

## Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship 2017

Archaeological Institute of America

### Field School Report: The Boncuklu Project

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This summer, with the help of generous funding from the Archaeological Institute of America's Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship, I participated in the excavation at Boncuklu Höyük, an early Neolithic village site near Konya, Turkey. The Boncuklu Project is directed by Dr. Douglas Baird of the University of Liverpool and Dr. Andrew Fairbairn of the University of Queensland, and their field school is offered through the Institute for Field Research. Research at Boncuklu is rooted primarily in its unique context during the development of sedentism and farming in Central Anatolia. Boncuklu is located near the seasonal Epipaleolithic site Pınarbaşı, as well as the later Neolithic sedentary Çatalhöyük, and chronologically lies between the two sites. Continuities in lithics, architecture, burials, and symbolism link these sites, and indicate that Boncuklu is a valuable resource for investigating the transition from mobile foraging to sedentary farming in the Anatolian Neolithic. As I am interested in studying sedentarization and foraging-to-farming transitions, I was excited to have the opportunity to work at this site.

The field school began with a week of lectures and travel to other archaeological sites in central Turkey, including Çatalhöyük, Hattusas, Alaca Höyük, and Kerkenes. In preparation for the excavation season, we were introduced to the archaeology of the development of plant cultivation and domestication in the Near East, the Aceramic Neolithic in Anatolia, and the archaeology of Boncuklu. Visits to other sites provided the opportunity to see and learn about the broader history and archaeology of Turkey, and left me eager to begin excavating at Boncuklu.



one of the experimental houses



director Doug Baird introduces the team to the trenches

The majority of the field crew arrived shortly after our return to the site, and we began to set up for the 2017 excavation season. We assembled tents and put up tarps to shade the trenches, and then set to work removing the backfill from the previous season of excavation. Two trenches were continued from last season – one containing a full mudbrick building footprint, and one comprised of a midden area with burials – and a new trench was opened as well. We began by drawing detailed measured plans of the trenches, and taking elevation points to include in the documentation. We then began excavating where the most recent context was located, and were given guidance on how to tell when a new context was reached. Excavation at this kind of site is quite slow and meticulous;

it can be difficult to notice the subtleties of the different contexts, and the contexts can be quite small. For example, there are often many stake holes around hearths, and each is excavated as a separate context. Also, the buildings were replastered sometimes dozens of times, and we removed each layer of plaster as a separate context. Although this is a slow process, it provides valuable insight into how buildings were used and modified over the entire life of the building. Context sheets were filled out and new plans were drawn for each new context to ensure that all details were documented, and the context was divided into appropriate sample bags. Any small finds were located exactly on the plan, and were bagged and documented.



excavating a midden



excavating the newly-opened trench

Over a long weekend halfway through the field school season, we were able to do some more traveling, this time to Cappadocia to visit more sites, including Aşıklı Höyük, Göreme, and the Derinkuyu underground city. I especially appreciated the opportunity to see other Neolithic sites, Çatalhöyük and Aşıklı Höyük, and learn more about current research in this area.



the flotation set-up



sorting heavy residue

I was also quite interested to see how an archaeological excavation is run, and all of the different specialists that contribute as well. In addition to learning fundamental field archaeology methods such as survey, measured drawing, excavation, and proper documentation and organization, we also spent time learning about the work that specialists do at the site. I plan to focus on environmental

archaeology as I continue my studies, so I was especially excited to get a chance to see the processes of archaeobotanical and zooarchaeological work on site, from sample processing to identification. Much of the material record from the site consists of very small objects, such as beads, obsidian microliths, and microfauna, and could only be recovered by wet-sieving and sorting through the heavy residue from flotation. Experimental archaeology is an important part of the research at Boncuklu, and we all got to participate one evening by making clay figurines to bury in the experimental houses. It is quite helpful to have gained this insight into the different roles of archaeologists as I decide how to focus my career.

After completing the archaeological field school at Boncuklu, I now have a much better understanding of how an excavation is run, and specifically how a Neolithic site is excavated. I hope to continue studying the transition to sedentism and farming in graduate school, and I now have experience working at an archaeological site in this context, and insight into how this kind of research is carried out. This has truly been a valuable experience as I begin my career as an archaeologist, and I am very grateful for the support that the Jane C. Waldbaum Scholarship has provided.