



Earliest Occupation at Ařađı Pınar: Layer 7

Ařađı Pınar ilk Yerleřim Evresi: 7. Tabaka

řemsettin Akyol¹ , řafak Nergiz² , Eylem Özdođan³ 



ABSTRACT

Toward the end of the last Ice Age, the transition from hunting and gathering to a settled life based on food production was the first step in radical changes that would determine the history of humanity. A very dynamic process was experienced during the approximately 4,000 year-long period known as the Neolithic; as the main elements that determined the Neolithic lifestyle formed over time, the Neolithic geography also tended toward a continuous expansion. The earliest settlements in Eastern Thrace correspond to a process where it was culturally settled with all the rules of the Neolithic lifestyle, and these settlements expanded their geography to the Balkan Peninsula. As one of the earliest settlements in Eastern Thrace, Ařađı Pınar is located along the southern outskirts of the Istranca Mountains and the northern part of the Ergene Basin. The period of the first occupation in Ařađı Pınar has been dated to 6000-5750 BC. This period corresponds to the Late Neolithic/ Early Chalcolithic Period of the Anatolian timeline. This paper discusses the earliest settlement phase known as Layer 7 in Ařađı Pınar through its architectural features. This period represents the early stages of settled life in the Balkans, and this paper will emphasize the characteristics of the settlement in Ařađı Pınar and the general evaluations of life during this period.

Keywords: Eastern Thrace, Ařađı Pınar, Neolithic, Wattle And Daub Architecture, Ditch

Öz

Yakındođu'da son buzul çađının sonlarına dođru avcılık ve toplayıcılıktan yerleřik ve besin üretiminin benimsendiđi bir yařama geçiř, insanlık tarihini belirleyecek köklü deđiřimlerin ilk adımı olur. Neolitik olarak adlandırılan, yaklaşık dört bin yıllık bir dönem boyunca oldukça dinamik bir süreç yařanmış, bu yařam biçimini oluřturan ana unsurlar zaman içinde şekillendiđi gibi Neolitik cođrafya da sürekli bir geniřleme eğilimi içerisinde olmuřtur. Dođu Trakya'daki ilk yerleřimler, kültürel olarak Neolitik yařam biçiminin tüm kurallarıyla oturduđu ve cođrafyasını Balkan Yarımadası'na dođu geniřlettiđi bir sürece karşılık gelir. Dođu Trakya'nın ilk tarımcı köy topluluklarından birisi olan Ařađı Pınar, Istranca Dađları'nın güney etekleri ve Ergene Havzası'nın kuzey kesiminde yer alır. Ařađı Pınar İlk Yerleřim Evresi olarak adlandırılan zaman dilimi MÖ 6. bin yılın ilk çeyređine tarihlenir. Bu dönem Balkan terminolojisiyle İlk Neolitik (Karanovo I-II), Anadolu kronolojisi ile Son Neolitik/ İlk Kalkolitik Dönem'e denk gelir. Bu yazıda Ařađı Pınar höyüđünün ilk yerleřim evresi olarak tanımlanan 7. tabaka, mimari özellikleriyle ele alınacaktır. Balkanlar'da yerleřik yařamın erken ařamalarını yansıtan bu dönemde, Ařađı Pınar'daki yerleřim özellikleri ve yařamın geneline iliřkin deđerlendirmeler üzerinde durulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dođu Trakya, Ařađı Pınar, Neolitik, Dal örgü mimari, Hendek

¹Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Department of Archeology, Çanakkale, Türkiye

²Kırkırelili University, Faculty of Architecture, Kırklareli, Türkiye

³İstanbul University, Prehistoric Archeology, İstanbul, Türkiye

ORCID ID: ř.A. 0000-0002-1447-5846;

ř.N. 0000-0003-4859-8315;

E.O. 0000-0003-1314-3695

Sorumlu yazar/Corresponding author:

řemsettin Akyol,

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi, Arkeoloji

Bölümü, Çanakkale, Türkiye

E-mail: akyol192@gmail.com

Başvuru/Submitted: 05.06.2022

Kabul/Accepted: 07.07.2022

Atıf/Citation: Akyol, S., Nergiz, S., & Ozdogan, E.

(2022). Earliest occupation at ařađı pınar: layer

7. *Anadolu Arařtırmaları-Anatolian Research*,

26, 27–40.

<https://doi.org/10.26650/anar.2022.1126062>



Introduction

The period from the end of the 7th millennium BC to the middle of the 6th millennium BC constitutes the initial phase of settled life in the Eastern Balkans, and what cultural affinity had existed among the Anatolian Plateau, Greece, and the Balkans was quite uncertain until recently due to the lack of research, especially in regard to the Anatolian Plateau. On the contrary, numerous settlements began being excavated in the early 20th century in Southeastern Europe. Settlements such as Sesklo (Tsountas, 1908), Starçevo (Fewkes et al. 1933), Vinca (Vasic, 1906), and Karanovo (Mikov, 1939) in particular are considered the key Neolithic settlements in Southeastern Europe today and have determined the main lines of the chronological progression there. However, some isolated sites in different parts of the Anatolian Plateau such as Fikirtepe (Bittel, 1969), Hacılar (Mellaart, 1970), and Çatalhöyük (Mellaart, 1967) were excavated at the late 1950s and 1960s. After these first excavations, studies in the west of the Anatolian Peninsula started mainly in the 90s and detailed results began to be obtained after the 2000s. Thus, until a few decades ago, discussions of the interactions between Southeast Europe and Anatolia were reduced to a conceptual level.

There is a similar research history for Eastern Thrace, which is located within the borders of Turkey. Despite its positional importance to understand the prehistoric interactions between the Balkans and Anatolia, prehistoric research in Eastern Thrace had been scarce compared to surrounding regions. Apart from some small-scale excavations such as Alpulu, which had been started as Tumulus and was carried out by Arif M. Mansel as the Director of Thrace Excavations in the 1930s that were noticed to have been settlements (Mansel, 1940), no proper prehistoric research had occurred in the region until the systematic surveys conducted by Mehmet Ozdoğan in 1979. Ozdoğan explored a large part of Eastern Thrace with his surveys in the region and carried out excavations in settlements such as Toptepe, Hoca Çeşme, Yarımburgaz, and Aşağı Pınar (Ozdoğan, 2013). These studies presented factual data revealing the region's place in cultural history and necessitated a reexamination of Anatolian-Balkan relations (Ozdoğan, 1994).

With the systematic excavations that started in Aşağı Pınar in 1993 in particular, the site became one of the key settlements of the region in terms of both stratigraphic sequence and architectural features. The links between the distinct geographical units, which were first observed in Hoca Çeşme, are more clearly seen in Aşağı Pınar, and this also revealed significant cultural similarities to exist between the Anatolia and the Eastern Balkans.

Aşağı Pınar and Its Environmental Characteristics

Aşağı Pınar is located approximately 500 m south of Kırklareli city center. The settlement is located just south of the dry Haydar Dere creek, a small branch of the Şeytan Dere, one of the tributaries of the Ergene River (Ozdoğan et al., 1997).

The area where the settlement is located is a region that transitions from a mountain to a plain environment and is also rich in water resources. The settlement is covered with forested areas and open lands suitable for agriculture as a result of its proximity to the Istranca Mountains and the Ergene Basin. Therefore, it has convenient conditions in terms of food and raw material resources (Ozdoğan, 2009).

The settlement was first discovered during the surface surveys Mehmet Ozdoğan had carried out in the region in the early 1980s, and excavations of it started in 1993 as a joint Turkish-German project under the direction of Mehmet Ozdoğan representing Turkey and Hermann Parzinger and then Svend Hansen representing Germany (Karul et al., 2003; Hansen & Schwarzberg, 2005; Eres et al., 2015; Ozdoğan & Schwarzberg, 2020). Fieldwork on the mound finished up in 2019, making it the longest-running excavation in Eastern Thrace. However, comprehensive publication studies and the open-air museum project are still in progress.

The settlement consists of eight layers and roughly date back to between 6000 and 4700 BC with approximately three meters worth of fill. As the earliest layers of the settlement, Layers 7 and 6 correspond to the period in Anatolia known as the Late Neolithic-Early Chalcolithic; it is referred to as the Early Neolithic in Balkan terminology and as the Karanovo I-II in Bulgaria. The upper Layers 5 through 2 correspond to the period known in Anatolia as the Middle Chalcolithic, in the Balkans as the Middle-Late Neolithic, and in Bulgaria as Karanovo III-IV (Ozdoğan, 2013). An intermediate phase is also found between Layers 5 and 6 and is called the Transitional Layer 5-6. This period is known as the Transition Phase in the Balkans and as the Karanovo II/III Phase in Bulgaria (Ozdoğan, 2009).

Layers 7 and 6 reflect the initial stages of the first settled village life in the Balkans. These layers reflect an uninterrupted process and are represented by spaces in a rectangular plan. They are located either adjacent or close to one another and were built with the wattle and daub technique in the northern and northeastern parts of the mound (Ozdoğan, E., 2011, 2016).

The First Settlement Phase Problem

Although not yet having many examples to be able support what is known of Eastern Thrace's settlement process due to the mentioned research deficiencies, the process has become more understandable, especially with the studies conducted in the last three decades. The settlement where one can follow the earliest stages of the Neolithic period is Hoca Çeşme. According to the lowest Phase IV and III C¹⁴ data, Hoca Çeşme roughly dates back to 6400-6000 BC (Karul, 2000).

One of the exciting features of Hoca Çeşme is its architecture. The architecture seen in Phase IV and III consists entirely of round-planned wattle and daub structures. However, Phase II reveals a significant change in the architecture, one where the building plan had changed with the round-planned building type being replaced by rectangular-planned buildings. However, the wattle and daub technique were maintained (Karul, 1994).

Wattle and daub structures are also characteristic in Aşağı Pınar, which is understood to have been inhabited in a more contemporary period with the Hoca Çeşme Phase II. However, the knowledge about on the first settlement phase was changed over time as a result of 27 seasonal field studies. Therefore, the building group in Layer 6 that consists of the adjacent rectangular-planned wattle-and-daub architecture that was unearthed during the first studies conducted in the northern part of the mound have been accepted as belonging to the first settlement phase of Aşağı Pınar (Karul et al., 2003). As the work expanded, the increase in the number of pottery pieces, which are characterized by red-on-white paint decoration in the east of the mound and shares similar forms to that in the Layer 6 material but with higher quality production, suggested the presence of a Layer 7. With the enlargement of the excavated area, building remains belonging to a rectangular-planned wattle and daub architecture were found in the northwestern part of the mound. In addition, two different ditch systems belonging to Layer 7 were also identified. Monochrome and relatively coarse wares, especially from the areas close to the bottom of these ditches, were seen as a possible indication of the existence of a Layer 8. However, no building phase was found below Layer 7 (Özdoğan, 2022). After the excavations were completed, Layer 7 was identified as being the first settlement phase of Aşağı Pınar.

Architecture

Layer 7 is the first architecturally defined settlement phase at Aşağı Pınar and has been understood in detail, especially in recent years. Accordingly, the first settlement on the mound was probably established in the highest part of the topography of that period, and a building group consisting of four adjacent rooms was unearthed here. The lowest phase of Layer 7 is represented by rectangular-planned wattle and daub structures. Two different ditch systems represent the other phases (Özdoğan, 2016; see Fig. 1).

The unearthed structures are located just above the bedrock in the eastern part of the mound. In the later layers, the proportions are larger and either adjacent situated close to one another. The dimensions of the buildings vary from approximately 40-55 m² (see Fig. 2). Some of the structures built with the wattle and daub technique were destroyed by the ditches, and others by Layer 6. For this reason, the structures could only be preserved at the ground level. The few post holes that were uncovered suggest that the walls had been built using thin posts. The spaces between these posts were filled in with brown mud, and the

virgin soil of the mound is understood to have been used while preparing this building mortar. The floors of the houses were carefully made. After the walls were built, the floors were leveled by scraping, and lime or clay plasters were applied. Some floors have more than one renewal phase. In structure no. 7-3 in particular located in the northwest, an intermediate soil layer of about 10 cm was filled only once and then was again plastered with lime and clay. A bench and storage units were added to the room during this renewal process. Red ocher was found in the middle part of the floors from structures no. 7-1 and 7-2 to the east of the building block (see Fig. 3).

Quite a few finds were unearthed inside the buildings. However, the fill about 20-25 cm above the floor was composed mostly of the building rubble and contains very small fractured potsherds and animal bones. This situation suggests that the structures may have been abandoned before being destroyed.

In Layer 7, tasks related to daily life were carried out partly inside the houses and to a large extent in the open areas where dense clay, lime surfaces, and three hearths were found just north of the buildings.

In the later phases of Layer 7, the building complex has been abandoned. However, later phases are known only through the two different ditch systems. Although the C¹⁴ data have not yielded any new information yet, a slight time difference probably exists between these ditches. Among these ditch systems, the ditch that perhaps represents the middle phase involves a ditch system extending in the northwest-southeast direction to the west of the area where the structures in the lowest phase are located and forming the image of a chain in how the ends are articulated around one another. Unlike the middle phase, the ditch in the south, representing a later phase, was opened in one go; it extends in the east-west direction and shapes a concave arc toward the north.

The ditches, which are considered the middle phase here, have varying lengths and an average width of approximately 2 meters. They have an average depth of 2.5 meters. Here, the ditch is composed of a series of long oval pits that appear to have been added to each other and lengthened, as opposed to being a channel that had been opened up all at once. As a result, the sides of the ditches narrow toward the bottom, giving a U- or V-shaped profile (see Fig. 4). The ditch was enlarged on the south side, possibly by pits that had been opened at different times. The quality of the fill that accumulated in the ditches and pits is pretty standard. The top is mixed fill; below it is fill consisting mainly of thin layers of lime, clay, and soil layers; and the bottom has soil with thicker stratifications of yellow and brown virgin soil fills. The similarity between the fill in the ditches and pits and the unearthed archaeological material gives the impression that the ditches and pits had been used at the same time and been filled intentionally (Ozdoğan et al., 2017).

The ditch further south represents the upper phase of Layer 7 and draws a one-piece concave arc that extends east to west. The width of the ditch varies, with an average of 2 m. The ditch continues almost uninterrupted for about 100 m from the western part of the mound (see Fig. 5). This ditch was probably opened at the same time in the form of a channel, and inside it is fill made up of thick soil layers at the bottom and thin layers of lime and clay at the upper section, with another section of fill above it consisting of soil layers of varying thickness. Like the other ditch, this one is understood to exhibit a three-stage process. In addition, pits with the same inner fill were excavated in the southern parts of the upper-phase ditch, just like the middle-phase ditch (see Fig. 6).

When evaluated in general, although some questions such as whether a relationship exists between the ditches in the north and south or whether they were more contemporary for a short time have yet to be answered, the settlement is understood to have expanded to the south and west toward the end of Layer 7. As is known from previous years, the structures in Layer 6 rise above the ditch in Layer 7 in some places, indicating that the ditch had lost its function in Layer 6. However, one should not overlook that the ditch, having not been completely filled, may have at least been partially used (Ozdoğan, 2016; Ozdoğan & Schwarzberg, 2020).

Although the function of the ditch remains unclear, it had at least clearly not been used for drainage or to enclose the settlement. Quality pottery, figurines, and some human bones are noteworthy found in the fill found in the ditch. The pottery consists of large broken pieces, suggesting that they may have been deliberately broken and thrown into the ditch (see Fig. 8). Although the variety of wares and forms is limited, the decorations are distinct and distinguishable. The fact that the ditch finds consist of a limited number of quality items suggests that this place had been used for cult purposes (Ozdoğan, 2013).

Conclusions

Aşağı Pınar is a settlement with a history that reflects a long uninterrupted period within a particular dynamic of change. From the early stages of Layer 7, the first settlement phase is known to have used the wattle and daub technique to construct its structures. Reflecting the early stages of the first settlement process of Eastern Thrace, the architecture seen in Phases IV and III from the Hoca Çeşme settlement consists entirely of circular-planned wattle and daub structures. The rectangular-planned wattle and daub houses seen in Phase II had been used in the construction of buildings since the first settlement phase of Aşağı Pınar; this shows how the first residents in Eastern Thrace had searched for diversity during the construction process, as the wattle and daub construction technique had appeared to be monotonous.

Layer 7 is understood to have buildings that were built adjacent or close to each other, and the spaces in front of the houses were used intensively. In other words, they appear to

have functioned as courtyards. Therefore, the emptiness of the interior must be related to the buildings' abandonment period. However, the numerical scarcity and distribution of the building elements suggest that most of the daily work had occurred in the courtyards. With its components gathered in a shared and open space, the courtyard tradition brings to mind its more contemporary counterparts in Northwestern Anatolia and the Lake District (Duru, 2008; Karul & Avcı, 2013; Roodenberg & Alpaslan-Roodenberg, 2013; Özdoğan, 2015), where the buildings have been built to open up to a shared courtyard, which is the general characteristic displayed in the settlement logic.

Another difference observed between Aşağı Pınar and the settlements in question is related to the use of open spaces. Although the spaces in front of the buildings in Aktopraklık and Ilıpınar as well as Layer 7 in Aşağı Pınar were used as courtyards where daily work was carried out, Layer 6 also has these open areas, but they opened out broadly while remaining relatively empty and undefined. Therefore, the daily activities that had been carried out outside are understood to have been taken inside the home.

The ditch systems encountered in Layer 7, are observed to have been a phenomenon frequently used for the Early Neolithic communities of Eastern Balkans and Thrace, as a result of the impact from increased research in recent years. However, differences of opinion still exist regarding the intended use of this phenomenon and are divided into two main groups. The first are those who view them as having been needed for defense, while the second view them as having been used for some sort of ritual.

In the contemporary period, many ditch settlements have been identified in Bulgaria (see Nikolova, 2021). In the Thrace region apart from Aşağı Pınar, ditches have been found in Yabolkovo 1-2, Yabalkovo 1, Yabalkovo 2, Nova Nadezhda, Pilyov Kaynak, and Kazlacha, all of which are located in Northern Thrace. The Yabolkovo settlement has two ditch systems, one in the north and the other in the southeast. The ditches have a rectangular cross-section and follow each other in a chain fashion (Petrova & Nikolova, 2014; Nikolova, 2021). Five different ditches were identified in the Nova Nadezhda settlement. These ditches were not used simultaneously and have time differences between them, which is also reflected in the C¹⁴ data. Accordingly, the outermost ditch is the latest, and the innermost ditch is the earliest. Holes for wooden pole posts have also been found along the sides of the outer ditch (Bacvarov et al., 2016b).

Ditches have also been detected in geomagnetic surveys at the Kazlacha and Pilyov Kaynak settlements (Bacvarov et al., 2016a), with Kazlacha having two different ditches (Petrova et al., 2016).

Discussions about the purpose for which the ditches unearthed in Aşağı Pınar as well as its more contemporary settlements were used are ongoing. However, the information obtained from both Aşağı Pınar and more contemporary settlements shows that the construction of these ditches had required great labor and social organization and that the finds unearthed in them were too complex to have been used for a simple drainage or enclosure process.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: He studies at Aşağı Pınar is supported by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Research Fund of the Istanbul University (Project No. 2018-30107), German Archaeological Institute (DAI Berlin), and the German Research Foundation (DFG; Project No. SCHW 1570/1-1).

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of Study- Ş.A., Ş.N., E.Ö.; Data Acquisition- Ş.A., Ş.N., E.Ö.; Data Analysis/ Interpretation- Ş.A., Ş.N., E.Ö.; Drafting Manuscript- Ş.A., Ş.N., E.Ö.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- Ş.A., Ş.N., E.Ö.; Final Approval and Accountability- Ş.A., Ş.N., E.Ö.

Acknowledgement: The studies at Aşağı Pınar is supported by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Research Fund of the Istanbul University (Project No. 2018-30107), German Archaeological Institute (DAI Berlin), and the German Research Foundation (DFG; Project No. SCHW 1570/1-1). We would like to express our gratitude to all supporting institutes.

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Figürler

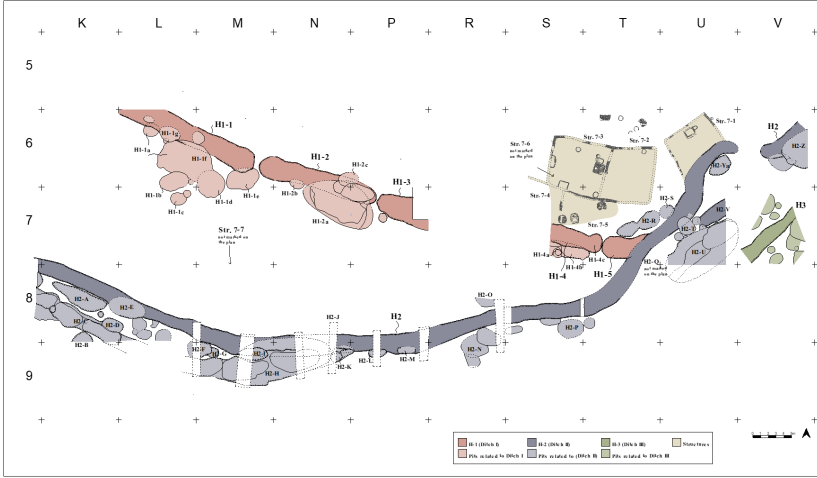


Figure 1: Plan of Layer 7



Figure 2: House 7-2 and 7-3 with open spaces in the north of the buildings

House 7-2 and 7-3



Figure 3: Details from the houses



DITCH (North)

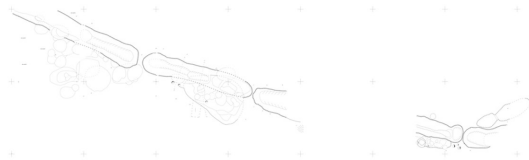


Figure 4: Northern Ditch

DITCH (South)

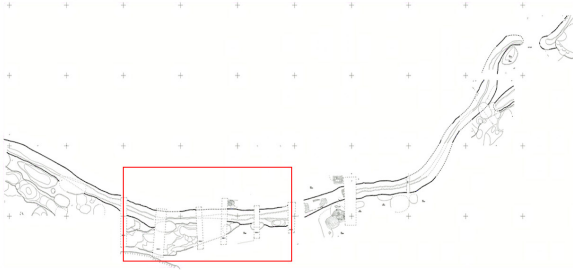


Figure 5: Southern Ditch

DITCH (South)

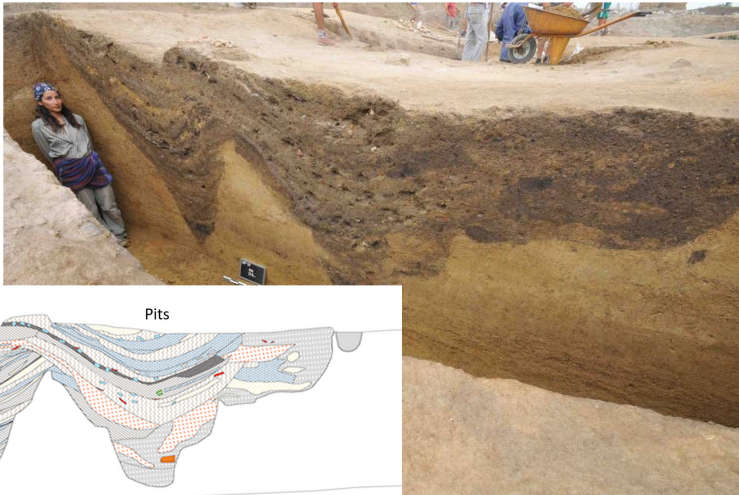


Figure 6: Southern ditch and related pit section



Figure 7: Finds from the ditch