New Neolithic cult centres and domestic settlements in the light of Urfa Region Surveys

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ABSTRACT – The present study concerns Neolithic period cult centres and settlements discovered recently during surface surveys in the central district of Urfa (Sanlıurfa) region in south-eastern Turkey. The presence of T-shaped pillars was ascertained at Ayanlar Höyük and Kurt Tepe cult sites. Other settlements are domestic settlements arranged around cult centre settlements. Some sites belong to Pre Pottery Neolithic, and the others to Pottery Neolithic. They are believed to be coeval with Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori cult sites.

IZYLEČEK – V študiji predstavljamo neolitska naselja in kultna središča, ki so bila nedavno odkrita med terenskimi pregledi v osrednjem delu regije Urfa (Sanlıurfa) v jugovzhodni Turčiji. Tako ime- norani T stebri so bili dokumentirani v kultnih središčih Ayanlar Höyük in Kurt Tepe. Okoli središč so bila odkrita običajna naselja, nekatera datirana v pred-keramični, druga v keramični neolitični. Sočasna so s kultnima središčema Göbekli Tepe in Nevali Çori.

KEY WORDS – Sanlıurfa; Pottery and Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN); cult buildings; round buildings; domestic buildings

Introduction

The important role played by the South-eastern Anatolia region in the emergence of precursor settlements and cult centres during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period is better comprehended every day as new settlements are discovered. The discovery of settlements such as Nevali Çori (Hauptmann 1993.37–69; 1999.66–86), Göbekli Tepe (Betle-Bohn et al. 1998.5–78; Schmidt 2001.45–54; 2002.8–13; 2007.115–129), Sanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle (Çelik 2000a.4–6; 2007.165–178; 2011a.139–164), Karahan Tepe (Çelik 2000b.6–8; 2011b.241–253), Sefer Tepe (Çelik 2006a.23–25; Gürer et al. 2012.161–162, 168–169), Hamzan Tepe (Çelik 2004.3–5; 2006b.222–224; 2010.257–268), Taşlı Tepe (Çelik et al. 2011.225–236; Gürer et al. 2013.292–293), İnanlı Tepe (Gürer et al. 2013.291–304), Kocanizam Tepeşesi (Gürer et al. 2012.160, 167–168), Başaran Höyük (Gürer et al. 2012.158–159, 165–166) and Herzo Tepe (Gürer et al. 2012.159–160, 166–167) as a result of surveys conducted in recent years particularly in the Urfa region constitutes the best evidence for this fact (Map 1).

It is believed that, at such settlements recently discovered in the Urfa region, especially the Neolithic societies adopted a predominantly hunter/gatherer way of life. Today, excavations of this period are being carried out only at Göbekli Tepe, Nevali Çori and Sanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle. Other settlements in the region with identical characteristics, such as Hamzan Tepe, Karahan Tepe, Sefer Tepe and Taşlı Tepe, have not been excavated yet. The common feature of such settlements is the presence of T-shaped pillars, like at Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori. Finds that are either similar or the successors to such pillars were also unearthed in the Adıyaman (Hauptmann 2000.5–9; 2012.13–22) and Gaziantep (Bulgan, Çelik 2011.85–90; Çelik 2005.28–29) regions located on the western banks of the Euphrates, proving that the phenomenon was even more widespread than previously thought.

Nineteen Neolithic sites were examined as a result of the studies conducted in the Urfa region, at Kurt Tepe, Guhera Abid Mevkii, Selamet Kuzey Mevkii, Se-
Kurt Tepesi

The mound, known locally as Kuça Gur, is located 45km east of Şanlıurfa province and 3km south of Sumakh village (Map 1.1) at 730m above sea level (a.s.l.). It is located on a hill dominating Çoban Deresi Boğazı (Çoban Creek Pass), which functions as a passageway between the Harran plain and the Viranşehir region (Fig. 1). It is a small mound established on a ridge formed by high calcareous plateaus, which is very poor in terms of soil. Several sacked tumuli from the Roman period were located around this mound, covering an area of approx. 1ha. The mound is distorted due to illegal excavations; moreover, a high voltage transmission line pole is located at the north end Small cavern groups and pools carved into the bedrock were found in the calcareous rocks surrounding the mound (Fig. 2). Negative traces of a T-shaped pillar are apparent at an illegal excavation pit in this area, which is thought to date to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Fig. 3). During the investigation conducted in the region, pillars which had been removed from their original site were discovered at Kösecik village, approx. 6km southeast of Kurt Tepesi (Fig. 4)\(^1\). Only flint and very scarce obsidian finds were unearthed at the settlement; the finds include scrapers and drills and flint arrowhead fragments (Pl. 1.a–h). Moreover, stone beads, and pestle parts made from basalt stone were also discovered.

Guhera Abid Mevkii

This site is located 48km east of Şanlıurfa and 500m northwest of Selamet village (Map 1.2) at 700m a.s.l. Two large trap sites for hunting wild game were discovered here (Bar-Oz on-line), laid out on the eastern slope of a hill and extending to form a triangle starting from the hill towards the valley plain (Fig. 5). The trap site has walls made from large flagstones, which are irregular and form a triangle with angles of approximately 50°. There are no wall remnants at the short edge of this triangle extending down from the hill. A wall remnant in the form of a circle of approx. 5m in diameter is present at the end of both converging long edges. Flint blades and flakes were discovered during the research in this area. Guhera Abid locality, where the traps are located, is approx. 3.5km southeast of the Kurt Tepesi settlement.

Selamet Kuzey Mevkii

This site is located 48km east of Şanlıurfa and 1 m north of Selamet village (Map 1.3). The settlement is on south-facing slope (Fig. 6) at 645m a.s.l., and covers approx. 0.5ha. Four tumuli were destroyed due to illegal excavations. Flint blades, flakes, and

\(^1\) The pillars were brought from Kuça Gura settlement by Hüseyin and Sinan Eyyüboğlu, who live in Kösecik village. (Private interview with Ibrahim Eyyüboğlu, 20.10.2013.) The pillars are now in the Şanlıurfa Museum.
Byblos and Nemrik type arrowheads were discovered during research in this area (Pl. 1.i–l).

**Selamet Kuzey Höyügü**
The mound, which is very small, extends over only approximately 0.2ha. It is located 1.5km north of Selamet village on a hill (Map 1.4) at 672m a.s.l. A remnant of a circular plan structure unearthed as a result of illegal excavations has been found here present (Fig. 7). Also, flint blades and flakes, as well as Babylos points and scrapers as fragments were discovered as a result of research. A Palaeolithic open-air site was found 100m west of the settlement, where research yielded a Levallois core and points.

**Çamçak Tepesi**
This site is located 1km south of Kuşharabesi village and 61km east of Şanlıurfa (Map 1.5), at 676m a.s.l. The site covers approx. 0.8ha. The settlement is situated on a calcareous hill (Fig. 8). Circular architectural remains were unearthed by illegal excavations (Fig. 9). Blades, flakes, waste products and some point fragments were discovered by researchers. This site is approx. 7km northwest of the Sefer Tepe settlement.

**Terzi Batı Mevkii**
This site, approx.1ha in area, is on a south-facing slope, approx. 1km west of Terzi village and 63km east of Şanlıurfa at 645m a.s.l. (Map 1.6). Research revealed that the settlement was inhabited during the Early Byzantine period, and the Chalcolithic and Neolithic period. Neolithic flint blades, flakes, some point fragment and architectural remains were discovered at the site. This settlement site is approx. 6km northwest of Sefer Tepe.

**Siluba Tepesi**
This site is situated approx. 1.4km northeast of Yıldızlı village and 90km southeast of Şanlıurfa, at 522m a.s.l. (Map 1.7). Lying between two hills, the site is covering an area of approx. 2ha. It has an earth embankment approximately 1m high. During research at this site, a sacked tumulus from the Roman period was discovered on the western hill. The surface survey revealed flint flakes, blades and unipolar cores (Pl. 1.m–r).

**Aşağık Yazıcı Güney Mevkii**
This site, 1.2km southeast of Aşağık Yazıcı village and 82km southeast of Şanlıurfa (Map 1.8), is covering an area of approx. 0.6ha, and is located at 56m a.s.l. The settlement is on a slightly inclined crater area between two calcareous hills (Fig. 10), surrounded by calcareous hills to the north, east, and south, with only the section facing west being open. During the survey of this area, small ponds carved into the calcareous rocks located east of the settlement were found: also, flint blades and flakes, some points and point fragments (Pl. 1.s–x), straw temper ceramics from the Pottery Neolithic period and ceramic fragments from later periods were discovered.

**Münzili Feriş**
This site is approx. 1.6km west of Altun tepe (Resmeldehab) village, and located 77km southeast of Şanlıurfa, situated at 612m a.s.l. (Map 1.9). The settlement is on a slightly inclined crater area between two calcareous hills and surrounded by calcareous hills to the north, east, and west, with only the section facing south being open. The site is approximately 0.1ha in area. The earth embankment of the settlement varies in height between approx. 50cm and 1m. No architectural remains were discovered here, but the survey yielded ceramics from the Neolithic, late Chalcolithic, early Bronze and late Byzantine periods. Flint blades and flakes, some scraper fragments, and a very small amount of obsidian were also found (Pl. 2.a–f).

**Münzili Haleylil**
This site is located approx. 1.3km west of Altun tepe village, 77km southeast of Şanlıurfa and at an altitude of 596m a.s.l. (Map 1.10). The site, covering approx. 0.5ha in area, is on a slightly inclined crater area between two calcareous hills (Fig. 11) and surrounded by calcareous hills to the north, east and west, with only the section facing south being open. No architectural remains were discovered at the settlement, as the area is currently in use as a field. The survey conducted here yielded ceramics from the Neolithic, late Chalcolithic, early Bronze, early Byzantine and Islamic periods. Moreover, flint blades, flakes, retouched blades, point fragments and scrapers were found (Pl. 2.g–j).

**Münzili İsa**
This site is situated approx. 1km west of Altun tepe village and 77km southeast of Şanlıurfa, at 611m a.s.l. (Map 1.11). The settlement is on a slightly inclined crater area between two calcareous hills (Fig. 12), surrounded by calcareous hills to the north, east and west, with the section facing south being open. The site covers an area of approx. 0.2ha. The earth embankment of the settlement varies in height between 1–2m. No architectural remains were discovered here, as the settlement area is currently in use as a field. As a result of the survey of this area, ce-
Ceramics from the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and early Byzantium periods were discovered. Moreover, flint blades and flakes made, some point fragments, scrapers, drills and obsidian were discovered as small finds (Pl. 2.k–r).

**Karakuş Batı Mevkii**
This site is located approx. 3km west of Karakuş village and 70km southeast of Şanlıurfa, at 539m a.s.l. (Map 1.12). Lying on the slope of a stream bed facing south, the settlement covers approx. 1.1ha (Fig. 13). A dry stream bed flowing east to west is located north of the settlement. No architectural remains were discovered here, as the settlement area is currently in use as a field. As a result of the survey, ceramics from the Early Byzantine and Neolithic periods (Pl. 2.s–x) were discovered.

**Çillo Mevkii 1**
This site is a hillside settlement located approx. 1km north of Çıralı village and 24km west of Şanlıurfa, at 668m a.s.l. (Map 1.13). The settlement is covering an area of approx. 0.5ha (Fig. 14). No architectural remains were discovered, as the area is currently in use as a field. The survey yielded ceramics from the Early and Mid-Byzantine and Neolithic periods (Pl. 3.g–k) and a flint bifacial tool from the Middle Palaeolithic as well as abundant amounts of blades and flakes, end scraper fragments were discovered (Pl. 2.s–x).

**Çillo Mevkii 2**
This is a hillside settlement located approx. 1.5km north of Çıralı village and 24km west of Şanlıurfa, at approx. 658m a.s.l. (Map 1.14). The settlement is covering an area of approx. 0.5ha (Fig. 15). No architectural remains were discovered, as the settlement area is currently in use as a field. As a result of the survey, ceramics from the Early Byzantine and Neolithic periods (Pl. 3.p–t) were discovered. Flint blades and flakes and scrapers and point fragments were also unearthed (Pl. 3.l–o).

**Domuzcurnu Tepesi**
This site is located 3.5km southeast of Kızılburç village and 28km west of Şanlıurfa, at 743m a.s.l. (Map 1.15). The settlement is covering an area of approx. 0.5ha (Fig. 16), lies on a low calcareous hill, and is surrounded by basalt deposits. It is a well-preserved site, with traces of some walls visible. As a result of the surveys, flint blades, flakes, unipolar core, core replacement fragments and hammer and some point fragments, scraper fragments, drills and blade with sheen were discovered dating back to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Pl. 3.u–z). A very small amount of obsidian blade and flake parts were also found.

**Nebi Tarlası**
This site is situated 2km southwest of Kızılburç village and 28km west of Şanlıurfa, at approx. 699m a.s.l. (Map 1.16). The settlement is covering an area of approx. 0.8ha. No architectural remains were discovered, as the settlement area is currently in use as a field. The survey yielded straw temper ceramics from the Neolithic and flint blades and flakes and scrapers were also discovered (Pl. 4.a–d). Also the usual amount of obsidian blade and flake parts was also discovered.

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*Pl. 1. Finds from Kurt Tepesi (a–h), Selamet Kuzey Mevkii (i–l), Siluba Tepesi (m–r) and Aşağı Yazıcı Güney Mevkii (s–x).*
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Ömer Altundağ Tarlası
This site is located 1km south of Kızılburç village and 28km west of Şanlıurfa, at 701m a.s.l. (Map 1.17). The settlement is covering an area of approx. 0.1ha, on the slope of a calcareous hill; basalt deposits are available to the east. The settlement has been destroyed by agricultural activity. As a result of surveys, ceramics from the Neolithic and early Byzantium periods, and flint blades and flakes and core replacement fragments were discovered (Pl. 4.e–h).

Hasan Sırtı
This site is located 1km north of Kızılburç village and 28km west of Şanlıurfa (Map 1.18). The settlement is approx. 0.6ha in area at 752m a.s.l. (Fig. 17). The settlement is on the western slope of a calcareous hill; basalt deposits are available to the east. The settlement was destroyed by agricultural activity. As a result of the surveys, straw temper ceramics from the Neolithic period and Early Byzantine ceramics were discovered. Flint blade and flake fragments and scraper fragments were also discovered (Pl. 4.i–l); a basalt stone upper grinding stone was also found.

Ayanlar Höyük
This site is located underneath and to the north of Ayanlar (Hut) village, 30km west of Şanlıurfa, at 733m a.s.l. (Map 1.19). It is covering an area of approx. 14ha (Fig. 18). The mound, which was destroyed by agricultural activity, is around 10m high. The village settlement is located on the southern section of the mound, which comprises five hills. Basalt deposits are available 2km to the east. The surveys revealed ceramics from the early and mid-Byzantine periods. Flint blades and flakes, unipolar and bipolar cores, core replacement fragments, scraper fragments, point fragments, hammer and rested blade fragments were discovered (Pls. 4.m–v, 5.a–b). Very small amounts of obsidian blade and flake parts were also revealed. Lower and upper basalt grindstones, stone bowl fragments, stone plate and pestles were among the other finds (Pl. 5.c–g). Limestone cubes and pedestal fragments from hollow stone, which we know were made for pillars (Fig. 19) were also discovered during surveys in the village. Also, small pole groups carved into the bedrock (Fig. 20), which are familiar from Göbekli Tepe (Beile-Bohn 1998. Abb. 20), Karahan Tepe (Çelik 2011b. Fig. 5) and Hamzan Tepe (Çelik 2004. Figs. 2–3; 2006b. Figs. 3–

Pl. 2. Mınzılıt Feriş (a–f), Mınzılıt Hıleyil (g–j), Mınzılıt Īsa (k–r) and Karakuş Batı Mevkii (s–x).
Assessment and conclusion

Circular building architecture was unearthed at Selamet Kuzeý Höyüği and Çamçak Tepe amongst the recently discovered sites. The remains of circular buildings were observed at Herzo Tepe (Güler et al. 2012, Fig. 4), İnanlı Tepe (Güler et al. 2013, Fig. 6), Hamzan Tepe (Çelik 2010, Figs. 3–4) and Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle (Çelik 2000a, Fig. 3; 2007, Fig. 16; 2011a, Fig. 14–16) during studies conducted in the region in previous years. Both T-shaped pillars and remains of circular buildings were encountered at Hamzan Tepe (Çelik 2004, Fig. 4; 2006b, Fig. 5; 2010, Fig. 2A). Likewise, a body piece of a T-shaped pillar as well as the remains of circular architectural buildings were also discovered at Yeni Mahalle (Çelik 2014, Fig. 21). The number of examples of this architectural tradition, which also resembles the circular cult buildings from Layers II and III of Göbekli Tepe, is gradually rising every day as a result of surface surveys (Schmidt 2010, Fig. 2). Examples of such buildings should date to the early stages of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. Similar buildings were also encountered at settlements such as Çayıönü (Erim-Ozdoğan 2011,191–193, Fig. 6), Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 2011,61–63, Figs. 2–6), Gusir Höyük (Karul 2011,2–4, Figs. 4–5, 11), Hasankeyf Höyük (Miyake 2013,40, 43, 46–47) and Körtik Tepe (Özkaya, Çoşkun 2011,90–93, Figs. 2–5).

The presence of T-shaped pillars is a feature common to the Göbekli Tepe, Nevali Çori, Karahan Tepe, Sefer Tepe, Taşlı Tepe, Hamzan Tepe and Adıyaman Kilişik settlements. These pillars were also encountered at Kurt Tepe. One of the pillars unearthed at Kurt Tepe has necktie-shaped groove and chevron pattern relief (Fig. 21) that we recognise from Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2007,118, Fig. 11) and Nevali Çori (Hauptmann 1993,51–53, Abb. 16). The chevron pattern on the pillar at Kurt Tepe is distinct from the pattern on the pillars at Nevali Çori, as this pattern has a single strip. However, this pattern is similar to the single-strip pattern on pillar 18 at the centre of building D in Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2010, Fig. 8). In particular, the T-shaped pillars unearthed at Kurt Tepe have several characteristics in common with Layer II of Göbekli Tepe and the cult building at Nevali Çori. Due to such similarities, Kurt Tepe should be dated to the late PPPA and early PPNB.

Located approx. 10–15km southeast of Karahan Tepe, the Minzilit İsa, Minzilit Feriş, Minzilit Hileyil and Aşağı Yazıcı Günüey Mekvii settlements present, due to their location, characteristics distinct from the
Neolithic settlements. The common feature of these settlements is that they are generally found on the southern slope of a rocky plateau and that they were inhabited in all periods. No architectural elements were encountered, as agricultural activities are being conducted on the land where the settlements are located. The fact that such small-scale settlements are located in the vicinity of Karahan Tepe, and that such settlements contain no cult finds suggest they might have been domestic settlements affiliated with Karahan Tepe cult centre.

Studies are being conducted at an area located approx. 25km west of Şanlıurfa city centre in order to understand the discovery site of two artefacts from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic brought to Şanlıurfa Museum in 2013 (Ercan, Çelik 2013.Figs. 1a–d, 3a–d). The studies conducted revealed that Ayanlar Höyük extends over an area of approx. 14ha. As a result of the research, the settlement was identified as a settlement inhabited during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic.

Furthermore, seven additional satellite settlements thought to be affiliated to this settlement were also discovered during the surface survey carried out south of the Ayanlar Höyük. Dömürkurnu Tepesi, Nebi Tarlası, Ömer Altındağ Tarlası, Hasan Sırtı, Çillo Mevkii 1 and Çillo Mevkii 2 settlements, located at distances varying from 2–7km from Ayanlar Höyük. Finds from both the Pre-Pottery and Pottery Neolithic were unearthed at these settlements. These settlements are arranged in the form of a large settlement site at the centre with smaller domestic settlements arranged around it, as at Karahan Tepe and Kurt Tepesi.

Guhera Abid Mevkii was probably used for mass hunting and snaring of wild animals. The site is located approx. 3km southeast of the Selamet Kuzey Mevkii, Selamet Kuzey Höyük and Kurt Tepesi settlements. This large snare area, the largest encountered in the region so far, lies in a pass that separates the Harran Plain and Viranşehir plain. This site

**Pl. 4. Nebi Tarlası (a–d), Ömer Altundağ Tarlası (e–h), Hasan Sırtı (i–l), Ayanlar Höyük (m–v).**

**Pl. 5. Finds from Ayanlar Höyük (a–g).**
was most probably used for hunting antelope during the Neolithic period.

The Çamçak Tepesi and Terzi village Batı Mevkii Neolithic settlements are located approx. 7km northwest of the Sefer Tepe site. These settlements were also probably domestic settlements of Sefer Tepe, like the Kocanizam, Başaran Höyük, Herzo Tepesi and İnanlı Tepesi settlements.

The Kurt Tepesi site has T-shaped pillars. An interesting fact is that this settlement is located at equal distances from both Karahan Tepe and Taşılı Tepe. Karahan Tepe, Taşılı Tepe and Kurt Tepesi are aligned in a north-south direction, with 15km distance between the settlements. Another common aspect of these settlements, which are not yet excavated, is that probably all three were constructed only for cult purposes.

The studies conducted indicate that the number of settlements in the region from the Neolithic period is considerable. Moreover, the finds unearthed from several settlements not only represent the Pre-Pottery Neolithic but also the Pottery Neolithic period. The surface surveys revealed new cult buildings and domestic settlements that we believe were affiliated with such cult buildings. Research will continue in the future around the previously discovered cult buildings.

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Fig. 1. View of Kurt Tepesi settlement from the south.

Fig. 2. A pool chiseled to the bed rock at Kurt Tepesi.

Fig. 3. The site where T-shaped pillars were unearthed due to illegal excavations at Kurt Tepesi.

Fig. 4. T-shaped pillars excavated from Kurt Tepesi.

Fig. 5. Selamet village Guhera Abid Mevkii triangle shaped snare areas.
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Fig. 6. View of Selamet village Kuzey Mevkii settlement from south.

Fig. 7. Remains of a circular building at Selamet village, northern mound.

Fig. 8. View of Kuşharabesi village Çamçak Tepe from the north.

Fig. 9. Remains of a circular building at Çamçak Tepe.

Fig. 10. View of Aşağı Yazıcı Güney Mevkii from the north.

Fig. 11. View of Mızılit Hıleyil from the west.

Fig. 12. View of Mızılit İsa from the southwest.

Fig. 13. View of Karakuş village Batı Mevkii from the south.
Fig. 14. View of Çıralı village Çillo Mevkii 1 from the south.

Fig. 15. View of Çıralı village Çillo Mevkii 2 from the north.

Fig. 16. View of Domuzcurnu Tepesi from the north.

Fig. 17. View of Hasan Sırtı from the south.

Fig. 18. General view of Ayanlar Höyük from the north.

Fig. 19. Pillar pedestal piece with hollow center discovered from Ayanlar Höyük.

Fig. 20. Cut-pot groups from Ayanlar Höyük, which are used for pool construction technique.

Fig. 21. Pillar with chevron pattern and necktie shaped groove from Kurt Tepesi.