik Museum, with Dr. J. J. Roodenberg of the Netherlands Institute for the Near East as scientific director (Roodenberg, van As and Alpaslan Roodenberg 2008). In 2007, the project was continued by the Netherlands Institute in Turkey, in İstanbul, with the generous permission of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism¹.

After long-term excavations at the site of Ilıpınar (Roodenberg 2000; Roodenberg and Thissen 2001; Roodenberg and Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2008) and soundings at Menteşe (Roodenberg et al. 2003), the research project at Barcın Höyük is the third excavation that takes place within the regional project titled 'Early Farming Communities in the Eastern Marmara Region'. The excavations hope to expand our knowledge of the pre-Bronze Age cultural developments in northwestern Anatolia, and to provide information especially on the earliest stages of settled farming life in the region. So far, the promise of Barcın Höyük to provide this has been confirmed, but more research is needed to gain a sense of issues such as architectural traditions,

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1 The 2007 season took place from July 2 to August 17. Government representative was Mrs. Hüdaverdi Benzer (İzmir). Financial support for the excavations is provided by the Netherlands Organizations for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Netherlands Institute for the Near East.

settlement layout and development and subsistence practices. After two years of excavating later levels and exploring the Neolithic in a deep sounding (in trench M10), excavations in 2007 were able to reach the Neolithic levels in a larger area (trench L11). One aim for the upcoming seasons is to increase the exposed Neolithic deposits. Continued research indicates a thick deposit of Neolithic layers. Virgin soil has not yet been reached. If the deepest cultural deposits span a considerable length of time, this could potentially provide in depth information on the earliest settlements in this region.

Because the site is under cultivation, excavations are currently restricted to a single parcel running North-South over the highest part of the double mound. In future seasons we hope to be able to get representative samples from different parts of the mound. The primary goals of this season were first: to improve our understanding of stratigraphy and mound formation, second: look for relatively undisturbed Late Neolithic levels and third: to excavate a section of a Byzantine cemetery which covers the top and southern slope of the mound.

Work in 2007 was done in four 9 by 9 meter trenches during a six week season in the center of the main mound (Fig. 2). Even though the trenches are adjacent, work continued on levels from different periods at the same time, because three of the four trenches had been previously excavated to different depths. The results of the excavations in each of the trenches are described below.

Trench L12

In the southernmost trench, L12, 27 inhumation burials were excavated, of which 23 were interred in grave pits covered by roof tiles. All inhumations were lying extended on their back, head towards the west. The construction of the graves and the finds indicate that the cemetery dates to the Byzantine period. Grave goods were rare, and included small metal trinkets such as crosses, rings and stone beads. Apart from a single very large pit, possibly a silo, which contained fragments of painted wall plaster, no evidence has been found so far for the settlement to which this cemetery belonged. The graves were dug directly into what appear to be Late Chalcolithic levels, which will be excavated in future seasons.

Trench M11

This trench was newly opened in 2007 and was excavated to nearly 2 meters below the surface. As in all other trenches excavated so far, preservation of settlement remains in the upper levels is poor. Two phases dating to the Late Chalcolithic period were distinguished. The upper most level comprised of a keyhole shaped oven with a diameter of 2.25 meters. The floor of the oven was sherd-paved. A mudbrick construction comprised of two walls forming a corner probably belongs to the same occupation phase. The walls were preserved to a height of no more than 15 cm., making it difficult to comment about the enclosed space. The interior of the room yielded fewer artifacts than the outer surfaces which were high in animal bone and refuse.

Beneath this phase excavations yielded an array of postholes. Assessing what types of buildings these posts would have supported remains difficult, but the great range of sizes and depths indicate that timber post constructions were an important architectural method in this phase.

The pottery from these two phases is Late Chalcolithic², with significant admixtures of heavily abraded Late Neolithic sherds. The Late Chalcolithic pottery has its closest affinities with the Ilıpınar phase IV ceramics, which came from a cemetery, and is also similar to the Ware F and G assemblages from Demircihüyük (Seeher 1987). This places the occupation phase in the middle of the fourth century B.C. Another interesting find from these levels is a copper or copper alloy axe (Fig. 3).

Trench M10

In trench M10 work was begun in 2005, and in a sounding in half the trench Late Neolithic deposits were encountered in 2006. Work in 2007 focused on bringing the remainder of this trench to this level. This goal was not completely accomplished. Most of the deposits excavated in M10 in 2007 date to the Chalcolithic Period. The highest of these deposits were cut by Early Bronze Age pits with well preserved pottery. Several phases of the Chalcolithic period were excavated but the deposits were largely featureless.

Apart from numerous pits, the most interesting feature of this trench was a dug channel running through the trench. This construction could either have been used to contain water, or as in nearby and roughly contemporaneous

2 The pottery has been studied by Dr. Laurens Thissen (Amsterdam).

Aktopraklık (Karul 2008) functioned as a boundary between two areas of the site. After this channel had lost its original function and had filled partly with sediment, a semi-subterranean space was cut into the side of the channel. It had an ephemeral plastered floor onto which a small circular hearth was placed. The floor of this hearth consisted of a flat bed of sherds covered by a thick layer of plaster. The sherds all belonged to a single large carinated dish.

In the western half of this trench a deep sounding reaching Neolithic levels was begun in 2006. A small section (1 by 1.5 m.) of this sounding was deepened in the 2007 season where it reached a maximum depth of 4.5 meters below the surface level although virgin soil has not yet been reached. The sounding yielded various floors including ones that were white and red plastered, as well as a child burial but the excavated area was too restricted to interpret the exposed deposits.

Trench L11

Trench L11 had been excavated already to a considerable depth in 2006, and a piece of charcoal from the lowest deposits reached then, was C-14 dated to 6400-6200 cal B.C. The excavations in 2007 did not go down significantly into lower deposits, and we know that there is at least another 1.5 meter of cultural deposits underneath. We did, however, expose a level with relatively well-preserved settlement features.

The earliest *in situ* remains that were exposed are tentatively dated to the Late Neolithic period, based on the 2006 C14 date and a general analysis of the pottery. These remains consist of a possible dwelling, although the construction is far from clear (Fig. 4). There is one mudslab wall, which forms a rectangular inner space together with two side walls or platforms. This situation was further complicated by the large number of Late Neolithic and Late Chalcolithic pits that cut the structure and the associated surfaces. No surfaces were reached in the interior, but excavations here yielded four infant burials.

On the exterior of the building were trodden earth surfaces with reed impressions. Frustratingly, this courtyard area was heavily disturbed by pits that proved to be very difficult to recognize and excavate due to processes of bio-turbation and rodent activities.

We still do not have a clear picture of the chronological position of this phase. The C-14 date from 2006 is tantalizingly early, contemporaneous with the oldest phases encountered in the eastern Marmara region, at Menteşe. But it is only a single date, and not from a secure context. The study of the pottery from these levels has only just begun, and is not made easier by the disturbance of many contexts by later digging activities. The pottery from trench L11 and from the earliest deposits reached in M10 belongs to a homogeneous ware group. It is thin-walled and well-fired at high temperatures. Decoration is not frequent, but there are numerous fragments of so-called Fikirtepe boxes.

Preliminary Conclusions

Overall, the 2007 season has demonstrated that the history of Barcın Höyük consisted of a number of occupation phases separated by significant periods of time. The earliest occupation has not yet been encountered and lies below the Late Neolithic level to which the architectural unit of trench L11 belongs. The ceramics and C-14 dates obtained in the 2006 season suggest that the Late Neolithic occupation took place in the second half of the seventh millennium B.C., contemporaneous with basal levels at Menteşe. Future seasons will expose more of this occupation phase and will investigate the older levels underneath. There is certainly a long gap between this phase and the following Late Chalcolithic phase dating to the first half of the fourth millennium B.C. After other periods for which there is currently no evidence for occupation, there are several large Early Bronze Age pits which yielded pottery dating to ca. 2400-2100 B.C.

Future seasons should allow us to gain better insight into the habitation patterns and subsistence strategies of the earliest farming communities in the eastern Marmara region. Ultimately, this can hopefully contribute to long-standing debates on the spread of agriculture from Southeastern and Central Anatolia to the Northwest and further into Europe.

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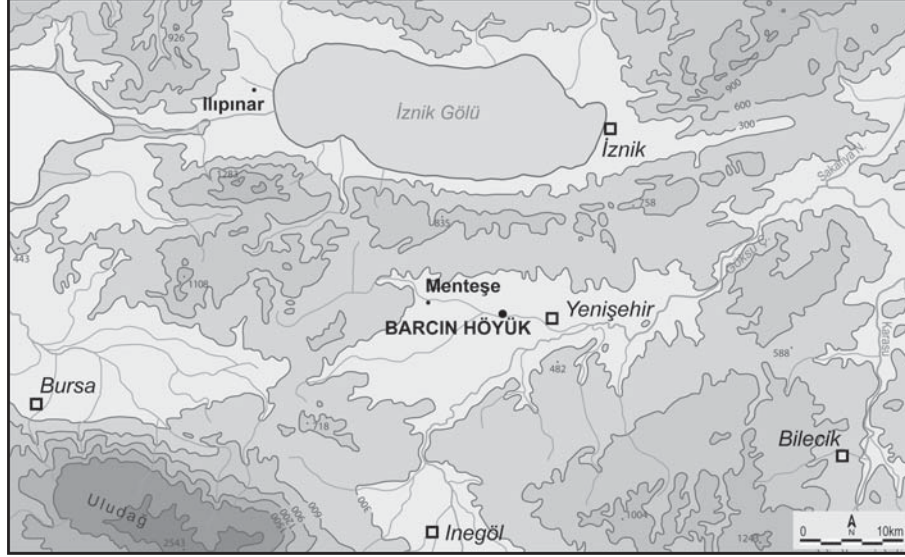


Fig. 1: Barcin Höyük and Mentese in the Plain of Yenişehir, and Ilıpınar in the İznik Lake Basin

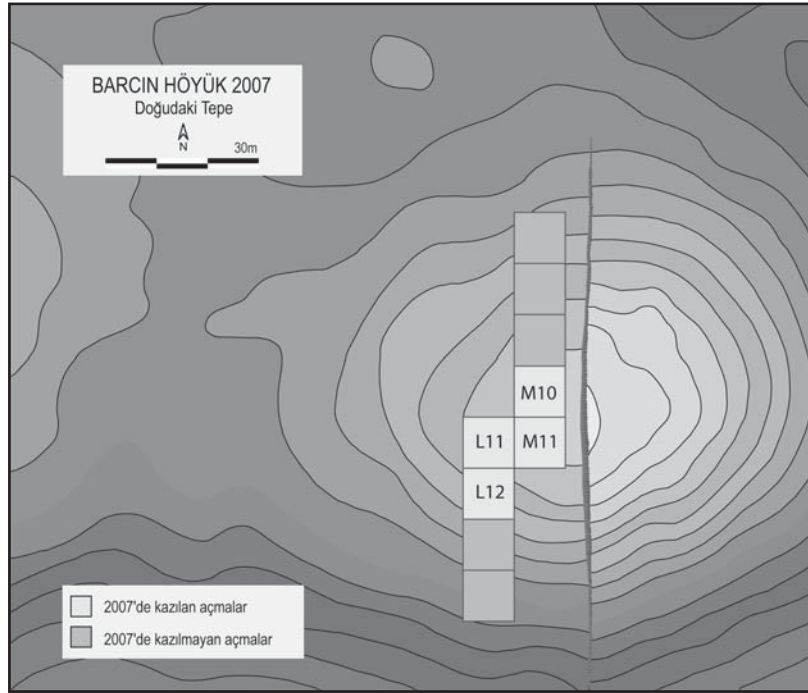


Fig. 2: The eastern section of Barcin Höyük with the trenches L11, L12, M10, M11 excavated in 2007

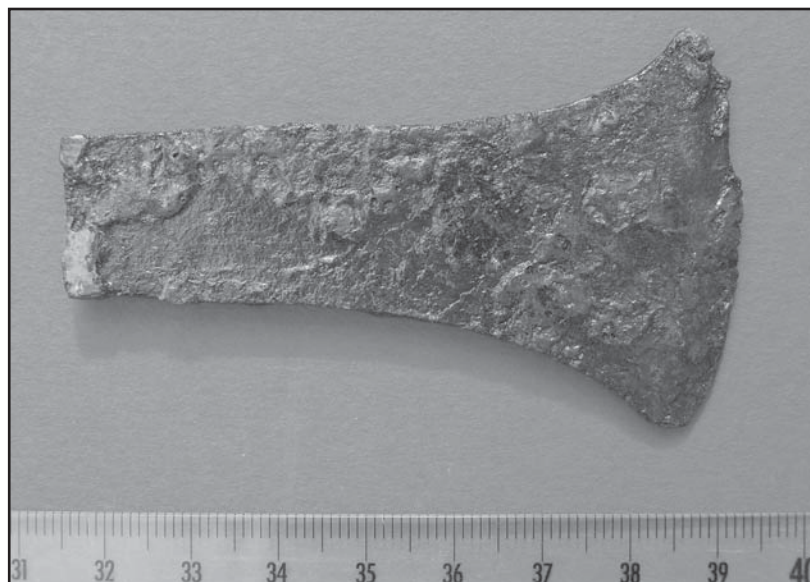


Fig.3: Copper-alloy axe from Late Chalcolithic levels of M11

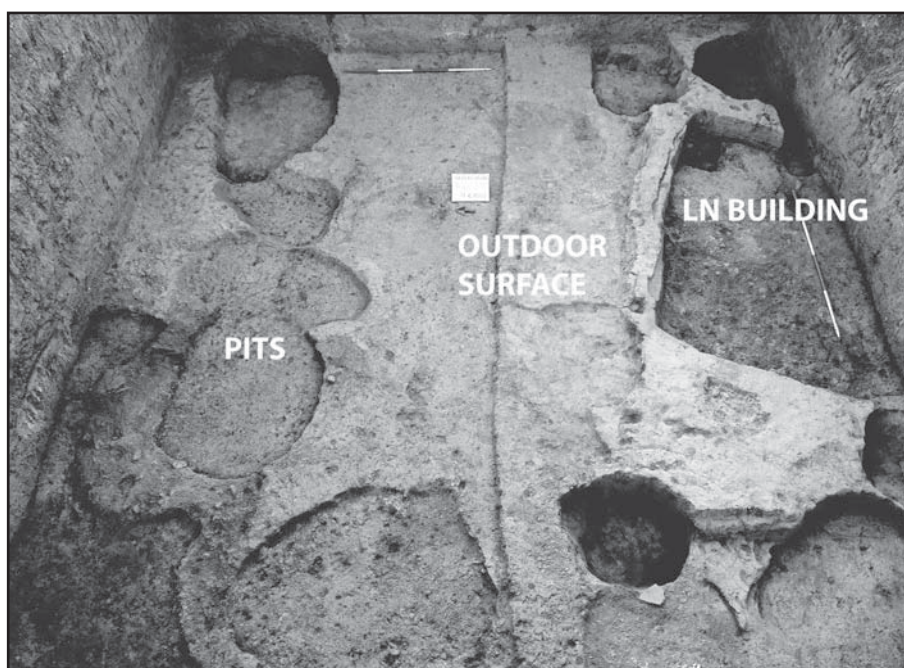


Fig. 4: Overview of trench L11 at the end of excavations, with the partial Late Neolithic building to the right (South), associated exterior surfaces in the center, and intrusive pits