Three Human Graves of the Hassuna Culture in Türbe Höyük

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THREE HUMAN GRAVES OF THE HASSUNA CULTURE
IN TÜRBE HÖYÜK

ABSTRACT

In the Near Eastern Neolithic, the burials of the Hassuna period are still represented by a very small group of artifacts and burials. At this point the three stone cists unearthed in Türbe Höyük become more valuable though a deeper understanding of the skeletal remains. The settlement of Türbe Höyük is located on the left bank of the Botan River on the foothills of the Taurus Mountains within the Siirt province. There are 16 skeletons found in these graves, skeletons of women, men and children. This study includes the presentation of both archaeological and anthropological examinations of those skeletons.

Key words: Neolithic Burial, Hassuna Culture, Near East

INTRODUCTION

The study of practices related to the funerary world is one of the gateways to the major concerns of all societies in their relation to death, but also, by contrast, in their relation to the living. The argument often put forward by archaeologists and anthropologists is that funerary customs reflect the role and status of individuals or are linked to the social structure of the group. Funeral practices concern both the living and the deceased. For example, according to L. Binford and A.A. Saxe, funeral treatment is a reflection of a person’s social position, relationship to death and mode of burial, referring to the social structure of the group and their hierarchy. Hodder suggests that the funeral customs are more or less complex, which can be interpreted as part of a social structure (ritual in perspective and/or social transformation). From a social structure point of view, death is also a total break for the individual. It is the irreversible departure of an individual who leaves his or her community. Hence, death is part of the social milieu, since it profoundly affects the members of society. In this perspective, Van Gennep defends the idea that death must be defined as the opposite of life; on the one hand, it constitutes one of the transitions of life and, on the other the rituals of life, to face death and to restore the social order that has been disrupted. From this point of view, funerary customs involve a transition in which they break the link between the deceased and the living. Where prehistoric peoples are concerned, the data are limited, which further complicates the understanding of certain funerary gestures. Throughout prehistory, primary and secondary funerary practices in individual, collective and/or multiple burials, located in or around habitats, are frequently observed. There are several problems and ongoing discussions about these burial types. The distinction between places of burial and the creation of cemeteries throughout the Near Eastern Neolithic is part of this problem. The new discoveries here, however, allow us to problematize the funerary practice incorporating the recent knowledge of Near Eastern Neolithic from a societal and structuralist point of view.

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6) Thevenet et al. 2014.
SITUATION AND CHRONOLOGY OF TÜRBE HöYÜK

Türbe Höyük is located 27 km south-west of Siirt, 6 km from the Botan River and Tigris crossing (Fig. 1). The Botan River begins south of Lake Van and it is fed by several affluences. It is one of the great sources of the Tigris, along with the Garzan and Batman rivers, in this mountainous region of the Eastern Taurus. The Botan crosses between the mountains and its banks are very deep and rocky. There isn’t much agricultural land around this region. It is the main passage between the valleys of the Tigris towards Lake Van. The site was identified by G. Algaze during the surveys carried out between 1988 and 1990. It was revisited in the İlısu Dam Project in 2000 by J. Velibeyoğlu and A. Schachner. Türbe Höyük is situated in the plain of the foothill of Şeyh Ömer Mountain, 1400 m above the sea level on a natural terrace on the left bank of Botan. The Höyük measures 100 x 40 sq. m. of surface. The area is excavated by Haluk Sağlam Timur and Mardin Museum in a joint project within the scope of İlısu Dam Project between 2002 and 2007. Occupation of the area begins with the Hassuna Culture (around 6400-6000 B.C.), followed by the Halaf Culture (about 6000-5300 B.C.). It continues with Ubaid and Uruk Cultures (Chalcolithic, about 5300-3200 B.C.), Early and Middle Bronze Age period (about 3000-2000 B.C.), and finally the Iron Age occupations.

HUMAN GRAVES AND THEIR DATING

This article focuses on three human graves (M 1, M 2, and M 3, Fig. 2) dating from the Hassuna Culture, which designates a ceramic culture found in the Jazira and Upper Tigris valley during the second half of the 7th millennium B.C.7. The analyses of the C14 are still outstanding, but from the typo-chronological point of view the funeral artefacts give us a preliminary idea about the dating of these burials. A vase with a rounded body with a closed neck was found in Grave 1 (Fig. 4, on the left). The dough is clean and chamois coloured. Grave 2 has a bowl and a pot with geometric patterns (open triangles and zig-zags) in black colours. The bowl is very rounded and its clay is clean and light-coloured chamois (Fig. 3). Its wall is fine. The pot also contains a thin orange-reddish clay (Fig. 4, on the right). Its body is very rounded and the neck is closed. The ceramics from these burials correspond to the ceramics of the Hassuna Culture, which is characterized by a painted ceramic, and made with rather fine clay. It is generally composed of rounded vases (height up

to 1.20 m), and rounded bowls. When compared to similar sites; Tell Hassuna, Hakemi Úç and Yarim Tepe I, we find the same type of vases and bowls in terms of shape and pattern.

ARCHAEO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSES OF HUMAN GRAVES

There are three cist graves in Türbe Höyük which are located 1.50 m apart from each other (called M1, M2 and M3, Fig. 5), located in the southern part of the site, along a line from north to south. These burials were built with limestone slabs placed against the wall of a pit. The foundation of the burials has never been flattened. They contain human remains, in total, belonging to 16 individuals (MNI), which are very poorly preserved (Table 1). It should be mentioned that red paint traces are identified on two skulls (TH’04 BHO/M2 and TH’04 BGB/M1). Body or cranial painting is evident from the Natuarian culture and there remain traces of it throughout the Pre-Pottery and Pottery Neolithic.

Dental caries and corrosion are found on the four adult individuals in the M1 burial (TH’04 BHO/M2 and TH’04 BGB/M1) and on the 6 adult individuals in the M2 burial (TH’04 BHM M2, TH’04 BRK M2/5, TH’04 BHL M2/6, TH’04 BRI M2/7a, TH’04 BRI M2/7b TH’04 BRJ M2/8). Examinations reveal two main problems can be dealt with from the paleo-anthropological point of view: the first relates to the mode of burial (secondary and/or primary) and the second is the contextual analysis of these burials, which are visibly outside the habitat.

Grave M1

The grave is about 95 cm wide and 95 cm long outside and about 50 x 65 cm inside (Fig. 5 and 6). Its state of conservation is good, except the west wall which is a little damaged. There are skulls belonging to seven individuals in the eastern part of the burial, as well as postcranial remains belonging to the adult subjects, dislocated and placed one on top of the other in the eastern and north-eastern

8) Lloyd and Safar 1945: Plate XIV /2; Robert 2010; Merpert and Munchaev 1987; Tekin 2007; 2011; Miyake 2010; Akkermans, and Schwartz 2003.
9) Lloyd and Safar 1945.
10) Tekin 2011.
12) Merpert and Munchaev 1987: fig. 5,1-5, fig. 6/b ; 5-8; Robert 2010.
14) Bocquentin 2003; Erdal 2013.
part of the burial. Seven skulls are placed against the eastern wall and another skull is located along the north wall near the north-eastern corner. The sex of the two subjects was identified as a man and an adult woman. Four other individuals are also adults but their sexes are indeterminable. The last subject is a child of 2 to 3 years old (TH'04 BRN M1/3). Remains of the accephalic parts are found (some bone fragments: leg, arm, rib, vertebrae) of adult subjects. They are displaced, highly damaged and they have no anatomical connection.

Grave M 2

It measures about 65 cm wide and 130 cm long outside and about 50 x 100 cm inside (Fig. 5 and 7). Conservation status of the grave is good, but the west wall is missing. The M 2 grave has eight adult individuals, including four males, two females and two undefined gender. One of the skeletons maintains anatomical connection although its condition has deteriorated. This is important because of its positioning and the condition of its joints. This individual was buried in a flexed position on the right side, leaving the left upper and lower limbs and skull still in anatomical connection (Fig. 8). Some bone fragments (leg, arm, rib, vertebrae) of other adult subjects, without anatomical connection, are also present (Fig. 8).

Grave M 3

It is about 75 cm wide and 120 cm long outside and about 45 x 70 cm inside (Fig. 5). Its state of conservation is not good, and the east and north walls are especially highly damaged. This burial has yielded some long bones (upper and lower limb) belonging to an adult. It did not deliver any funeral furniture.

ANALYSIS OF INHUMATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GRAVES

The graves outside the habitat belonging to the Hassuna culture have been discovered only at Türbe Höyük. Two cist graves were uncovered at Hakemi Use, but there were no human remains in the graves. In addition, collective burials of this period located

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BGB M1/1</td>
<td>Adult 45-50 years old</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BCG M1/2</td>
<td>Adult Unknown</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRN M1/3</td>
<td>Immature 2.5 years old</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRH M1/4</td>
<td>Adult Unknown</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRL M1/5</td>
<td>Adult Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRO M1/6</td>
<td>Adult Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRM M1/7</td>
<td>Adult 30-40 years old</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial M2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRF M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BHM M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRO M2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRK M2/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BHL M2/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRI M2/7a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRI M2/7b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRJ M2/8</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burial M3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TH’04 BRG M3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 burials from 2 collective and 1 individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.
in the settlement are known at Yarim Tepe I\textsuperscript{15} and Tell Hassuna\textsuperscript{16}. But they are simple graves. In Türbe Höyük, burials are built with limestone slabs. Two of three tombs (M 1 and M 2) are collective, containing several buried individuals, the third (M 3) had only one individual. It is possible that Grave M 3 was also built for multiple usages but it was used only for a short time, which is why a single individual was identified. It is important to note that the size of the graves is very small for the number of the burials.

This characteristic relation to the number of individuals buried suggests a succession of deposits. Seven or eight individuals were buried in M 1 and M 2 in a space not exceeding 80-90 cm\textsuperscript{2}. This burial process also explains (at least in part) the poor state of conservation of the subjects. While the skulls could be repositioned (moved/tidied) during later burials, they would be assembled in the eastern, sometimes south-eastern part of the grave. The presence of the partially conserved individual in the Grave M 2, partly in the anatomical position, suggests that the decomposition was completed in the burial and that the burials were made as death occurred. It is believed that individuals buried at the lower level were dislocated and displaced during subsequent funerals; this form is typical funeral procedure of collective burials\textsuperscript{17}. According to the small size of the burials and the state of preserv-

\textsuperscript{15} M erpert and M unchaev 1987.
\textsuperscript{16} L lloyd and S afar 1945.
\textsuperscript{17} C chambon 2000; 2014.
tion of the subjects, it appears that the long bones must be “drained” during later burials and that the skulls have been grouped together in the eastern, sometimes south-eastern part of the graves. These results show that the bodies were present at the time of burial but only the skulls and some fragmentary bones that have been preserved. Some are anatomically coherent and even remain in connection with the skulls, suggesting primary deposits and that the skulls do not come from elsewhere, contrary to what one might believe at first sight. From the point of view of funerals, the common characteristics of secondary inhumations, which are very common in general, involve the transfer of the person to a final place of burial after partial or complete decomposition of the body and/or fleshy. Often, it is the skulls that were taken and then individually grouped or buried elsewhere. But in the case of Türbe Höyük, it is clear that the skulls do not come from elsewhere, rather that the long bones are poorly preserved or removed during later burials. These burials are therefore collective, for the use of primary inhumation, and they may belong to a group or family (family crypt), for the long-term use.

**BURIALS OUTSIDE THE HABITAT IN NEAR EAST**

The burials of Türbe Höyük are outside the settlement and they present characteristics of a cemetery area. But the most interesting point is that it was only adults who were buried in that area. From this perspective, the problem arises whether there is a contextual distinction based on the age of the indi-

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During the Halaf Culture and the contemporary cultures in the Near East, the same funerary distinction was found according to the age of the individuals on those sites that have a cemetery. For example, in the cemetery area at Tell Arpachiyah, 3 children and 7 adults were uncovered. In Tepe Gawra, a total of 27 subjects were identified, including 26 adults and 1 child in the cemetery. Similar data have been reported for Aktopraklî Höyük (in Western Anatolia), where a cemetery dating from the 6th millennium and intramural burials have been identified. In Aktopraklî 44 subjects were studied, finding 37 adults and 7 children and new-borns in the cemetery area. Alpaslan-Roodenberg also mentions, without giving the precise number, that sub-adults are predominantly buried in the habitation and adults are almost absent. According to these preliminary analyses, she proposes that adults were buried mainly in the cemetery and children in the habitation. In Tepecik/Çiftlik, two different buildings were found, within the settlement area. For example, the BB Building is used as a burial site, with a majority of adult burials. On the contrary, children are mostly buried in and around houses in Tepecik/Çiftlik. Therefore there is a clear distinction between adult burial sites (in BB Building) and sub-adults in the same settlement.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

According to anthropological analyses, in a large geographic area including Central and Western Anatolia during the Pottery Neolithic children and, in some cases, women are more likely to be buried in settlement areas. The strong presence of the burial of adults outside the settlement area is seen in several Mesopotamian and Anatolian sites. This data also complements this change during the Pottery Neolithic period, in the area including Türbe Höyük. Indeed, it seems that the process of funerary gestures ex-

26) Tsuneki 2013.
27) Liesbeth and Akkermans 2009.
29) Malllowan and Rose 1935.
30) Tobler 1950.
33) Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011.
34) Alpaslan-Roodenberg 2011.
pressed with regard to death diverge according to the age of the individuals from the 7th millennium in the Near East. This is a new funerary treatment that manifests itself in the form of the creation of a place of burial, outside the habitat, for the use of adults more specifically whereas the burial of sub-adults remains predominantly in the habitat. This is a funerary distinction, probably related to the social structure of the society of the recent Neolithic of the Near East.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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E.G., H.S. and Y.S.E.

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Yoffee and J.F. Clark (eds.), 1993-4, Moscow: 25-42.


La citadelle de Tushpa (Van, Turquie).