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# **METAPHYSIS**

## **RITUAL, MYTH AND SYMBOLISM IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE**

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# HUNTING THE BEAST. A RECONSTRUCTED RITUAL IN AN EBA METAL PRODUCTION CENTRE IN WESTERN ANATOLIA\*

## 1. Introduction

The current widely accepted archaeological and sociocultural concept for the dawn of the Aegean Early Bronze Age around 3000 BC points to a society in a process of transformation and consolidation.<sup>1</sup> Recent, but also controversial studies under discussion suggest that this particular cultural transformation process was already in progress within the Chalcolithic period and examine potential indicators of complex societies already for the 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC Aegean.<sup>2</sup> However, one result of this particular sociocultural change, well-known and comprehensively discussed, is clearly visible through the establishment of proto-urban centres around the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC in the Aegean-Western Anatolian world.<sup>3</sup>

This contribution focuses on one potential social ritual in the centuries of consolidation in Early Bronze Age I at Çukuriçi Höyük on the central Anatolian Aegean coast, and proposes the existence of a hunting ritual as a social practice reconstructed through an interdisciplinary study.<sup>4</sup> The archaeological and faunal records provide fragmentary indications of an assumed religious and ritual complexity in a nonliterate prehistoric society that generally lacks any figurative depictions or illustrations of human activities between c. 3000 and 2600 BC. The invisibility of various important aspects of ritual behaviour further restricts the reconstruction of these supernatural and social elements within a prehistoric society.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding this lack in the record, we assume that a specific kind of hunting served as a potential act of ritualization, reflecting a social strategy within a transforming

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\* Excavations at Çukuriçi Höyük were conducted with financial support from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF projects P 19859-G02 and Y 528-G19) and the European Research Council (ERC Starting grant 263339). We further like to thank the Ephesos excavations and all members of the Çukuriçi team.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. C. RENFREW, "Cycladic Metallurgy and the Aegean Early Bronze Age," *AJA* 71 (1967) 1-20; J. MARAN, *Kulturwandel auf dem griechischen Festland und den Kykladen im späten 3. Jahrtausend v. Chr. Studien zu den kulturellen Verhältnissen in Südosteuropa und dem zentralen sowie östlichen Mittelmeerraum in der späten Kupfer- und frühen Bronzezeit* (1998); E. ALRAM-STERN, "Times of Change: Greece and the Aegean during the 4th Millennium BC," in B. HOREJS and M. MEHOFER (eds.), *Western Anatolia before Troy. Proto-Urbanisation in the 4th Millennium BC* (2014) 305-328.

<sup>2</sup> Recently P. TOMKINS and Y. PAPADATOS, "The Emergence of Trade and the Integration of Crete into the Wider Aegean in the Late 4th Millennium: New Evidence and Implications," in HOREJS and MEHOFER eds. (*supra* n. 1) 345-366; B. HOREJS, "Proto-Urbanisation without Urban Centres? A Model of Transformation for the Izmir Region in the 4th Millennium BC," in HOREJS and MEHOFER eds. (*supra* n. 1) 15-42.

<sup>3</sup> O. KOUKA, *Siedlungsorganisation in der Nord- und Ostägäis während der Frühbronzezeit (3. Jt. v. Chr.)* (2002); L. RAHMSTORF, "Zur Ausbreitung vorderasiatischer Innovationen in die frühbronzezeitliche Ägäis," *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 81 (2006) 49-96; V. ŞAHOĞLU, "Trade and Interconnections between Anatolia and the Cyclades during the 3rd Millenium BC," in V. ŞAHOĞLU and P. SOTIRAKOPOULOU (eds.), *Across. The Cyclades and Western Anatolia during the 3rd Millennium BC* (2011) 172-177; MARAN (*supra* n. 1); RENFREW (*supra* n. 1); T. EFE, "Küllüoba and the Initial Stages of Urbanism in Western Anatolia," in M. ÖZDOĞAN and N. BASGELEN (eds.), *From primary villages to cities. Essays in honour of U. Esin* (2003) 265-282. J. MARAN and M. KOSTOULA, "The spider's web: innovation and society in the Early Helladic Period of the Corridor Houses," in Y. GALANAKIS et al. (eds.), *ΑΘΥΡΜΑΤΑ. Critical Essays on the Archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honour of E. Susan Sherratt* (2014) 141-158.

<sup>4</sup> C. HUMPHREY and J. LAIDLAW, "Sacrifice and ritualization," in E. KYRIAKIDIS (ed.), *The Archaeology of Ritual* (2007) 255-276.

<sup>5</sup> M. VERHOEVEN, "The many dimensions of ritual," in T. INSOLL (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion* (2011) 115-132.

community. In this respect we follow Kyriakidis' ritual definition as "an ethic category that refers to set activities with a special (not-normal) intention-in-action, and which are specific to a group of people".<sup>6</sup> A distinction between religious and non-religious (political, social, profane) ritual practice in our case study does not appear promising, as we only have the remains of specific hunted animals, namely large fallow deer and leopard. The hunting of the latter can be correlated with the Near Eastern and Mesopotamian hunting of the beast in a symbolic context of meaning for distinct social groups.<sup>7</sup> It appears obvious that a distinct concept of hunting associated with a social-political elite as known in e.g. Mesopotamia took place coincidentally at the Anatolian Aegean coast in early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. Particularly in that period of Early Bronze Age 1 a strong network from the Aegean coast to Central Anatolia as far as to Mesopotamia and the Levant becomes visible through metallurgy (e.g. special alloy technologies)<sup>8</sup> and the establishment of early metric systems and measurement units,<sup>9</sup> both attested at Early Bronze Age Çukuriçi Höyük.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. The Early Bronze Age site and society

Various sites at the dawn of the Early Bronze Age have been excavated in the East Aegean and Western Anatolia dating to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC (Pl. XCVIa), forming the archaeological cultural background for Çukuriçi Höyük. The tell settlement was originally founded on the Aegean coast in a fertile basin in the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. The settling activities proceeded towards the Early Bronze Age 1. Radiocarbon dates range between the Early Bronze Age settlements of two phases (ÇuHö IV and III), i.e. 2900 to 2750 BC.<sup>11</sup> Two excavated areas revealed agglutinating buildings, separated by a few open courtyards and plastered narrow streets. Additionally, the geophysical survey of the preserved part of the tell shows a dense pattern of similar structures (Pl. XCVIb). The complex settlement structure and architectural system are well known from East Aegean and Western Anatolia (e.g. Poliochni, Thermi, Troy I),<sup>12</sup> as already discussed elsewhere.

Spatial analyses of the material from the excavated EBA single buildings and rooms revealed them to be typically domestic with the processing, storage and consumption of food, as well as textile production on the one hand,<sup>13</sup> and metallurgical workshops on the other. 49 ovens were excavated within the living quarters, representing the remains of a metallurgical production zone. The huge assemblage of metallurgical equipment (e.g. tools, slags, moulds, half-finished objects) allows a reconstruction of the complete *chaîne opératoire* of the metallurgical production process. The studies of M. Mehofer including typological, archaeometrical and geochemical analyses reveal intensive arsenical copper production at the site that we are interpreting as a regional metallurgical production centre.<sup>14</sup> Besides being a centre for metal exchange, the site also appears to have been a gateway

<sup>6</sup> E. KYRIAKIDIS, "Archaeologies of Ritual", in KYRIAKIDIS ed. (*supra* n. 5) 294.

<sup>7</sup> A. GALIK *et al.*, "Der nächtliche Jäger als Beute – Zur prähistorischen Leopardenjagd", *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 87/2 (2012) 261-307.

<sup>8</sup> M. MEHOFER, "Metallurgy during the Chalcolithic and the Beginning of the Early Bronze Age in Western Anatolia," in HOREJS and MEHOFER eds. (*supra* n. 1) 463-489; H. BORN and S. HANSEN, *Helme und Waffen Alteuropas* (2001).

<sup>9</sup> MARAN (*supra* n. 1) 299-305; RAHMSTORF (*supra* n. 3) 49-96.

<sup>10</sup> B. HOREJS, "Metalworkers at the Çukuriçi Höyük? An Early Bronze Age Mould and a "Near Eastern weight" from Western Anatolia," in T.L. KIENLIN and B. ROBERTS (eds.), *Metals and Societies. Studies in honour of Barbara S. Ottaway* (2009) 358-368.

<sup>11</sup> B. HOREJS *et al.*, "Aktivitäten und Subsistenz in den Siedlungen des Çukuriçi Höyük. Der Forschungsstand nach den Ausgrabungen 2006-2009," *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 86/1 (2011) 31-66.

<sup>12</sup> Cp. KOUKA (*supra* n. 3); M. IVANOVA, "Domestic Architecture in the Early Bronze Age of Western Anatolia: The Row-Houses of Troy I," *AnSt* 63 (2013) 17-33.

<sup>13</sup> Ch. BRITSCH and B. HOREJS, "The Role of Textile Production and Fishing in the EBA Metallurgical Centre of Çukuriçi Höyük," *Egypt and Levant* 24 (2014) 229-242.

<sup>14</sup> B. HOREJS *et al.*, "Metallhandwerker im frühen 3. Jt. v. Chr. – Neue Ergebnisse vom Çukuriçi Höyük," *IstMitt* 60 (2010) 7-37; MEHOFER (*supra* n. 8).



community for raw material imports and distribution further inland, particularly for Melian obsidian.<sup>15</sup> As we have argued elsewhere, the high amount of Melian obsidian at around 70% of the EBA lithics is highly conspicuous, and can only be compared with sites at or around the obsidian sources, since obsidian only occurs in much lower amounts at contemporary sites in Western Anatolia.<sup>16</sup> Very briefly summarized, Çukuriçi's community at the dawn of the Bronze Age appears integrated in a regional as well as in an interregional network. The intensive copper production (and potentially also raw material exchange) reflects a specialized economy, far from simple subsistence.

So far, our ongoing excavations and studies could not extract one outstanding area or building that could reflect some special socio-political group or elite in any particular space. On the contrary, the spatial distribution of materials and homogenous architecture appears to be regular and egalitarian. The zoological remains indicate a potential social differentiation within the Çukuriçi community that we interpret as final deposits of social hunting rituals.

### 3. Faunal analyses - stock keeping and hunting

The faunal remains were mainly accumulated through domestic refuse and allow the reconstruction of food webs and subsistence strategies. Animal flesh was supplied through the raising of livestock, for which ovicaprines and cattle provided the greater part of the meat supply (Pl. XCVIIa-b),<sup>17</sup> though goat seem to have been of greater importance than sheep in the Early Bronze Age following a characteristic pattern of the Western Anatolian Coast.<sup>18</sup> Pig was regularly consumed but to a lesser extent than the other domesticates (Pl. XCVIIa-b). It appears unlikely that domesticates were kept within the living and metal production areas at the beginnings of urbanization, nor that the metal workers herded the animals themselves. The stocks might have been kept at some distance from these areas. The culling patterns obtained from postcranial elements indicate the exploitation strategies of the livestock; a high percentage of cattle lived up to 4 years, most of the ovicaprines were slaughtered in their third year, while most of the pigs as younger animals, which altogether indicates a pattern of meat exploitation. Nevertheless, various kinds of culling stages, including new-borns, specify that stocks, or at least parts of the stocks, were kept in the vicinity of the settlement and the animals could have been slaughtered at any time of the year, as well as having been used for dairy production.

The other important source of subsistence was maritime food as illustrated by the overwhelming numerical and weight frequencies of molluscs (Pl. XCVIIc-d). The major part of the shells consists of edible cockles (*Cerastoderma glaucum*) besides a large number of other bivalve species. Limpets (*Patella sp.*) and ceriths (*Cerithium vulgatum*) served as the most important gastropods, which also revealed a large number of edible and inedible species as well. The high diversity of fish species and a dolphin rib fragment reflects the "maritime culture" of the Çukuriçi people. They fished close to the shore as the frequency of sea bream or mugilids suggests. However, the remains of very large fish as well as sharks and rays probably indicate fishing at some distance off the shore as well.

### 4. A hunting ritual?

Hunting did not play an important role in the daily subsistence of the Early Bronze Age settlement, although 20% of the identifiable mammal remains belong to wild species and reflect diversity in their composition, which include hare, boar and aurochs which supplemented the protein

<sup>15</sup> *Cp.* the particular role of gateway communities as discussed recently by Y. PAPADATOS and P. TOMKINS, "Trading, the Longboat, and Cultural Interaction in the Aegean During the Late Fourth Millennium B.C.E.: The View from Kephala Petras, East Crete," *AJA* 117 (2013) 353-381.

<sup>16</sup> M. BERGNER *et al.*, "Zur Herkunft der Obsidianartefakte vom Çukuriçi Höyük," *StTroica* 18 (2008) 251-273; D. KNITTER *et al.*, "Integrated centrality analysis: A diachronic comparison of selected Western Anatolian locations," *Quaternary International* 312 (2013) 45-56.

<sup>17</sup> For detail analyses s. HOREJS *et al.* 2011 (*supra* n. 11).

<sup>18</sup> G. FORSTENPOINTNER *et al.*, "Tierreste," in F. KRINZINGER (ed.), *Hanghaus 2 in Ephesos die Wohnheiten 1 und 2. Forschungen in Ephesos VIII/8* (2010) 357-369.

supply. Other small carnivores like mustelids, fox or wild cat were probably hunted for their fur. Large carnivores like bear and leopard do not reflect hunting for food, fur or hide alone, but undoubtedly also represented very prestigious hunting targets.

As argued elsewhere hunting of leopards and its figural depiction is strongly connected with religious spheres.<sup>19</sup> Quite interesting for the interpretation of the Çukuriçi Höyük remains of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium is a shift in the leopard's symbolic meaning through time. First depictions and reliefs from the early Holocene stress the dangerous side of the beast with connotation of claws and teeth, as well as its unexpected and dynamic movements and pounces (e.g. Bou Senghoum and Göbekli Tepe).<sup>20</sup> This easily understandable meaning was later in the Neolithic period transferred to a more static symbol interpreted as “domesticating” the wild and dangerous life outside the earliest permanent settlements, like in Çatalhöyük.<sup>21</sup> Ian Hodder convincingly argued that the frequent pictures, figurines and reliefs of leopards represent the dangerous magical world outside the protected households as a conscious contradiction to the farmer's “secure” life.<sup>22</sup> The second symbolic content in early prehistory is the strong connection of leopards to the female goddess, the so called *Lady of the Beasts*. Last but not least, the third symbolic element is already recognizable in these early periods, i.e. the transfer of the leopard's magic power through the wearing of its coat, probably by special persons or groups successful in hunting the beast.<sup>23</sup>

The character of the leopard's image changes in Anatolia, the Near East and Iran with the beginning of the transformation process from farming societies into another social and political structure in the Chalcolithic 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> millennium<sup>24</sup> and is continuing into the Early Bronze Age. At that time, the animal is frequently depicted as an individual creature and the combination with female attributes or goddess disappear. Their primary signs like claws, teeth and the dynamic movements are modestly depicted and the leopard seems to reflect a more “domesticated and controllable danger”. New scenes develop depicting leopards hunting other creatures such as wild goats or snakes, probably mythological scenes we are no longer able to decipher. The fur as symbolic mediator of the leopard's power and danger is still frequently used and illustrated in 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, with the relation between leopards and the elite becoming clearly visible such as on the famous banner from Ur or the seal from Ebla.<sup>25</sup> The meaning of leopards in early dynastic Egypt has to be differentiated from Anatolia or the Near East and is apparently based on a very complex imaginary and spiritual sphere, where it is a crucial element in religious and elite contexts.<sup>26</sup>

The briefly summarized contemporaneous symbolic expressions support the interpretation of a community in a social transformation process for the Early Bronze Age at Çukuriçi Höyük, in Anatolia and in the Near East. Leopards are linked to the first elite groups and their hunting behaviour appears to be a distinct social expression. Could the leopard remains from Çukuriçi Höyük reflect a social hunting ritual demonstrating or supporting the power of an outstanding group of persons?

However, the most abundant wild animal in Çukuriçi's Early Bronze Age is fallow deer represented mainly by postcranial elements directly indicating hunting. The major part of the bones represents rather large individuals probably demonstrating a specialization on prestigious stag hunting, likely in some ritual/cultic context (Pl. XCVIIe). Another distinctive feature is the presence of numerous more or less completely preserved stag antlers in various house contexts of the Early Bronze Age (Pl. XCVIIIa-b), especially in relation to the minimal frequency of artefacts and tools made of

<sup>19</sup> For detailed discussion and catalogue of objects as well as bones s. GALIK *et al.* (*supra* n. 7).

<sup>20</sup> R. NEHREN, *Zur Prähistorie der Maghrebländer. Marokko-Algerien-Tunesien* (1992), Pl. 84; K. SCHMIDT, *Sie bauten die ersten Tempel. Das rätselhafte Heiligtum der Steinzeitjäger* (2006) 234 Fig. 10.

<sup>21</sup> For example J. MELLAART, *Çatal Hüyük* (1967) Fig. 6, 51.

<sup>22</sup> I. HODDER, *The Leopard's Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Çatalhöyük* (2006).

<sup>23</sup> GALIK *et al.* (*supra* n. 7) 297-300.

<sup>24</sup> See discussion in GALIK *et al.* (*supra* n. 7) 282 Fig. 15, 296-300.

<sup>25</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art (ed.), *Art of first cities* (2003) 100; 173 Fig. 112.

<sup>26</sup> GALIK *et al.* (*supra* n. 7) 280-285.

antler found in these contexts. If not used as raw material these antlers probably reflect a higher symbolic meaning.

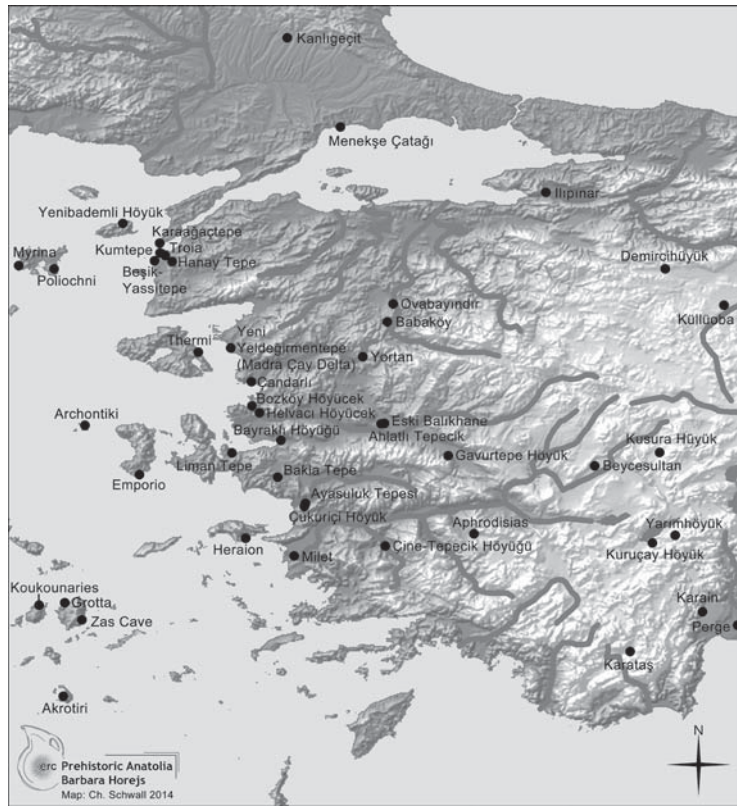
## **5. Discussion**

The Early Bronze Age settlements at Çukuriçi Höyük indicate not only a highly organized settling structure at the Western Coast of Anatolia. They reveal a society having sufficient navigation skills and maritime traditions that provided exchange goods like the highly valuable obsidian from Melos at one hand. At the other hand the inhabitants obviously had profound knowledge in the processing and use of arsenic copper metal another item of high value in sense of exchange goods. Such a society, especially when living in protourban settlement structures, was certainly sufficiently supplied with animal protein by domesticates, probably kept and herded by people of another societal level. The people living in multifunctional houses at EBA Çukuriçi Höyük preferred a diet provided by extensive exploitation of natural resources. Though, it can be assumed that the daily food of these inhabitants was provided safely, they spend obviously effort and time hunting on wild beasts. On one hand there is evidence of leopard hunting that was connected to ritual and religious behavior from the earliest periods onwards. Although, the ritual context and depiction of leopards shifted through time, they continued being a kind of a sacred animal even in the Early Bronze Ages. Nevertheless, the most important game was fallow deer and the hunters targeted obviously for large stags mirroring special behavior that was connoted not only to a society of a higher level but also to ritual events. Although antler was certainly used as raw material to some extent the pattern of unused and complete stag antlers could be interpreted as remains of a house cult-ritual within the multifunctional rooms at Early Bronze Age Çukuriçi Höyük.

Barbara HOREJS  
Alfred GALIK

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

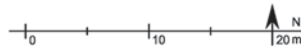
- Pl. XCVIa Excavated sites dating to Early Bronze Age 1 (Map: Ch. Schwall/ERC Prehistoric Anatolia).
- Pl. XCVIb Settlements dating to Early Bronze Age 1 at Çukuriçi Höyük (Plan: M. Börner, S. Grasböck/ERC Prehistoric Anatolia).
- Pl. XCVIIa Numerical distribution of major domesticates at EBA 1 Çukuriçi Höyük (graph: A. Galik).
- Pl. XCVIIb Weight distribution of major domesticates at EBA 1 Çukuriçi Höyük (graph: A. Galik).
- Pl. XCVIIc Numerical faunal distribution at EBA 1 Çukuriçi Höyük (graph: A. Galik).
- Pl. XCVIIId Weight quantification of the faunal distribution at EBA 1 Çukuriçi Höyük (graph: A. Galik).
- Pl. XCVIIe Diagram of the size distribution of fallow deer remains based on LSI values. According to R.H. MEADOW, "The Use of Size Index Scaling Techniques for Research on Archaeozoological Collections from the Middle East," in C. BECKER *et al.*, *Historia Animalium ex Ossibus: Beiträge aus Paläoanatomie, Archäologie, Ägyptologie, Ethnologie und Geschichte der Tiermedizin* (1999) 285-300, the standard individual is a four year old female individual from the reference collection at the Inst. for Anatomy, Histology and Embryology (graph: A. Galik).
- Pl. XCVIIIa Spatial distribution of fallow deer antler finds in trenches S1-S4 at EBA 1 Çukuriçi Höyük, for detail list s. table 1 (plan: M. Börner/ERC Prehistoric Anatolia).
- Pl. XCVIIIb Rooms in phases ÇuHö III and IV revealing fallow deer antler finds (tab.: A. Galik).



a



- settlement phase ÇuHö III
- settlement phase ÇuHö IV
- prospected area
- excavated area

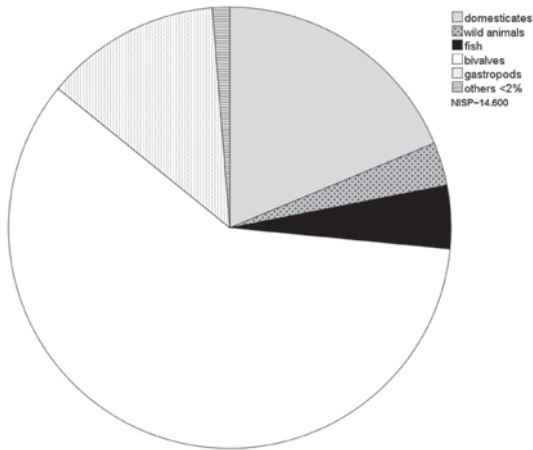


Çukuriçi Höyük  
schematic architectural plan, Early Bronze Age

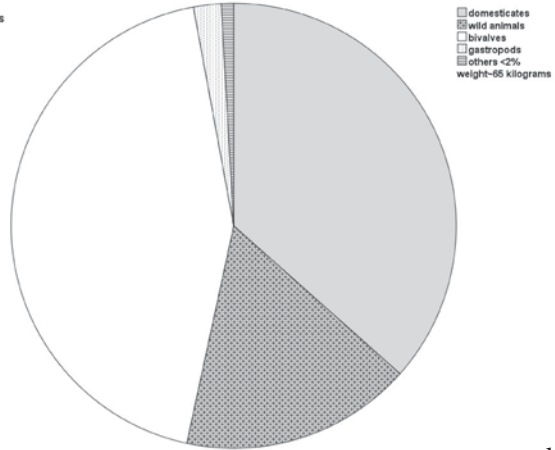
Geophysics by:  
**ZAMG**  
Zentralanstalt für  
Meteorologie und  
Geodynamik

erc Prehistoric Anatolia  
Barbara Horejs  
map: Börner, Grasböck

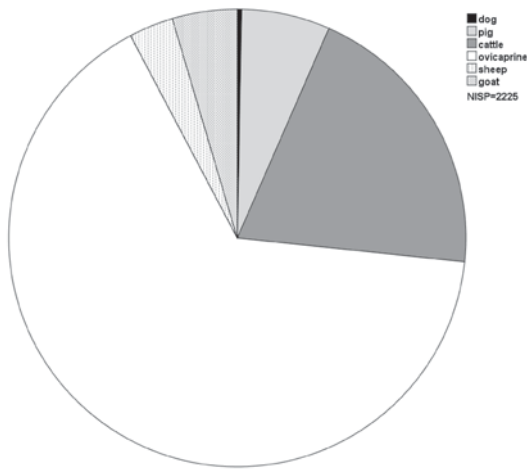
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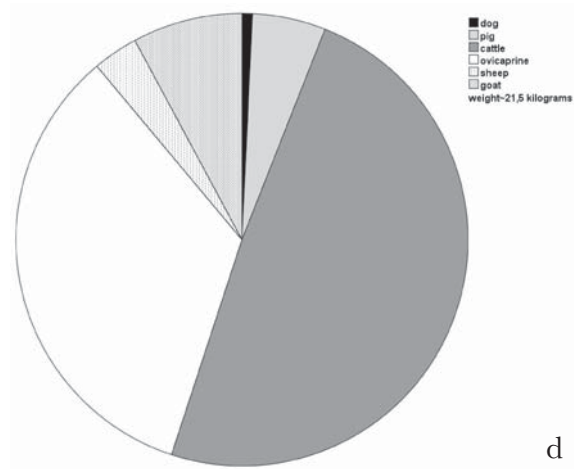
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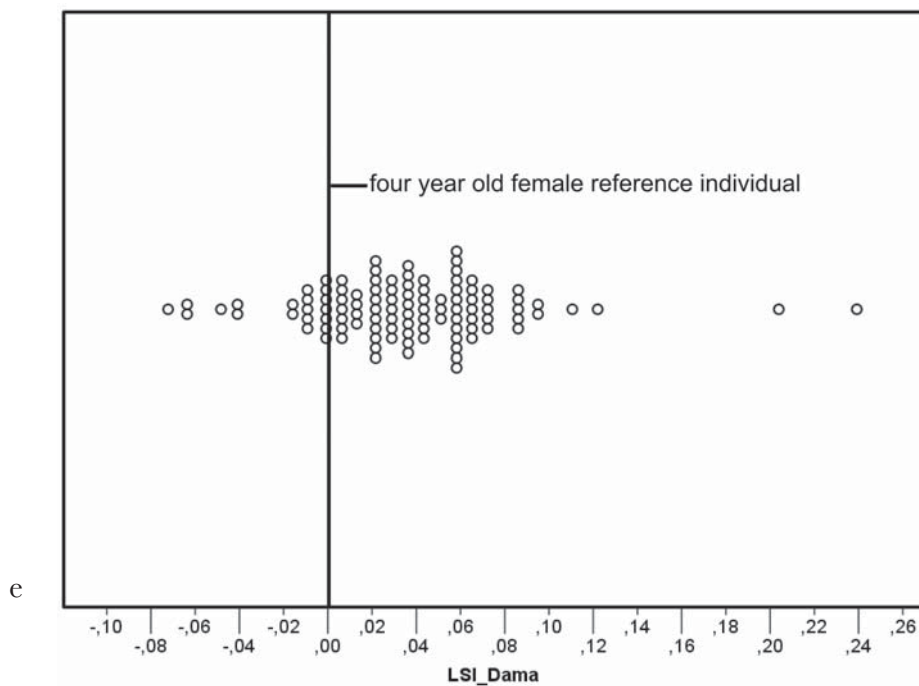
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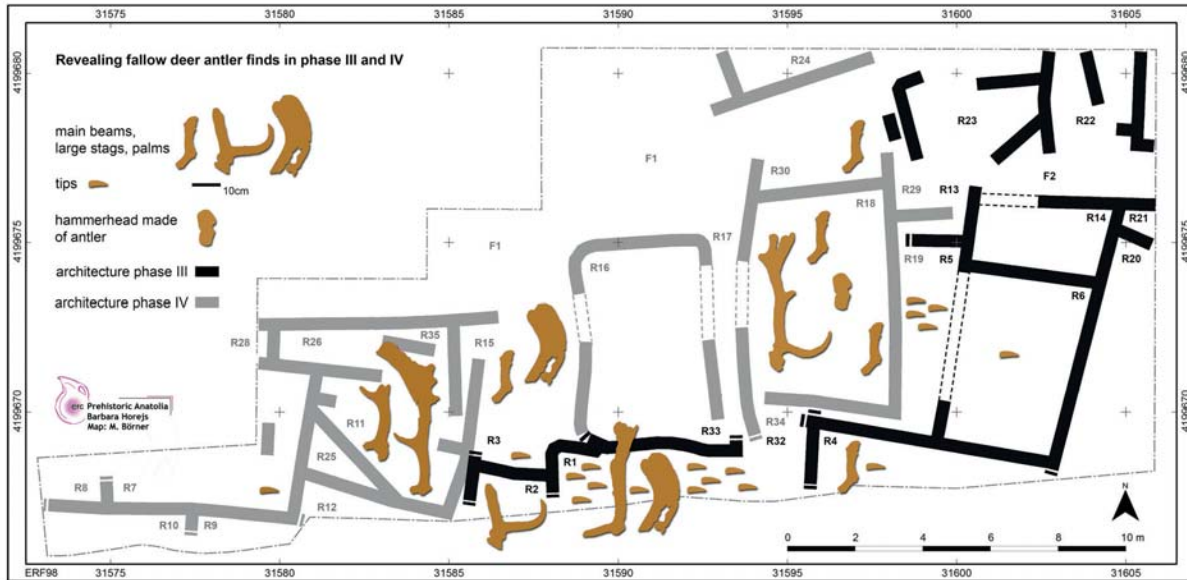
c



d



e



a

Phase ÇuHö IV	Phase ÇuHö III
<u>Room 1:</u> contained 12 new antler fragments, the middle part of an antler showing circular cut marks on the main beam, an unmodified tip, another shed main beam and a modified specimen, tips removed from palms and tips with rounded edges	<u>Room 7:</u> an unmodified antler tip
<u>Room 2:</u> contained the base of a large stag's shed antler	<u>Room 11:</u> contained one shed main beam fragment and one unshed antler with rounded edges on the palm's margins
<u>Room 4:</u> contained one unmodified antler tip and one unshed antler of a young individual	<u>Room 15:</u> contained one main beam and another antler palm without modification
<u>Room 6:</u> unmodified antler tip	<u>Room 18:</u> contained one unshed and another unmodified main beam, a large and unmodified stag's antler and a hammerhead made of antler with a groove for a stone tool
	<u>Room 19:</u> 4 unmodified antler tips
	<u>Room 30:</u> the fill of a pit revealed an unmodified main beam
	<u>SE1014: Pit 988:</u> contained a large stag's antler

b