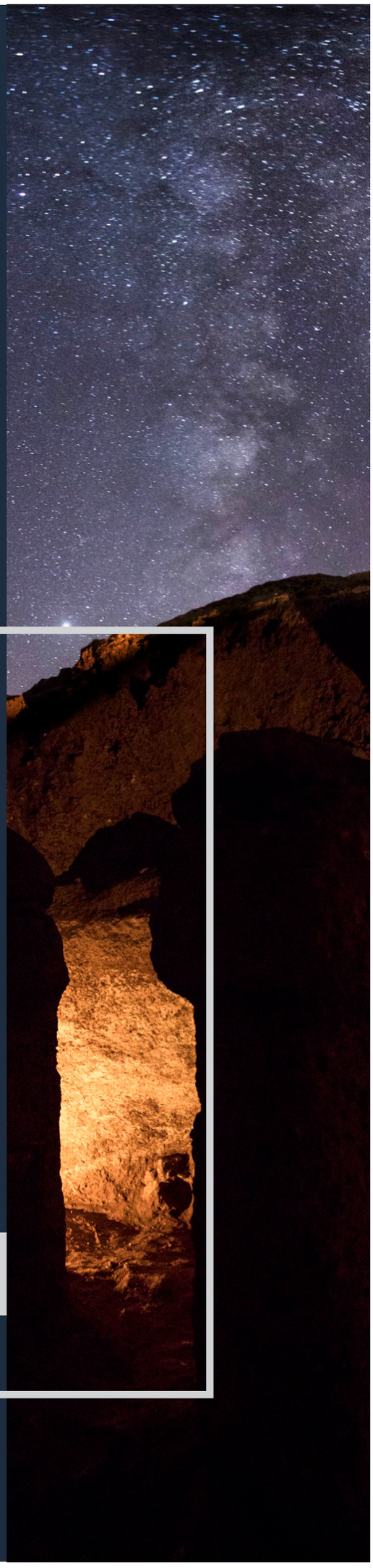
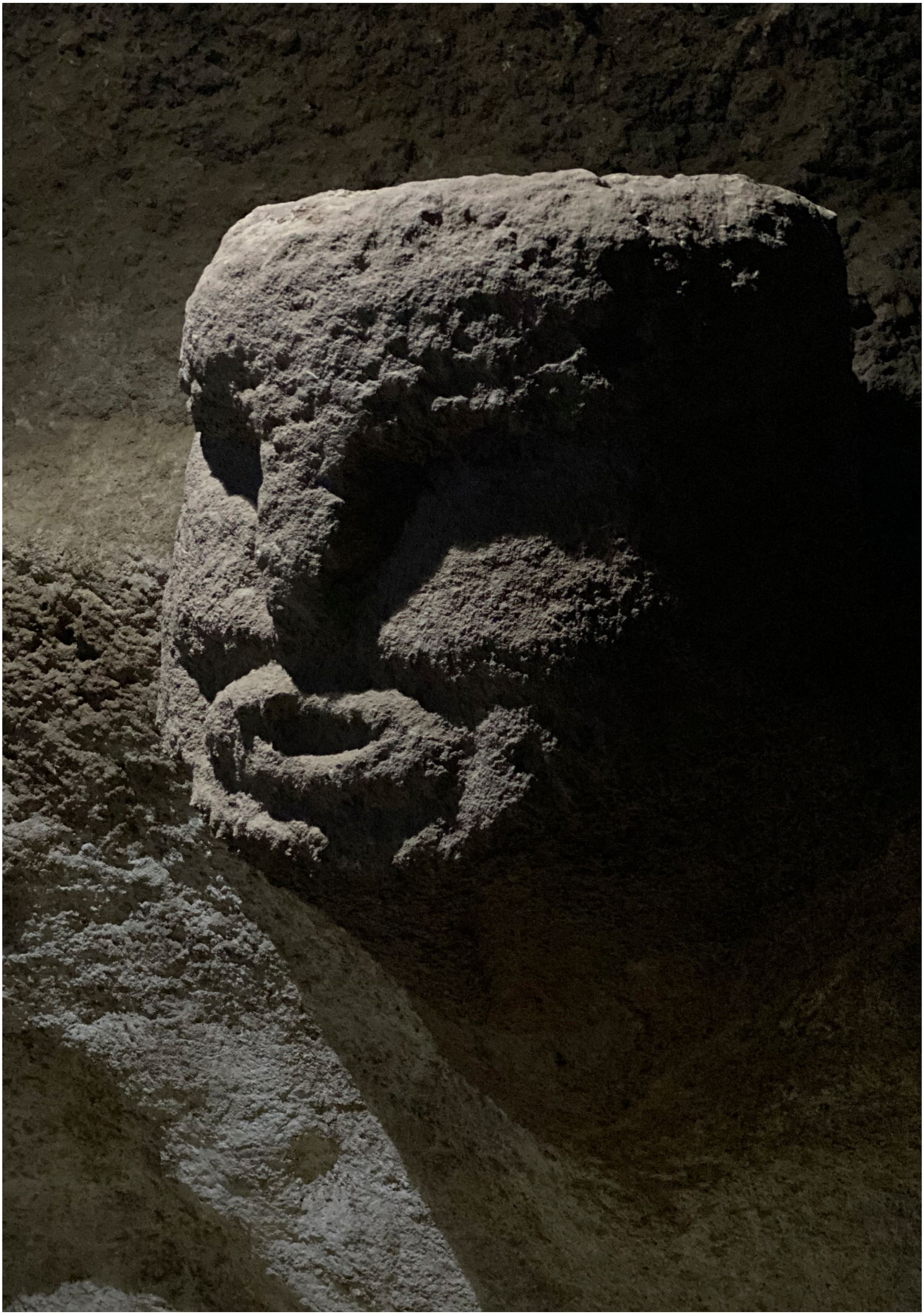


Buried Buildings at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Karahantepe

Prof. Dr. Necmi KARUL



Buried Buildings at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Karahantepe*

Karahantepe Çanak Çömleksiz Neolitik Dönem Gömülü Yapıları

Necmi KARUL**

Abstract

The practice of intentional burying of buildings is one of the controversial topics of Neolithic archaeology. Even though a consensus has not been attained on this matter, the number of buildings asserted as being intentionally buried is steadily increasing in Anatolia and in other parts of the Near East as well, exemplified both as domestic and special functions. The custom of burying buildings had its beginnings in the earliest phases of the Neolithic Period sustaining up to the latest stages, though considerably varying in the modalities of its implementation. The paper will introduce the buried structures recently excavated at the Neolithic site of Karahantepe. All structures exposed at present are special buildings, evidently intentionally filled in. The structure denominated as AB, being the most informative not only on the filling process but also on the final sealing process of the building, will be elaborated in some detail.

Key Words: Karahantepe, Pre-Pottery Neolithic, Neolithic architecture, Special Structures, Buried Buildings

Özet

Neolitik Çağ'da binaların gömülmesine ilişkin uygulamalar 1960'lı yıllardan bu yana güncelliğini yitirmeyen tartışma konularından biridir. Yakın Doğu ve Anadolu'da binaların gömüldüğüne dair birçok örnek söz konusudur. Bu örnekler konut ya da özel yapılar olabildiği gibi yapı ve yerleşme bazında ele alınabilecek niteliktedir. Bina gömme Neolitik Çağ'ın erken evrelerinden sonuna kadar izlenebilen bir olgudur ve ortak özellikleri kadar yerleşmeler arasında farklı olan uygulamalarda söz konusudur. Burada yakın zaman önce kazılmaya başlanan Karahantepe yerleşiminde açığa çıkarılan gömülü yapılar üzerinde durulmaktadır. Yerleşmede şimdiye kadar açığa çıkarılan ve "özel yapı" olarak tanımlanan binaların hepsinin bilinçli olarak doldurulduğu anlaşılmıştır. Yazıda söz konusu yapılar tanıtılarak, kazısı tamamlanmış olan AB yapısı üzerinde ayrıntılı olarak durulacaktır.

***Anahtar Kelimeler**: Karahantepe, Çanak Çömleksiz Neolitik, Neolitik mimari, Özel yapılar, Gömülü yapılar*

Introduction

The Neolithic Period is the beginning of a new way of living, not only in subsistence and technologies but communities developing and conceptualizing the modalities of a new symbolism, equipped with new images. During recent years the number of Neolithic sites excavated has greatly increased, each revealing an extensive array of imagery extending through the entire extent of the Neolithic Period. While these settlements were the scene of structural activities that can be considered the beginning of architecture, they also bear traces of the conceptual transformation of the space. It is during this period when the building was instilled to mean something other than a space to live in, whereby the construction of the first shelters was followed by that of "special structures". Apart from special structures, practices such as the tradition of sub-floor burials, special applications in the building interior, the construction of buildings over the same place as the previous one, etc., are among the main indicators of these new spiritual practices. In this regard, perhaps the most striking phenomenon is that of "buried buildings". Particularly prevalent in the Near East and Anatolia, this practice has been discussed with many examples since the 1960s (French, 1963:35; Kirkbride, 1968:96; Mellaart, 1962; Özdoğan and Özdoğan, 1998; Özdoğan 2018; Türkcan, 2010).

The burial of buildings is somewhat comparable to that of human burials, signifying the strength of the meaning attached to the building. In this respect it is of interest to note that there are examples of both dwellings and special buildings that were buried during the Neolithic period. Examples where the life cycle ends while still preserving their functional properties are observed more in special buildings. Considering the labor and time required for the construction of such structures, they must have held great meaning for Neolithic societies.

The phenomenon of buried buildings that began in the early Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period continued into the Pottery Neolithic Period (Özdoğan, 2018). The ritual practice of decommissioning buildings was not only done by filling in, but practices such as demolition, burning, and leveling building debris without removing the foundations may also be regarded as part of the special process which marked the termination of the use of structures

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(Stevanović, 1997; Tringham, 2005; Brami 2014). Certainly, some of these contain requirements in terms of reconstruction activities to create a solid foundation or may have been considered relevant to the property itself; however, they are some other cases when studied in detail present clear indicators of intentional termination of buildings by any of the practices noted previously, either by deliberate demolition or reconstruction applications. For reconstruction activities at Çatalhöyük, the buildings in the lower phases may have been buried to provide a solid foundation for the new buildings (Hodder and Cessford, 2004: 32). In another example at Mezraa-Teleilat, the early Pottery Neolithic Period buildings at Layer II C were demolished to the sub-basement or sometimes to even foundation level, and covered with their own stone rubble (Ülger, 2007). During this process, special objects were left in the buildings or foundations, and in some cases sterile soil was filled in before they were covered by stone rubble (see Karul, 2003). Thus, the Mezraa Teleilat examples indicate the buildings were put through a deliberate demolition process.

Buried buildings, particularly the large structures of Göbeklitepe, have been on the agenda again in recent years. Structures uncovered at this site measure 20 meters wide and height of six meters, whereas the labor and planning required to bury them also renders this matter even the more remarkable (Schmidt, 2006: 227; 2010; Banning, 2011; Kurapkat, 2012; Kinzel, Clare and Sönmez, 2021).

Excavation at Karahantepe in Şanlıurfa, which began in 2019, have revealed examples that provide details regarding the phenomenon of buried buildings. There is clear evidence that structures were intentionally buried. This article discusses practices pertaining to buried buildings during the early Neolithic period by highlighting examples brought to light at Karahantepe. Thus, preliminary conclusions about these structures and their burial processes are provided in this article whereas current evaluations have been made on the structural features of these building remnants. As the excavation is in the preliminary stage for now, the assessments are based mostly on the structural features of the visible remnants and particularly those of Structure AB (Str. AB).

Karahantepe

Located 55 kilometers east of downtown Şanlıurfa, in the Tek Tek National Park area, the Karahantepe setlement was discovered during the Şanlıurfa Archaeological Survey of 1997 (Çelik, 2000). The Tek Tek Mountains are situated between the Harran and Viranşehir plains, with a 60-km long low plateau that reaches a height of 761 m in the north and falls below 500 m to the south. The northern section of the mountains forms a shallow ravine with steep slopes, defined by small rivers with tributaries. Stepped hills formed by horizontal limestone layers that expand from top to bottom are found in the section where Karahantepe is situated. It seems highly plausible that by blocking their one end by stone walls, these valleys were used as convenient hunting grounds.

The limestone shale surfaces provided both the building material and the raw material for the construction of T-shaped pillars in Karahantepe. The presence of limestone bedrock, which is relatively easy to process, was obviously a determining factor in the construction of monumental-sized structures carved into the bedrock as well as those of large T-pillars. At Karahantepe archaeological fills cover an area of nearly 10 hectares, and extend an additional five hectares when the quarries for the T-shaped pillars are included. Archeological deposit commences over a limestone hill and continue along the eastern slope, and continue on the western terrace of the opposite hill as well as on the southern plain (Fig. 1). Some excellent engineering went into the cutting, carving and smoothing of the limestone surfaces, which expand and descend in steps towards the slope, providing an optimal setting for structures.

Surface surveys and geomagnetic measurements conducted at Karahantepe have indicated the presence of four distinct sectors. The first two of these are the West and East terraces (two opposite terraces/slopes of two hills) where the upper parts of the pillars are visible on the surface, and even round-planned structures of different sizes defined by the arrangement of these stones can be distinguished. The structures found carved into the bedrock of a section of the northern quadrant of the West Terrace will be present in some more detail in this article. While there are no pillar-like remains visible on the surface of the third section that is the Southern Plain, artifacts that are perhaps related to domestic structures such as grinding stones, etc., have been recovered. The final section is that of the Quarries where the material for the pillars was obtained. Beds of pillars and T-shaped pillars left in place or partially processed are seen on the terraces of the western hill descending towards the south and west. Although these estimations are mainly based on surface observations, they are confirmed both by the existing topography and the bedrock itself.

At sites such as Karahantepe, where the topography is so rough and the structures are built into the bedrock topography during prehistory, the construction process following the development of the structures may only be understood by following the bedrock. For example, while they comprise of different elevations and floor levels, the four subterranean structures revealed in Karahantepe in 2019-2020 are contemporary in that three of them make

up sections of a building complex (Fig. 2). While two of the three structures at Karahantepe have been excavated in their entirety, more than half of the third example has been excavated. They have been named according to the order of their recovery and dated Late PPNA and Early PPNB. The first two (Str. AA and AB), were completely carved into the bedrock and intentionally filled. Larger than the first two, the third structure (Str. AD) was carved into the bedrock in the west, with its floor leveled into the bedrock. A deliberate demolition phenomenon has been noticed with this large structure. A fourth structure (Str. AC) also carved into the bedrock is situated in the northeast of this building complex. During the last field season the stony top filling has been removed, but the inner fill of this structure has yet to be excavated. As will be mentioned again later, it is worth noting that different methods were used for a similar purpose in contemporary buildings. Concurrently, while an irreversible process with the demolition of one side of the building complex was observed, the other side was buried in order to render it recyclable. All of these point to discussions regarding the meaning attributed to the building, whereas the matter of burying, burning or deliberate destruction of buildings will continue to maintain their validity.

Architectural Remains and Buried Buildings in Karahantepe

The structures excavated thus far are found to the north of the Western Terrace. In this upper terrace section, the layered bedrock descends sharply, whereas these inclined surfaces were cut out and three adjacent structures were imbedded into the bedrock here.

The central unit of the building complex is Str. AD, which is the largest. Although Str. AD still has not been completely excavated, conclusions have been drawn up which provide an idea about the structural plan, interior features and the process that occurred after its use ended. The diameter of the structure reaches 23 meters and has a nearly rectangular plan with rounded corners. The western half of the building was set into carved bedrock; the height of this side which forms the wall is 4.3 meters. Buttresses carved from the bedrock on this side and the lower end of the wall are in the form of benches with two steps. The other half of the structure is partially imbedded in the bedrock or completely surrounded by an independently standing stone wall. Pillars and two-stepped benches continue along the 1.5 meters thick wall. Moreover, there are two more collapsed pillars inside the building, by which it is understood these pillars were seated on a rather shallow bed opposite each other in the center of the building. The building's ground floor was gouged out the bedrock. Especially in terms of interior furnishings, Str. AD is a very sophisticated structure and as such, is the subject of another paper. In this article, the focus will be on what kind of filling process occurred after the building completed its function.

The profile in the east-west direction in the middle of the building provides clues as to how the interior of the building was filled in. In this section, one's attention is drawn to the soil and stone layers inclining from opposite directions towards the center of the building and flattening in the middle. The western half of the profile features oversized stones that appear to have been dragged in harmony with the bedrock slope where the building was positioned (Fig. 3). These stones form several rows one atop of each other and their slope decreases towards the center of the building, as they become parallel to the floor (Fig. 4). There are smaller ones on these large stones in the lower level, upward followed by even smaller ones with thick earth fill containing very irregular stones of different sizes at the top. Bedrock flanks the western edge of the building, and since there are no stone walls here, it should be expected that the stones in the space have been naturally or deliberately dragged from the slope. While the fill is very similar in the east half of the profile, the slope is in the opposite direction. This time, layers inclined towards the interior of the building are seen from the wall bordering the east of the building. Therefore, the fact that the filling inside the building is not at an inclination compatible with the bedrock slope, but from the periphery towards the center suggests a conscious filling process. In addition, broken sculptures and stone objects, i.e., plates and vessels etc., left on the benches give the impression they have been deliberately left in the building. From both a structural and functional standpoint, Str. AD differs from the other aforementioned buildings. This is also valid for the process after the structure completed its function. As mentioned below, while practices indicating a systematic filling are observed in the other structures, Str. AD was demolished in order to terminate its use. This may be because the size of the structure made the filling process difficult.

A different process is observed in the ovoid Str. AB adjacent to the north of Str. AD. Str. AB was carved entirely into the bedrock. This 7 x 6 meters structure essentially has a trapezoidal plan with rounded corners. This form is noteworthy as it is also repeated in the adjacent Str. AA (Fig. 5). The building is entered through a circle with a diameter of 70 cm on the south side and descending from 5-step stairs. There is another stair with four steps reaching from the floor to the up to the other end of the building, at the northeast corner. From the slopes of the worn out steps, it is assumed the set of stairs in the south were used for descending into the building, and the other for the exit. Assumed to have served as the entrance, it is possible to access the steps on the south

from both from the adjacent Str. AD and the ground level. This structure of the entry suggests it is most likely related to the Str. AD.

There is a ridge along the upper western side of the Str. AB, whereas the central part of this ridge is shaped like a human head extending into space. This head is turned slightly towards the entrance stairs. There are two small niches on the bench near the head, which depicts a man with protruding forehead, thick lips and a beard under his chin. The upper east side of the building forms a straight line, with rows of stones added to the lower edges to create it. It is slightly carved just below this line to create a bed that continues along the edge. This bed is probably related to the top cover. There is also a serpentine channel opening into the building to the north.

The building was made by carving into the bedrock and creating standing pillars. In other words, there are ten pillars formed from the bedrock itself. Moreover, the number of pillars in the building reached 11 with a flat plate placed in a shallow bed after being formed. Although it is assumed that these pillars were carved in sequential order, it is difficult to define with any precision. Nevertheless, the four pillars in front of the human head on the west wall form the first row. The front of the head is left empty and the pillars are lined up in the same direction, with two on the right and two on the left. Standing 1.6-1.7 meters high, these four pillars were crafted more elaborately than those in the back row. All pillars are erected and shaped like a phallus. The six pillars in the back row are shorter, stand 1-1.4 meters high and are 30-50 cm in diameter. Though these two pillars are grooved on the front side, it is difficult to say whether these grooves were made deliberately. In addition, the upper ends of these two pillars have eroded and become concave from the impact of the stones placed on them during the refilling process.

To briefly introduce the structural features in regards to the focus of this article, it is clear Str. AB was built for special purposes, with phallus-shaped pillars designed and formed from the beginning and a human head shaped from the bedrock (Fig. 6, 7). As a matter of fact, there are no domestic elements in the building. It is understood that the building was intentionally filled according to certain rules. The method of excavation used was the decisive force in understanding this process. In this context, the boundaries of the building became defined, whereas it was divided into two in the north-south direction and the excavation of the western half was completed first. Thus, a section was created in the building that could be followed during the excavation (Fig. 8).

It would be more proper to summarize the filling of the building according to the stage of the process. In this context, a reddish buff colored soil containing amorphous flat limestone pieces of 5-10 cm in size, with a thickness of 40-50 cm, containing no archaeological material were used to fill the irregular floor surface. This deposit was also comprised of medium-sized stones laying in different positions. It is understood these stones were thrown between the pillars or lined up in some places as a result of a rapid filling process, rather than over time (Fig. 9a). Unlike the rest of the area, the front of the south staircase is completely filled with stones. Larger stones placed in a nearly vertical position were used for this process (Fig. 9b). Unlike the other examples, the steps in the north do not constitute a defined staircase. Although the relation of the stone filling here with the steps is not clear, the density of the stones reaching down to the floor here is remarkable. On this first layer, at the very bottom, there is a dark colored filling of 1.5 meters, containing irregular and different sizes of stones and archaeological material, including a few pottery sherds. This deposit is covered with large stones that fill the entire space without leaving any gaps. These stones do not spread beyond the boundaries of the structure at the top, indicating the filling process was limited to the area covered by the structure. Moreover, it is noteworthy that large, flat stones were used and arranged in places at the top. In fact, a large flat stone measuring 2.65 x 1.65 meters was positioned in the bed on the east side. Large flat stones were placed regularly in the same section. As a result, the building looks as though it was practically covered with stones.

In its initial stage the structure was raised by means of placing large stones over the pillars in the back row, which is evidence that it was deliberately filled (Fig. 10a-b). This process was applied only for the six pillars in the rear row whereas they were raised to the surface in this way. Those in the front row are high, probably not needed to position stones over them as they reach just below the surface. Had the building been filled with natural erosion, it would not be possible for these stones to randomly fall atop the pillars or remain in place, so positioning these stones in this manner was considered a part of the filling process.

As this brief summary indicates, Str. AB was deliberately filled in a series of sequential procedures. It is difficult to estimate how long this process took, but it can be assumed that it did not transpire over an extended period. The fact the filler material does not bleed over beyond the structure zone, and that it is limited to the interior space indicates the structure and its boundaries remained visible. As a matter of fact, the extension of the short pillars to the surface should also be construed as a method to distinguish their places. All of this may suggest that the structures were filled in to be discharged at a later time, but similar practices have not been observed either in Karahantepe or in other sites. In this case, it would be more reasonable to assume the structures were buried with their experiences, in other words, in a manner that

preserves their references to the past, rather than a mere filling process. This reference should include the location and the building itself as well as its contents.

It is worth noting that Str. AB is reached by passing through Str. AD; there is also a connection from Str AB to Str. AA. Nonetheless, the main entry is via Str. AD. Therefore, we could assume Str. AD to be the actual place of activities that took place in this structure. The present evidence strongly suggests a ceremonial process, entering the building from one end and exiting at the other end, having to parade in presence of the human head featuring a phallic symbolism; nevertheless, our preliminary interpretation will evidently be further elaborated after the excavation of this complex structure is completed and relevant findings analyzed.

The filling method used utilized at Str. AB was also applied in Str. AA and Str. AC. Structure AA. measures 8.5 x 7 meters and is nearly trapezoidal with rounded edges. Str. AA, which is also subterranean, is shallow compared to the others and has a depth of ca. 1.1 meter. There is a 6.6 meters-long bench that extends along the west side of the building. Two steps at one end of this bench link the building to the outside. Moreover, there are two small pits dug into the platform in front of these stairs. These pits are adjacent and measure 20 cm wide, and 10 cm deep. There is a snake engraved on the front of the bench, with a fox engraved right beneath the stairs at the end of this motif. There is also a small niche under the fox's chin. A deep pit with amorphous edges is found in the northern half of the building. Filled with large stones, this pit is thought to be the result of destruction or an incomplete activity. In the section outside the deep pit, the building was filled with soil of similar character up to the upper level of the bench. This filling contains 10-15 cm thick and homogeneous stones. There is also archaeological material in the fill, including a few pottery fragments. This filling is also covered with oversized stones that are limited to the area of the building.

There is another subterranean structure with similar features, about 20 meters northeast of this building complex, where the bedrock descends sharply again. Str. AC was excavated here only to the extent that its boundaries are defined (Fig. 11). With a diameter of 5.5 meters, the southern half of this structure is bordered by bedrock and the northern half by means of stones placed vertically. Again, the top of the building was covered with large flat stones so as not to overflow beyond this area.

Conclusion

Karahantepe excavations that commenced in 2019 have revealed strong evidence of intentional burying of buildings by filling in. This phenomenon has been observed in every structure so far excavated on the Western Terrace of the site, all to be featured as special buildings. While it is assumed that the special buildings continue thusly in the south and east sections of the terrace, the same features continue in the Eastern Terrace. Although it is a flatter terrace, it can be claimed there are large, special buildings here as well. It is not possible to say all of these structures were used simultaneously, but it is understood that these parts of the settlement were reserved for special buildings. Situated in the south of these two terraces, the Southern Plain must be the living area of the dwellers of the settlement.

Although limestone bedrock is relatively easy to handle, it poses many problems in terms of construction. The importance of the labor spent on the construction of these special buildings is clearly evident. As is seen in the example of Str. AB, plenty of planning, design and creativity are essential for the erection of the phallus-shaped pillars and human head from bedrock. Moreover, the complex design of the structure, being comprised of several interconnected architectural units clearly is a novelty firstly observed at Karahantepe. Justifiably we can assume that the later stages of our work will provide further evidence to understand and interpret the function and meaning of the structures. The practice of intentional burying being one of them. For now, as can be seen from the examples we have, it is clear that although burying a structure means vacating a building or venue, it is a practice that requires a lot of time and effort. This means more than just abandonment. As a result, the idea that the construction, useful lifespan, and burial of the building are parts of a same ritual that deserves further discussion. These initial results at Karahantepe seem to enable us to make more detailed assessments and discussions as the excavations progress.

Acknowledgements

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Figures

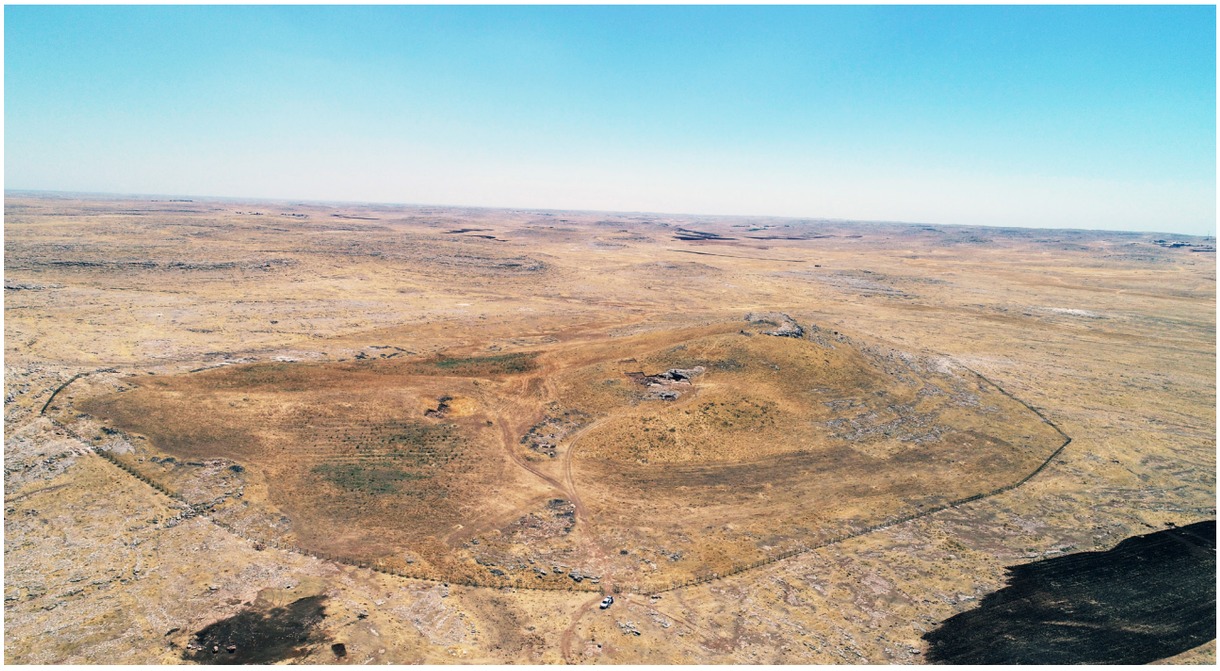

Fig. 1. *A view of Tek Tek Mountains and Karahantepe from the North.*

Fig. 2. *Western Terrace, buildings excavated in 2019 and 2020.*

Fig. 3. *Structure AD, drawing and photograph of the profile crossing the middle of Str. AD in an east-west direction (view from the North).*

Fig. 4. *Photographs of the section in Str. AD showing the demolition process of the building from the periphery towards the center.*

Fig. 5. *After the excavations in the Str. AA and Str. AB are completed, view from Northwest.*

Fig. 6. *Str. AB, view from West.*

Fig. 7. *Phallus-shaped pillars and a human head shaped from the bedrock.*

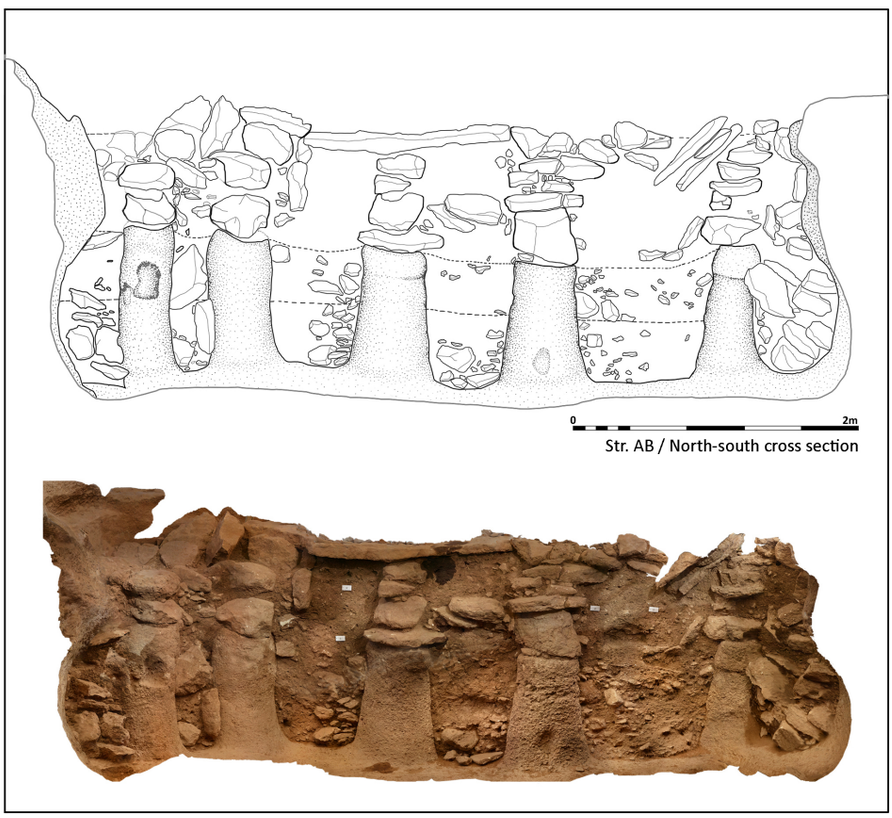

Fig. 8. *Structure AB, drawing and photograph of the profile crossing the middle of Str. AB in a north-south direction (view from the West). The filling process of the building can be seen in this section.*

Fig. 9. *a-b Structure AB, stones between pillars on the left, stony fill in front of the staircase in the south entrance on the right.*

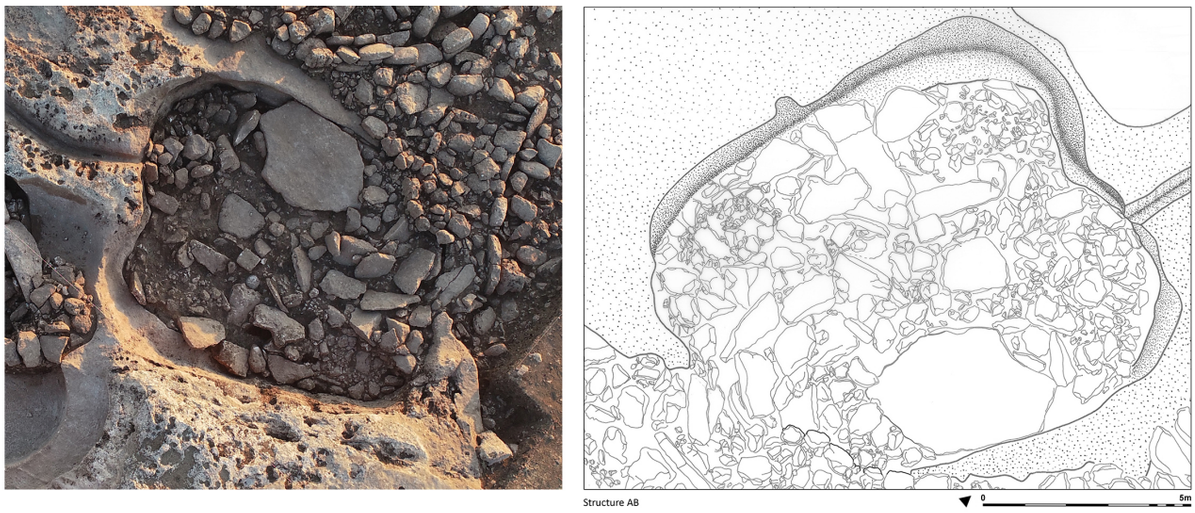

Fig. 10. *Structure AB, stone covered surface showing the final stage of filling.*

Fig.11. *Similar to other buildings Structure AC, also has a stone-covered surface showing the final stage of filling.*