

Field Reports

Vecihi Özkaya,

Körtik Tepe

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KPS-75, Kerak Plateau

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Kmlo 2

Contributions

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Editorial

Blizzards of emails, swarms of deadlines and papers, baskets of applications, paralysis by administrative needs: all of this increasingly characterizes Near Eastern Neolithic research. The share of original research on field work and material is substituted more and more by research made for the stage, reflected by a mass of papers typified by accelerating redundancy and unsupported guess-work. A paradoxical situation is reached: colleagues produce papers without being able to read others' publications to a sufficient extent, nor do they have the time to communicate about mutual research. Big research clusters in some countries absorb energies by (often) misguiding empty keywords (e.g. landscape, space), while it is forgotten that the major progress and innovation in research mostly results from an ideal combination of two or three individuals operating with interdisciplinary cooperating. The personal side of all of this can result in elements of masochism among the more responsible of us, the inability to say "No," which sometimes leads to health problems, helpless floating with the current, and the exclusion of those who do not follow the main trend.

The Near Eastern Neolithic family is still small, and this should foster the opportunity to critically counter these common trends in research and to develop research ethics against Neolithic research deflation. We have to start considering if all the conferences and workshops are necessary, since they are one source of our academic breathlessness. We have to start investing more time in research progress and innovation by simply sitting down and doing the job: working on excavated materials (final publications) rather than publishing more intriguing preliminary ideas with limited material bases. And we have to start working more sustainably: site hopping, neglected conservation and curation measures, attitudes of non-sharing, and failure to raise local competency are some of the dangers we face. Each of us is asked to distinguish wisely and carefully between necessary constraints promoting Neolithic research and constraints produced by following uncontrolled trends in research and research politics. Let us dare to say "No."

For a number of various reasons on our side, issues of Neo-Lithics appear late, for which we ask you to accept our apologies. We would like to announce that the special issue on Rubble Slides (Neo-Lithics 1/09) will appear in Spring 2010, and the one on Water Domestication (now Neo-Lithics 2/10) later in 2010. We warmly welcome the new Neo-Lithics' managing editorial board (beginning with issue 1/09): Dörte and Jan Krumnow and Christoph Purschwitz, while gratefully remembering the work of the previous managing editor, Jürgen Baumgarten. Dörte, Jan, and Christoph will be on your side during the submission and publication process: as ever, we welcome your research, especially from the young colleagues and sites outside the Levant, for publication in Neo-Lithics.

Hans Georg K. Gebel and Gary O. Rollefson

Excavations at Körtik Tepe. A New Pre-Pottery Neolithic A Site in Southeastern Anatolia

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Introduction

With its location near the point where Batman Çayı and the Tigris River meet, approximately 30 km west of Batman in southeastern Anatolia, Körtik Tepe is situated on the west bank the Tigris near a Pınarbaşı field of the Ağıl Village (Ancolini) within the administrative borders of Bismil district, Diyarbakır (Fig. 1). In the form of a low hill, the mound extends across an area of 100 x 150 m and a height 5.50 m above its surroundings. The mound, also known by its traditional names Kotuk or Kotik, was first detected in surveys carried out in 1989 and evaluated as a late site (Algaze and Rosenberg 1990). Archaeological excavations that began in 2000 continued until 2009. Excavations exposed an area of approximately 2600 m² in 89 trenches of 5.00 x 5.00 m, reaching variable depths between 1.00-5.50 m (Fig. 2). Together with Hallan Çemi, Körtik Tepe is one of the earliest sites in which the transition from

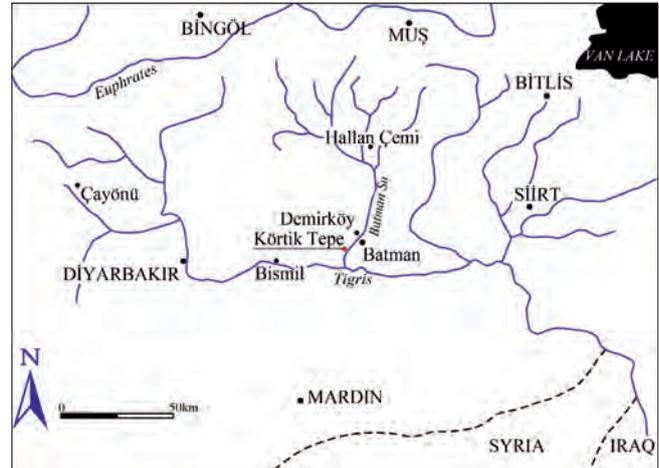


Fig. 1 Location of Körtik Tepe.

hunter-gatherer communities following a nomadic way of life to settled village life is represented.

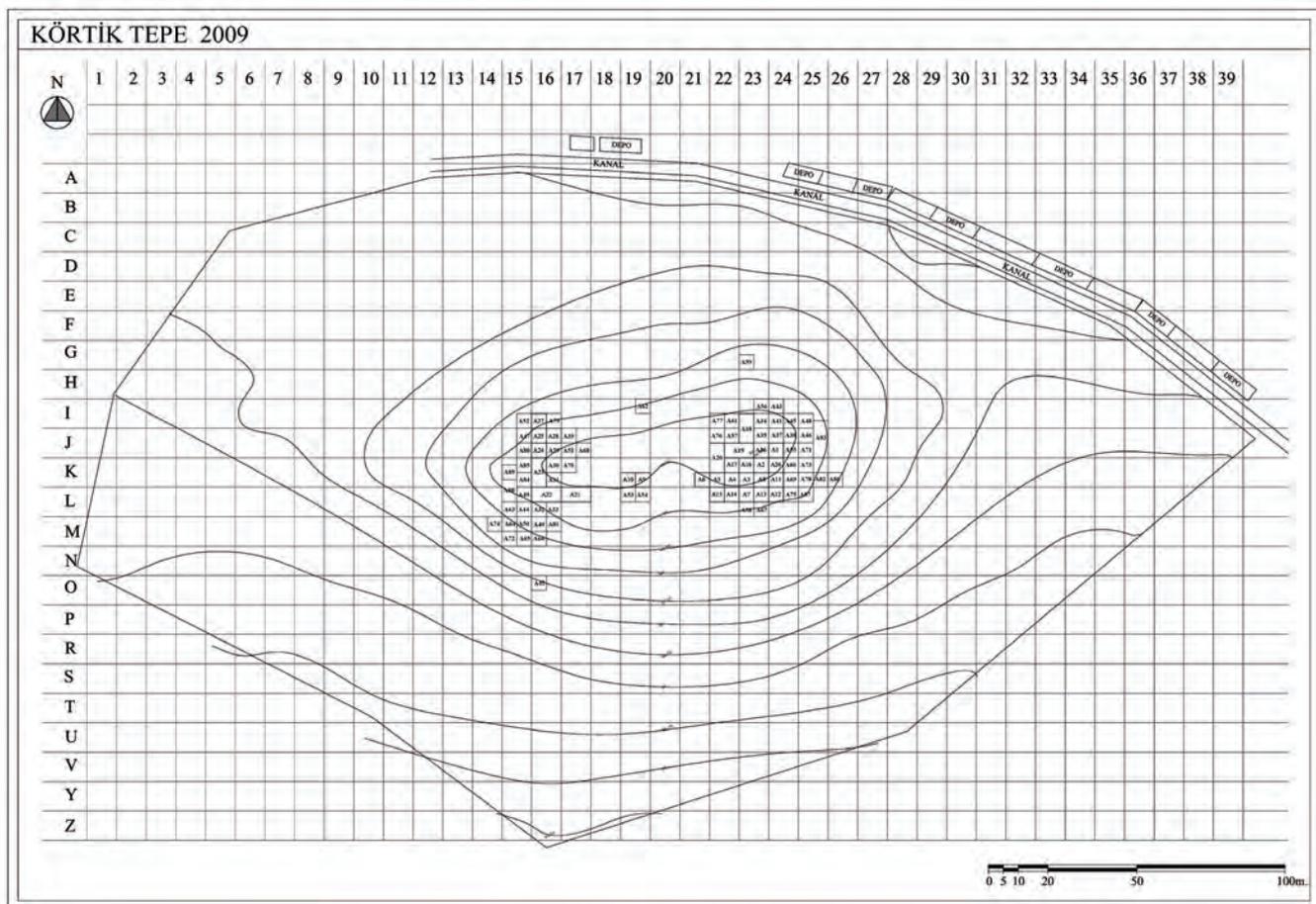


Fig. 2 Topographical plan of site



Fig. 3 Circular structures and intramural tombs

Excavations revealed two main culture phases in the mound: a medieval period represents the later culture phase, while the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, represented mainly by architectural remains, burials, and grave goods, is the earlier one.

Architecture

The PPN cultural structure of the mound generally reflects important differences, especially in terms of small finds, from other well-known contemporary settlements in the region. All data indicate that Körtik Tepe is a permanent settlement (Özkaya and San 2007). Excavations during 2005-2009 showed that there are at least six separate architectural layers.

It is possible to gather Körtik Tepe structures in three main groups. The first group is composed of 77 round buildings. All houses are round in plan with dirt floors surrounded by single-leaf walls of unworked stones. Walls were badly damaged by construction activity of the medieval phase occupations (Fig. 3). Among these there are many structures that are not walled at all. These structures, varying in size between 2.30-3.00 m, are constructed directly on the ground. The floors of stones



Fig. 4 PPNA tomb



Fig. 5 PPNA tomb

pressed into the compact earth. Based on a preliminary judgement, these round buildings from Körtik Tepe, whether with flat or con cave floors, are single-family dwellings characteristic of the earliest Pre-Pottery Neolithic period and similar in nature to Hallan Çemi, Göbekli Tepe, Tell Abr, Jerf el-Ahmar, Sheikh Hassan, Mureybet, Qermez Dere and Nemrik (Aurenche 2007; Kozłowski and Kempisty 1990; Rosenberg and Redding 2000). The second group is composed of 34 buildings that are too small for residences. The sizes of these buildings, which are found in almost all levels in the excavated areas and are also round in plan, vary between 1.10-2.10 m in diameter. Floors of this group are also paved with pebbles (Özkaya 2004; Özkaya and San 2007; Özkaya and Coşkun 2008). These structures must have served as storage units similar to



Fig. 6 Tomb contents

those at Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg and Redding 2000; Rosenberg 2007), confirmed by the dense vegetable remains in them.

The last group of structures in our sample (Y3, Y11, Y44, Y35) is completely different in terms of their sizes and floors as well as in their rare numbers. Data are not sufficient to explain functions of these, but we suspect they may have played some special roles, similar in some ways to the public structures at Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg and Redding 2000).

However, despite the architectural similarities with Hallan Çemi, Körtik Tepe stands apart in terms of its small finds. Although there are no direct similarities with Çayönü (Özdoğan-Özdoğan 1989; Schirmer 1990) or Nevalı Çori (Hauptmann 1993), similar structures to the third group are found in other Neolithic settlements of Anatolia. In the Levant region there are comparable structures in such early settlements such as 'Ain Mallaha (Perrot 1966), Jericho (Bar-Josef 1986; Kuijt 1996), and the lower layers of Beidha (Byrd 1994; 2000). Though they include specific differences in terms of features, structure types, finds, and some functions, it is not surprising that the rarity of these buildings are generally considered to be public structures. Therefore, the site of Körtik Tepe shows parallels not only with Anatolia but also with the Levant.

Burials

Graves play an important role in terms of characterizing the social and cultural structure of Körtik Tepe. The majority of skeletons were buried with grave goods, and a large proportion of the burials on the mound were found beneath house floors (Figs. 4-5). The context of a few graves is uncertain as they are near the surface and badly disturbed. Burials inside houses show that the places where people were living were sanctified as well as profane.

Instead of being buried haphazardly, rules of treating the dead included practices before burial as well as interment itself. One specific practice was the partial smearing of skeletons with gypsum plaster (Özbek 2005) (Fig. 4). For many of the plastered skeletons, including skulls, colored parallel bands occur in the



Fig. 7 General view of the Körtik Tepe finds from 2009



Fig. 8 PPNA stone vessels

upper parts of the bones. In two different samples red and black lines are parallel to each other. Such color traces are also seen on grave goods. All these data show that the dead were defleshed, subsequently partly covered with plaster, and then pigmented. Similar practices in the later PPN period have been noted (Goring Morris 2000), but Körtik Tepe holds a special place in terms of the specific kinds of plastering treatment.

Traditions of burying the dead and the accompanying grave goods help to demonstrate the sociocultural system of the era. It is possible to gain an understanding in such related features as production, technology, labor, and decoration of grave gifts, most of which were of worked stone. Jewelry was made of different stones; decorated and undecorated bone objects and stone figurines were numerous. Other grave goods include stone vessels, axes, pestles, mortars, perforated stones, and cutting-piercing tools (Figs. 6-9). Similarities to tools used in daily life indicate fundamental beliefs among the Körtik Tepe settlers, particularly the concept of a continuation of life after the death.



Fig. 9 Stone pestles



Fig. 10 Decorated stone with patterned incisions

Chipped and Ground Stone Artifacts

Chipped stone artifacts from Körtik Tepe are chiefly composed of flint. Obsidian tools and debitage are secondary. Furthermore, although rare numerically, quartz raw material was also used. Among tool groups Çayönü tools show up although in small quantities. Notably, although projectile points are numerous, no arrowheads of PPNA or PPNB types common to the classic Levant or Zagros traditions were found. Instead, tool types are more typical of the Epipaleolithic, characterized by microliths and arch-backed blades, generally similar to the inventory from Hallan Çemi. There is nothing among the tool types to contradict our interpretation that wild plant collecting was the principal means of acquiring plant foods. Some tools still reflect Paleolithic origins, with large scrapers being very important. It is observed that more formal tools were produced from obsidian, and these mostly consist of lunates and other geometric forms.

The obsidian at Körtik Tepe was only obtainable from a great distance, whether through exchange or direct acquisition. As was the case for Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg and Redding 2000; Hauptmann 2002), the green transparent obsidian is likely East Anatolian in origin (Özkaya and San 2007).

Most of the material from the mound consists of ground stone artifacts (Fig. 7), and the majority of these came from burials; a small proportion came from domestic contexts. Except for a few examples that were preserved as complete objects, most finds included as grave goods were broken, including many stone vessels,



Fig. 11 Bone fish hooks

utilitarian and ceremonial axes in different shapes and sizes, mortars, pestles, and grinding stones, all of which reflect the rich cultural collection in Körtik Tepe. Foremost among the types, stone vessels constitute a special group with their broad formal repertoire and their geometric and natural decoration (Fig. 8). All parts of the stone vessels are covered by engraved animal figures, mostly snakes, wild goats, scorpions, birds, and mixed creatures that likely represent elements of their belief system. Despite their rarity throughout the region, it is clear that such stone vessels are seen in Pre-Pottery Neolithic period communities in Near East.

One type of ground stone object brings relationships among Körtik Tepe and contemporary sites into sharp relief. This is the pestle produced for utilitarian and ceremonial use (Fig. 9). Samples worked from coarse stone include abrasion traces as a result of use, and they generally display rough formal features. Ones that have shiny surfaces are made of more workable chlorite that is also used for stone vessels (Özkaya 2004). Most of the pestles of this type have upper ends finished with stylized wild bird and goat heads and are found as grave goods. Nearly identical pestles also came from Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 1999) and Çayönü (Davis 1982; Özdoğan 1999) in Anatolia and from Nemrik 9 in Iraq (Kozłowski 1989).

Among the Körtik Tepe finds, stone axes comprise another important group. In addition to some with rough formal features, there are others that were shaped carefully. Axes differ in terms of size based on different stone types; however, they all share similar morphologies. Axes among the grave goods have holes carefully bored in the center. The majority of axes from non-burial contexts are abraded from rough usage (Özkaya and San 2007). In addition to axes included as grave goods, there are also small, carefully fashioned mace heads with compressed circular forms (Özkaya and San 2007).

Chlorite stone figurines included as grave goods made by abrasion and incision are often of undefinable animals, although there is one that is clearly a goat.

Such figurines are not known from contemporary sites in the Near East, and they appear to be expressions of a local belief system. The concentric circles on the shoulders of the figures are also commonly found on decorated stone vessels among the grave goods, adding to the uniqueness of these objects. Another exotic piece that is of unknown use is a stone decorated with patterned incisions (Fig. 10).

Another type of shaped stone object from Körtik Tepe includes small-sized pointed cylinders that reflect close cultural ties with other early and late Pre-Pottery Neolithic period sites in Anatolia (Özkaya and San 2007). Shaped by means of abrasion, these chlorite objects have simple incised lines; one of them, with deep corrugations has counterparts at Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 1999) and Demirköy (Rosenberg and İnal 1999).

Bone Artifacts

Bone artifacts make up another basic group at Körtik Tepe. The majority of them were found in burials, although a few were found in other contexts. Considering their formal features and decoration, it is possible to classify bone artifacts in two groups as either decorative or utilitarian (Özkaya and San 2003; 2007). Utilitarian tools consist of awls, hooks, and points (Fig. 11) (Özkaya and San 2007).

Most of them are fragmentary, but definable awls reflect morphological differences with Çayönü samples. Awls with their bigger size and stubby heads differ from points. Close equivalents of small sized bone points that are used as pins are known from Çayönü (Özdoğan 1999). Once again, the bone material from Körtik Tepe shows similarities with bone finds from Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 1999) and is related to the Zarzian tradition, connected to some degree with traditions known from other sites of the region in form and function.

Personal Ornaments

Different jewelry groups produced from different materials reveal the richness of the collection of grave goods from the mound. Beads are one group placed in burials as gifts next to skeletons or in stone vessels (Fig. 6). Most of the beads were produced from burgundy-colored stone (Özkaya and San 2002), which is easily worked. This kind of ornament is the largest group, but another includes vertebrae of animals such as birds, fish and shell (Özkaya and San 2007). As in other kinds of grave goods, the quantity and quality of beads vary from burial to burial; some graves lack ornaments altogether. Although they are represented by only a few samples, some beads are made of chlorite, the same material the stone vessels are fashioned from. Ornaments were competently made involving decoration of parallel incised lines and carefully drilled

holes. Although generally oval in shape, serpentine beads also occur in different forms (Özkaya and San 2002), similar to those from Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 1993). Although there are some specific differences, the jewelry from Körtik Tepe is similar to that from Çayönü as well (Özdoğan 1999).

The disparity of grave good distributions suggests that those burials with large quantities of beads and other jewelry are of a different social class than those people buried in graves with none or only a few objects. This, in turn, indicates that social complexity had already appeared among the residents of Körtik Tepe by the PPNA period.

Concluding Remarks

The character of the site, similarities to contemporary sites throughout the Upper Tigris Valley, the finds as grave gifts beneath houses and in other burials, faunal remains (Arbuckle and Özkaya 2006), and other evidence all show that Körtik Tepe definitely belongs to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period. This fact is confirmed with C14 analysis showing that mound was settled at the beginning of the 10th millennium BC (Özkaya and San 2007; Özkaya and Coşkun 2008). Körtik Tepe is thus one of the oldest known Neolithic sites of Anatolia. In view of the strong Epipaleolithic character demonstrated by the presence of microliths and arch-backed blades that reflect close parallels with Hallan Çemi, there are indications that Körtik Tepe was settled in an even earlier time.

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