

BARCIN HÖYÜK EXCAVATIONS, 2008

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The Barcın Höyük Project, which began in 2005, is carried out under the auspices of the Netherlands Institute in Turkey in İstanbul, in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for the Near East in Leiden, Holland. After full seasons in 2005, 2006 (Roodenberg, van As and Alpaslan 2008) and 2007 (Gerritsen & Özbal 2009), fieldwork in 2008 was restricted to two weeks. The goals of the season were 1) to continue excavations of the Middle Byzantine cemetery on the southern slope of the east mound (trench L12); 2) to carry out a site survey to assess whether intact remains of a Byzantine settlement may have been preserved somewhere on the mound; 3) to continue analyses of the prehistoric ceramics, the chipped stone remains and the human remains.

Background to the Project

The site of Barcın Höyük is located in the Eastern Marmara region of Bursa Province, situated in the Plain of Yenişehir to the south of the İznik Lake and to the northwest of the Uludağ Mountain range. Excavations so far have encountered occupation levels dating to the Late Neolithic, Late Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Roman and Byzantine periods. It was selected for excavation because of its potential to address questions regarding the beginnings of settled farming life in the region and to gain insights into the role of the Eastern Marmara region in the expansion processes of farming from Central Anatolia to Northwest Anatolia and onwards to Southeastern Europe. Based on current evidence, these processes took place between the middle of the seventh millennium and the earlier part of the sixth millennium B.C. The top of the Late Neolithic levels at Barcın Höyük has been provisionally dated

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by two C14 dates to before 6000 cal BC (Roodenberg, van As and Alpaslan 2008). Virgin soil has not yet been reached and it is currently unknown when occupation at the site began.

Excavations in the Middle Byzantine Cemetery

Excavations focused on trench L12 (Fig. 1). This trench was begun in 2006 and excavated during the full 2007 season, but work had been slow because of the density of burials from the Byzantine period in this area. In future seasons the aim is to go down in this trench to the Neolithic levels and expose the remainder of the architectural unit found in L11 to the north in 2007.

In 2008 nine complete and a further five incomplete burials were excavated (Fig. 2). Several were of the classic type, i.e. with a grave cover of two or three pairs of large tiles surrounded by rocks. Several other burials showed no traces of a grave construction. It is possible that these are of a different type. More likely is that tiles and stones of these graves were removed during later burial activities. Based on stratigraphic observations, graves without cover tend to belong either to the oldest phase of the cemetery (i.e. superimposed by later graves) or to the latest graves. The latter are placed in shallow pits whereby the skeleton rests on the tiles or rocks of older graves.

The stratigraphy within the cemetery indicates that it was in use for a considerable period of time (Fig. 3). At present it is impossible to estimate the total number of individuals buried here. Datable materials from the cemetery are very rare. An engraved bronze reliquary holder that was found in a grave excavated in trench L11 in 2006 gives a date of the 10th or 11th century (Roodenberg 2009). The engravings show the Virgin Mary and Christ on the Cross.

Site Survey

Anestis Vasilakeris of Boğaziçi University joined the project in 2008 in order to investigate the local context of the Byzantine cemetery, hoping to

establish the chances that remains of a chapel and/or a settlement of the same date as the cemetery were preserved. Due to intensive agricultural use of the mound, the upper strata have generally suffered badly and have been completely removed in places. A surface collection was carried out on the western mound. This survey found ample Roman and Early Byzantine pottery near the top of the mound. The Byzantine sherds mostly appear to predate the Middle Byzantine date of the cemetery. Interestingly, the surface of the western mound yielded almost no Neolithic or Chalcolithic ceramics.

Ceramic Analyses

Analysis of the Late Neolithic and Late Chalcolithic pottery from the 2007 materials from trench L11 was carried out by Laurens Thissen. L11 is the trench which yielded architectural remains and an outdoor area from the Late Neolithic period as well as pits from the Late Chalcolithic period (Gerritsen and Özbal 2009). For both periods there is now a repertoire of shapes, and a preliminary analysis of wares, production techniques, surface treatments and decorations. The Late Neolithic pottery (Fig. 4) is characterized by thin-walled, well-made vessels, often brown to dark brown in colour. It is mineral tempered, and the surfaces are generally well burnished. The shapes range from open cups and bowls with pinched rims to whole-mouth vessels. The bowls are often oval instead of round. Vertical pierced lugs are very common on the closed shapes, two or four per vessel. A small percentage of the Late Neolithic pottery is decorated with incised patterns, and so-called Fikirtepe boxes are fairly common.

The Late Chalcolithic pottery (Fig. 5) is generally thick-walled in comparison to the Neolithic ceramics. Colours vary from pale brown to black. Mineral temper occurs the most, but there is now also chaff tempered pottery. The surfaces are smooth but not nearly as well burnished as the Late Neolithic ceramics. Carinated dishes are common, as are bowls and deep pots with handles or lugs.

Chipped Stone Analyses

The flint and obsidian assemblages from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic levels were analyzed in 2008 by Ivan Gatsov and Petranka Nedelcheva of New Bulgarian University (Gatsov, Nedelcheva, Özbal & Gerritsen in press).

To the Neolithic period date a large quantity of retouched specimens. Among these tools one notes a collection of end-scrapers, perforators, retouched blades and flakes. Overall, the main technological and typological features of the Neolithic artifacts from Barcın Höyük, especially in terms of core types and reduction techniques, display strong similarities with those from Ilıpınar, Mentеше, Fikirtepe and Pendik (Gatsov 2009). Most notable are the similar core types and reduction techniques which show single platform blade cores with diligent preparation and blade/bladelet oriented core reduction. These assemblages are also characterized by monotonous typological structures dominated by end scrapers, retouched blades and perforators, and a relatively large number of retouched blades with visible traces of usage.

Obsidian is fairly common in the Neolithic contexts, although it is too early to determine the percentage of obsidian within the full chipped stone assemblage. Among the obsidian artifacts from Barcın Höyük, the small, extremely narrow and thin blade fragments are related to an advanced stage of core reduction.

During the Late Chalcolithic period the assemblage included retouched pieces and unretouched blade fragments with silica gloss. Typical for the Chalcolithic period are a double end-scraper on a blade with slightly convex profile and lateral cortex, a blade end-scraper with a rounded front, and a fragment of a blade end-scraper. The use of obsidian has diminished in this period.

The Human Remains

Jessica Pearson of Liverpool University analyzed the human skeletons from the 2007 and 2008 seasons. The prehistoric assemblage from these seasons is small, with one adult and five neonates or infants. The adult was a female who must have carried very heavy loads with her right arm, resulting in damage to the elbow and wrist. Her left arm was broken shortly before death.

The Byzantine assemblage of human remains is much more extensive (see also Alpaslan Roodenberg 2009). The preservation of the bone is very uneven, largely depending on the depth of the grave-pit. Men and women, and all age groups from newborn to middle to old age are represented. A full report on the osteological analyses will appear separately.

Acknowledgements

The Barcın Höyük Excavations gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance and support of the T.C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, Director Yusuf Demirci and the staff of İznik Müzesi, and representative Jülide Kayahan of Burdur Müzesi. Many thanks go to Prof. Bahri Yıldız and the staff of the Uludağ Üniversitesi, İbrahim Orhan Yüksek Meslekokulu for their hospitality. The Barcın Höyük Excavations are funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO).

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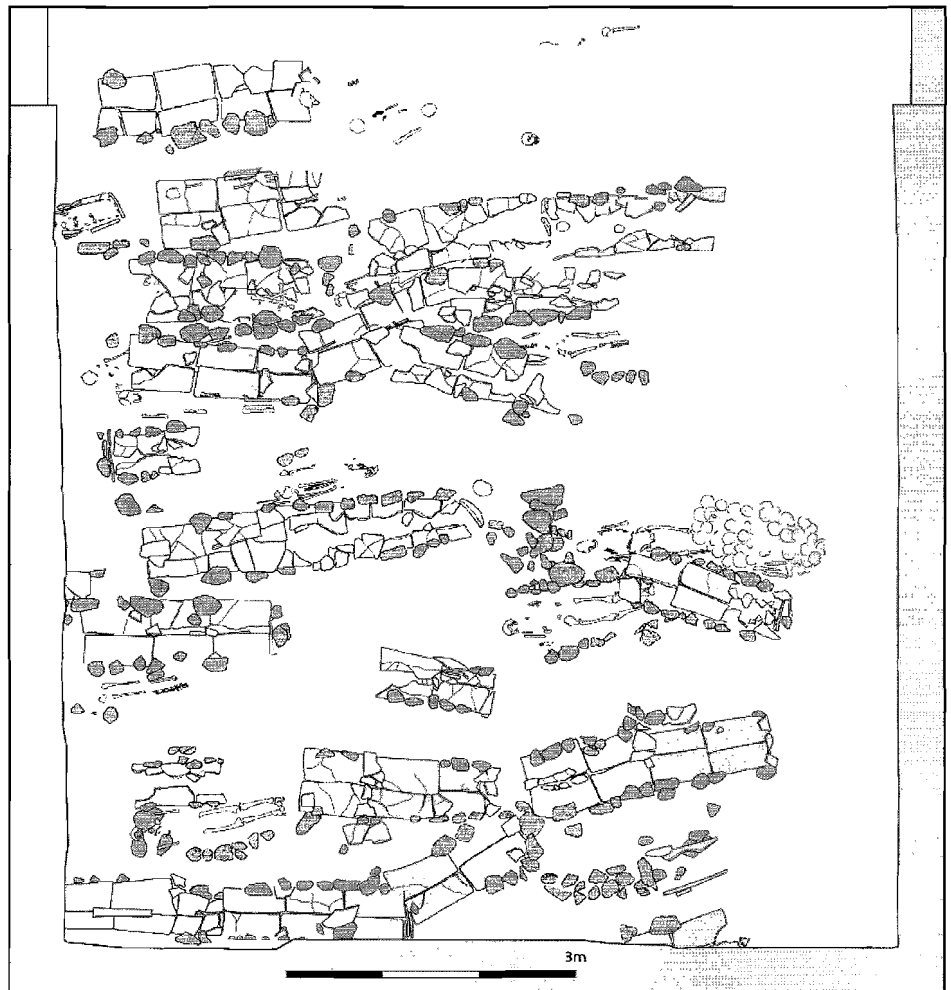


Fig. 3: Byzantine graves in trench L12, excavated between 2006 and 2008.

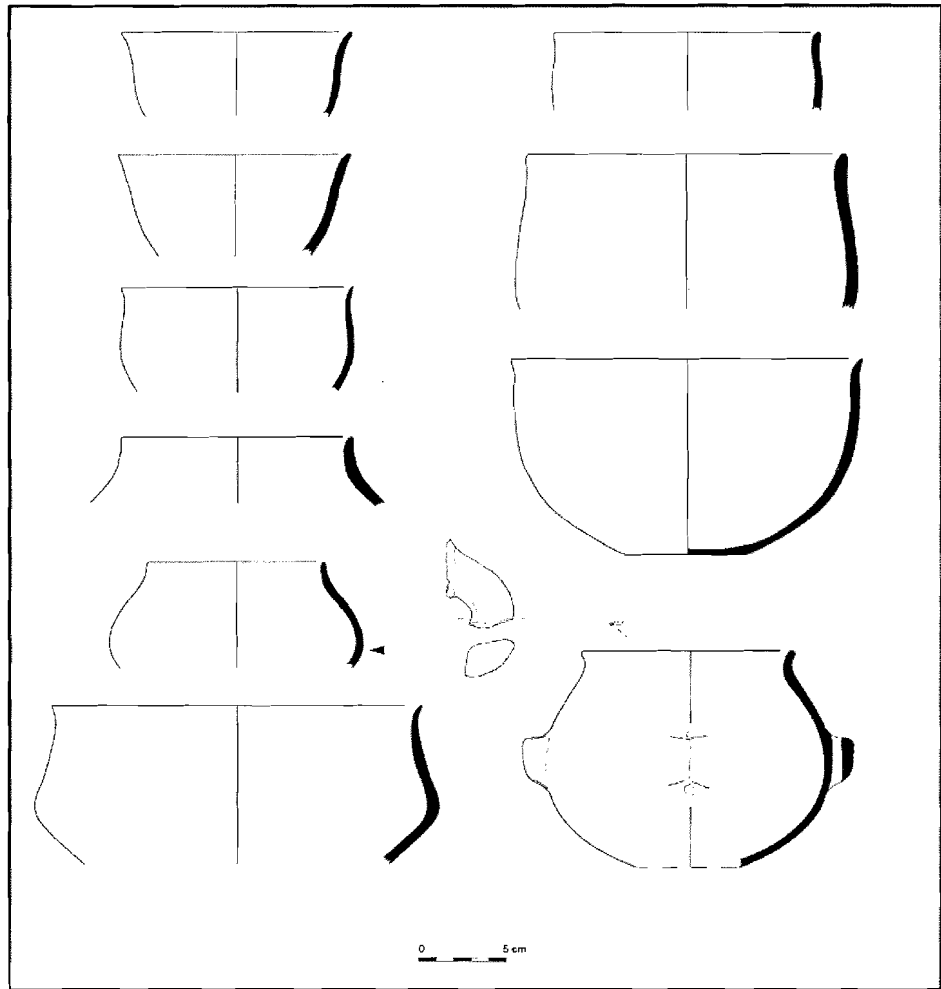


Fig. 4: Common shapes among the Late Neolithic ceramics.

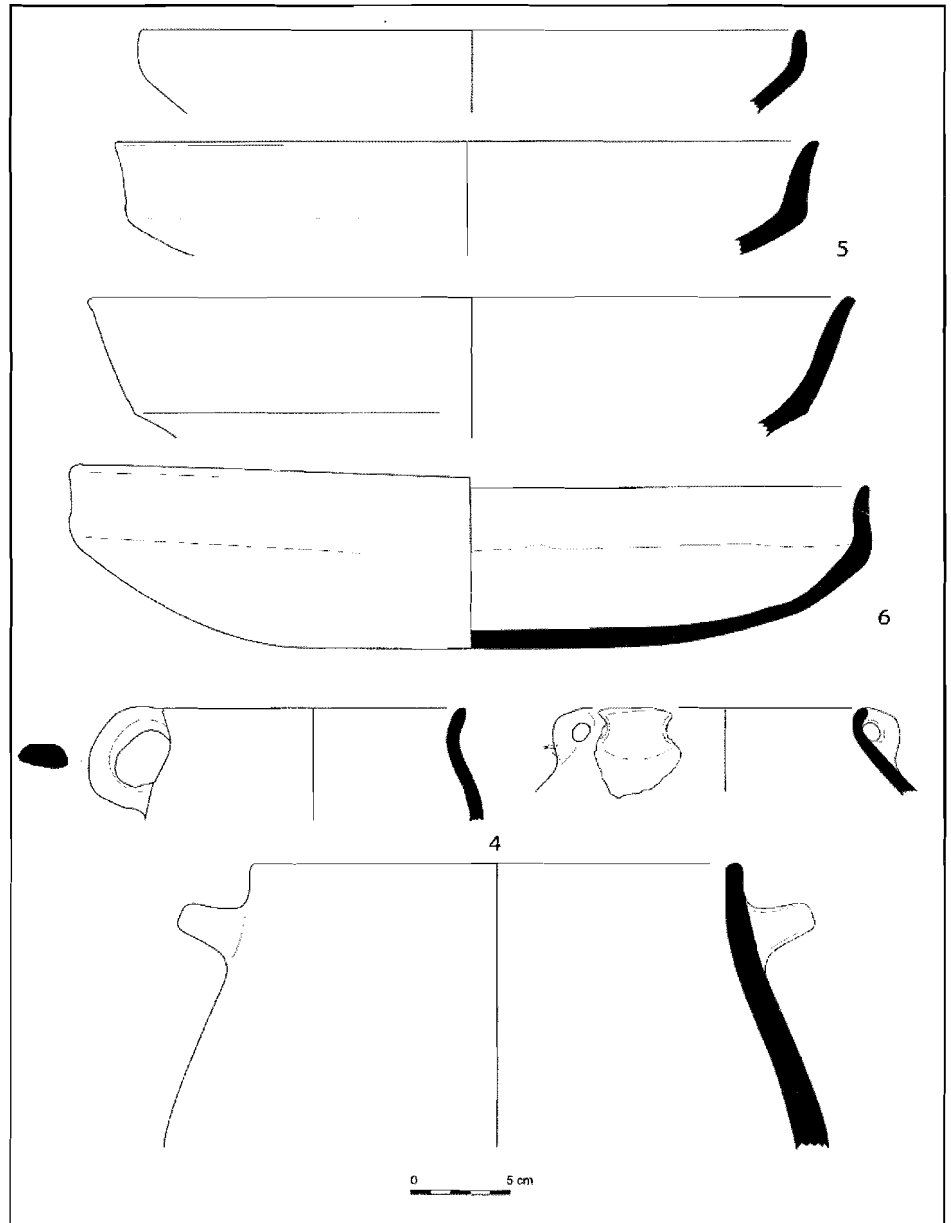


Fig. 5: Common shapes among the Late Chalcolithic ceramics.