

## House-related practices as markers of the Neolithic expansion from Anatolia to the Balkans

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### ABSTRACT

Following the assumption that the Neolithic witnessed the first widespread appearance of permanent houses and households, in line with the adoption of sedentism, this article examines the relevance of residential and construction practices to our understanding of the process of Neolithic expansion from Anatolia to the Balkans. Three practices, with a broad spatial distribution, are reviewed: house burning, the vertical superimposition of houses and intra-settlement burial. The article first outlines the basis of a contextual method to retrieve practices from material patterning left in the record, such as burnt houses for the practice of intentional house burning. The next section delves into the similarities in practices between Neolithic communities in Anatolia, Thrace and Greece, during the 7th and 6th millennia BC cal. to suggest that: 1) house burning was a key strategy to bring houses to 'closure' at the end of their use-lives; 2) people took advantage of the stability of extant houses to build new houses atop; and 3) this practice was closely connected with the burial of the dead in, or in close proximity to, houses. Common attitudes to residence and construction across a vast array of sites underpin similarities in house form and house use patterns. To conclude, the discussion highlights the need for a dynamic approach, based on comparative time-lines of practices, to determine the direction of spread.

### KEYWORDS

Anatolia, Balkans, houses, Neolithic, practices

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### Introduction

Unlike plants, animals and other material components of the Neolithic 'package', which can be transported to and transplanted in a foreign environment, houses are bound to the place in which they are constructed. Add to that the fact that architecture is influenced by the climate and the availability of local resources, and habitation becomes one of the most conservative aspects of human life (Leroi-Gourhan 1945, 256). Yet, the archaeological record indicates similarities in house use patterns between vastly remote sites at the onset of the Neolithic horizon. A practice approach, emphasising the actions of the people involved in the process of Neolithic expansion, allows us to address these similarities in a meaningful way.

The first section of this article discusses the basis of a practice approach in archaeology. This sets up the scene for a more substantive review of selected practices, with reference to some of the perceived similarities between the Balkans and Anatolia in the Neolithic. The discussion concludes by highlighting the importance of chronology to determine the direction of spread and shift the emphasis from spatially diffuse practices to a diffusion of practices.

## Data and methods

Traditionally, interactions between the Balkans and Anatolia have been addressed through the agency of objects and raw materials, such as obsidian, without there being a clear theorisation of exactly what such interactions meant for the people involved. A case in point is the Fikirtepe 'culture' in the Eastern Marmara region, in which two farming communities, who lived side by side and shared a similar material culture, apparently constructed vastly different houses and disposed of their dead in different manners<sup>1</sup>. Similarity-based approaches to material culture, which tend to equate 'pots with people', have been gradually superseded by practice-led models, emphasising both the objects themselves and the context in which they were embedded (see e.g. Rahmstorf 2006 on the Aegean Bronze Age). The rationale behind this conceptual shift, which is reflected more widely across the social sciences (Bourdieu 1977[2007]), is that, understanding how different societies go about doing things and tackling problems that arise from daily life provides significant insight into the level of interaction between them.

The approach advocated here uses practice as a basic unit of analysis. Practice shifts the focus of archaeology from culture traits to patterns of social behaviour internalised and reproduced through everyday life action. At the most basic level, a practice may be defined as an act, which appeals to a community of norms or values, and is consequently shared among members of a society or class. Practices are marked therein by repetitions in the material record. Archaeologists are familiar with the concept of burial practice, which they use to describe a consistent method of disposal of the dead evidenced across one or more archaeological sites, such as, for instance, primary inhumation in tightly flexed position for the period under review; but practices relate to virtually every aspect of human life. Although burial practices are invested with symbolic meaning, practices in general may, as their name suggests, fulfil at once practical and symbolic purposes, or one or the other, being, as they are, concrete solutions to a known problem.

Biological functions, such as eating, drinking or sheltering, cannot be considered practices, as such, because they only allow for one concrete course of action. Access to a source of drinking water may be assumed, for instance, as a given for every human or animal society, without this requiring further explanation or discussion. Conversely, the methods of access to water, be it by building next to a river, by digging a well, or by any other practical solution, is a contested realm useful for conceptualising human action. Key to the concept of practice is thus the notion of choice, or a sequence thereof, associated with a specific patterning in the material record. In this respect, archaeologists who dig are eminently well placed to collect practices, given their experience of the stratigraphic record, in which a 'cut', for instance, is the residue of a concrete action, such as the digging of a pit in prehistory.

Practices in archaeology are accessed at indirectly through their material expression using information about the context (Hodder 1987). Four main types of contextual information may be listed:

- *relational*: how an object relates spatially to other objects in a given context;
- *depositional*: how an object relates chronologically to other objects in a sequence of

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1 There were circular semi-subterranean huts, burials under floors and cremations at 'coastal' sites like Fikirtepe, Pendik, Istanbul-Yenikapı and Aktopraklık C, whereas there were rectilinear post-frame houses, inter-dwelling and, more rarely, intramural burials further inland, at Barcın, Menteşe and Ilıpınar (Özdoğan M. 2011).

depositional events;

- *typological*: how the object relates to a type of similarly-defined objects within a classification;
- *the object itself*: intrinsic characteristics of the object on macroscopic or microscopic level;

As an illustration of how this method works, one might think, for instance, of the practice of subfloor burial, which is defined here as a burial under an ‘active’ household. An example of *relational* context is that provided by the occurrence of human remains within a domestic space. To establish that the house was indeed in use when the burial took place, the *depositional* sequence is used: it is necessary to consider, first, whether the burial pit cut into a living platform or surface; second, whether it was sealed by one or more layers of plaster, so that occupation could resume. Finally, a specific grave may be ascribed to a broader burial practice through detailed *typological* cross-comparison.

With regard to the choice of practices under review in this paper, three were selected, house burning, vertical superimposition of houses and intra-settlement burial, which are linked to different stages of the life-cycle of the buildings. The practices relate to the house and thus, indirectly, to one of the core components of the Neolithic pattern of existence – sedentism. Incidentally, some of these practices tied people to a place. Houses are currently the most conspicuous feature in the material record of Neolithic Anatolia and Southeast Europe, and this ‘visibility’ is testament to their continuous or repeated use over prolonged periods of time, as well as the regularity with which they were built, often one upon another, which led to considerable stratification at the base of tells. Given the scope of this work, I shall limit myself to a general assessment of potential overlaps in practice between Anatolia and the Southern Balkans, including Thrace and the Aegean Basin, with reference to some of the most significant archaeological sites – those that have produced stratified material and are correctly dated and published.

## Results

In what follows, I suggest that parallels in the material record between Anatolia and the Balkans, such as countless mentions of burnt houses, call attention to similar attitudes to residence and construction across vastly distant sites.

### *House burning*

The Neolithic of Southeast Europe is almost invariably dominated by the fires, which caused the destruction of generations of houses in places like Vinča, Karanovo and Sesklo. The phenomenon is so extensive that it has been referred to as a “burned-house horizon” (Tringham 2000). Explanations for such a phenomenon have oscillated between accident – some authors citing the propensity of Neolithic houses to catch fire in the presence of central fire installations, such as hearths and ovens – and deliberate action by enemy forces or by the people themselves (Stevanović 1997). Where this question has received more scholarly attention, using forensic and contextual methods of investigation, such as Opovo in Serbia, the excavators found that the fires were compatible with deliberate action, and that the effort involved was suggestive of symbolic rather than warfare-related activities. In support of their model, the excavators highlighted the input of accelerants to reach high temperatures, the presence of multiple ignition points, and a fire path which was not con-

sistent with wind-blown burning (Stevanović 1997). Hence the idea that Vinča houses were brought to 'closure' by burning (Tringham 1991; Chapman 1999).

Vinča houses stand at one end of a spectrum which, judging by the distribution of burnt houses, stretched across the Southern Balkans and parts of Anatolia. The sheer regularity with which houses have burnt in places like the Upper Thracian Plain of Southwest Bulgaria, occasionally with very rich assemblages of finds, hints at a common practice, or elements of a shared practice between Vinča and Karanovo. Sites in the latter group include, among others, Azmak, Kapitan Dimitrijevo, Karanovo, Rakitovo, Sofia-Slatina and Stara Zagora-Okružna Bolnitsa (Mikov 1959; Georgiev 1965; Nikolov 2000; Radunčeva *et al.* 2002; Nikolov, Sirakova 2002). House burning was less conspicuous in the Struma Valley, where only two houses, one apparently inserted upon the other, experienced fire destructions at Kovačevo (Demoule, Lichardus-Itten 1994; Lichardus-Itten *et al.* 2002). In Northeast Greece, houses burned at repeated intervals towards the end of the Middle Neolithic period. In Sesklo, for instance, both the tell and the extended settlement burned in concert during the MNIII B phase (Theocharis 1973). Other Thessalian sites, such as Elateia and Tsangli, experienced disruptive fire destructions (Wace, Thompson 1912; Weinberg 1962). At Middle Neolithic Servia in Central Macedonia, houses burned with remarkable material assemblages including dozens of complete or restorable vessels and unusual finds like boars' tusks (Mould, Wardle 2000). Nea Nikomedeia provided evidence for older burnt houses, perhaps dating back to the initial Neolithic settlement in the region (Rodden, Rodden 1964a; 1964b).

House burning in Anatolia appears to be a much more circumscribed phenomenon, relating mainly to the ceramic Neolithic period between c. 6,500-5,500 BC cal. Çatalhöyük, for instance, has not produced any evidence for fire-related house destruction prior to the middle of the main sequence, Level VIB, dated to after c. 6,500 BC cal.; in contrast, every succeeding building-level has burned to an extent (Mellaart 1966, 172). At Çatalhöyük, fire can be shown to have been inserted in a sequence of 'closure'-related activities, which initially involved manual demolition and infilling (Twiss *et al.* 2008). In other words, houses were not in a state to live in when the fires happened. The evidence is mostly contextual. A transect of sites, spanning from the Konya Plain to the Aegean coast of Turkey, including Çatalhöyük, Bademağacı, Höyücek, Hacılar, Kuruçay and Ulucak, experienced systematic fire destructions during the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> millennia BC cal., fuelling speculation that farming communities in the region were increasingly involved in inter-settlement conflict or warfare (Clare *et al.* 2008) (fig. 1).

In this case, however, the fires did not end the occupation of the sites. Anomalously large concentration of ceramic or figurine objects scattered on the last floor surfaces or in managed fills are typical of this region. The 45 female figurines from Hacılar, for example, were found deposited *in situ* on the floor of three of the level VI burnt houses (Mellaart 1970, 166). At Höyücek ShP, a cluster of five buildings was destroyed by fire at a time that the houses were no longer in use: indeed, one of the buildings was completely empty except for a marble bowl, and its doorways were found blocked (Duru, Umurtak 2005). Another building was so crammed with artefacts that circulation through one of the rooms was no longer possible; recesses in the walls, which presumably held sliding door panels, were jammed with ceramic vessels and stone chisels (Duru, Umurtak 2005).

On the other hand, there was no clear evidence of this practice in Northwest Anatolia until after c. 5,800 BC cal. Single houses burned in Ilıpınar X, Menteşe and Barcın – suggesting that houses were normally left to collapse by themselves or were manually pulled

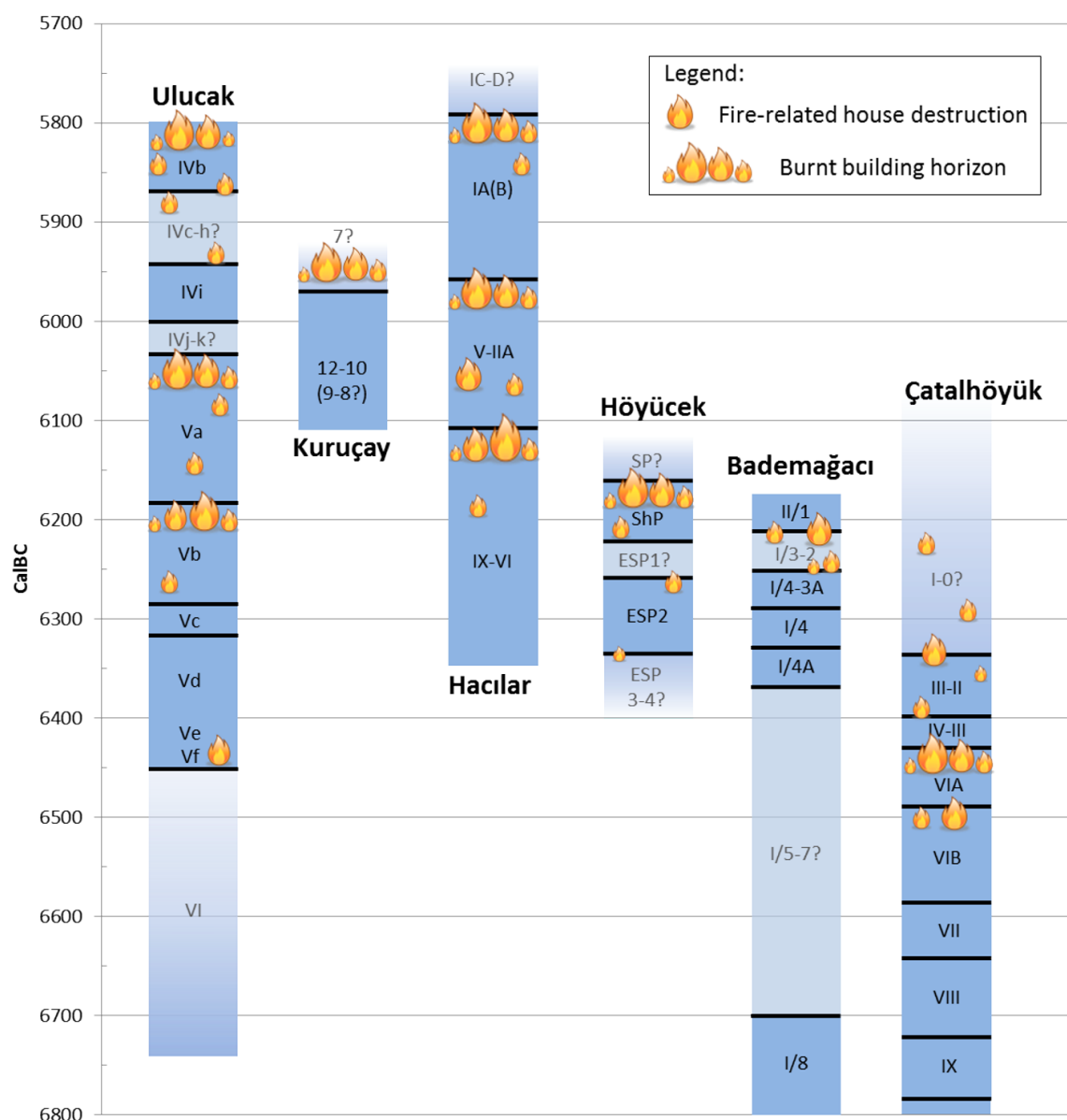


Fig. 1. Incidence of fire-related house destruction in Central and Western Anatolia. Chronological chart adapted from Thissen (2010, fig.13). The sequence of Çatalhöyük was additionally plotted on this graph using C14 dates from the CANeW database (Thissen 2007) and the method of median estimators of phase boundaries (Thissen 2010). Calculations are based on the IntCal09 calibration curve (Reimer et al. 2009) in OxCal v4.1.7 (Bronk Ramsey 2011). Distribution of fire-related destructions after Çilingiroğlu 2012; Çilingiroğlu, Abay 2005; Çilingiroğlu et al. 2004; Duru 1994; 2008; Duru, Umurtak 2005; Mellaart 1966; 1967; 1970

Обр. 1. Разпространение на опожарени жилища в Централна и Западна Анатолия. Хронологическа диаграма, адаптирана от Тиссен (2010, fig.13). Последователната серия от дати на Чаталхуюк е добавена в диаграмата, използвайки C14 дати от базата данни CANeW (Thissen 2007) и метода на усредняване на границите на фазите (Thissen 2010). Изчисленията са направени с помощта на калибрационната крива IntCal09 (Reimer et al. 2009) на програмата OxCal v4.1.7 (Bronk Ramsey 2011). Разпространението на жилища, унищожени с помощта на огън е по Çilingiroğlu, 2012; Çilingiroğlu, Abay 2005; Çilingiroğlu, et al. 2004; Duru 1994; 2008; Duru, Umurtak 2005; Mellaart 1966; 1967; 1970

apart at the end of their use-lives (Roodenberg *et al.* 2003; Roodenberg 2008; Gerritsen *et al.* 2013). Later on in the sequence, at Ilıpınar VI, at least 16 mudbrick houses arranged in a semi-circular row burned in concert, at a temperature exceeding 1,000°C in some of the rooms (Claasz-Cookson 2010). Achieving such a high temperature would have required a continuous input of fuel into the fire (Stevanović 1997, 365-374). At Aşağı Pınar 6, near the border with Bulgaria, another row of agglutinated houses burned to a high temperature; the excavators observed that the fire path, the extent of the fire destruction, and the rooms' contents, were consistent with a deliberate destruction of the settlement by the people themselves (Özdoğan E. 2011).

#### *Vertical superimposition of houses*

Settlement mounds or tells provide another potential link between Anatolia and the Balkans. Their distribution follows closely the initial expansion of Neolithic societies into Europe. The mountains of the Balkan range apparently marked the northern limit of the distribution of tells for the earlier phase of the Neolithic (Sherratt 1983; Chapman 1990). Tells became widespread from the Balkan range to the Great Hungarian Plain only in the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC cal. (Chapman 1997; Bailey 1999). There are as yet no known Mesolithic tells in Europe, which suggests that Mesolithic communities either had different residential practices or that their structures were built of materials that did not leave such a signature in the landscape. The site of Lepenski Vir, on the other hand, has been referred to as an "ersatz tell", for the great depth of deposits and the neat accumulation of building strata, which resemble, albeit remotely, that observed on Southeast European tells (Borić 2008, 118). The deposits in question relate mainly to the period of 'transition' to the Neolithic, after c. 6,200 BC cal., when trapezoidal houses were superimposed onto older, stone-line hearths (Borić 2003; 2008).

A case has been made for a strong correlation between the formation of tells and the practice of vertically superimposing buildings (Chapman 1990; Tringham 2000). Standard requirements for tell formation included the use of mud in architecture, a strong commitment to place, with the continuous reuse of the same parcels of land over time, and a particular management of settlement debris in excess (Sherratt 1983). In particular, on-site reuse of building materials adversely affected the rate of expansion of tells and this strategy contributes to explain the relatively 'flat' topography of sites like Kovačevo (Brochier 1994). The bigger tells were located in the Upper Thracian Plain. Karanovo and Kapitan Dimitrijevo both accumulated over 12 m of deposits (Hiller and Nikolov 1997; Nikolov 2007). In the Struma Valley, tells in the traditional sense were only found to the North of the Kresna Gorge (Lichardus-Itten *et al.* 2006). Repeated houses were common-place in mainland Greece, and occurred from the beginning of the Neolithic sequence onward at Achilleion, Elateia, Gediki, Giannitsa B, Lerna, Otsaki and Prodromos 3 (Perlès 2001). Middle Neolithic Sesklo is noteworthy for the contrast between the tell itself, Sesklo A, in which houses were neatly superimposed, and the flat extended site, Sesklo B, where building compounds shifted location over time (Kotsakis 1999). This suggests that sections of the same community were involved in different social practices.

In Anatolia, likewise, we find two strategies for accumulating tells. The older one, on the Central Anatolian Plateau, consisted in a strict superimposition of houses, which were individually repeated on the same parcel of land. Later aceramic sites, such as Aşıklı and Çatalhöyük, were remarkable for the significantly high level at which disused houses

were truncated, habitually one metre or more, and the extraordinary fixity of houses and features across up to seven generations of houses (Esin, Harmankaya 1999; Hodder 2006; 2007; Düring 2006). Against this model, Hacılar, in the Southwest Anatolian Lake District, showed more horizontalisation and imbrication of successive building strata. Houses no longer referenced individual building plots. The latter profile of sites reflects shifts in the focus of occupation over time, perhaps linked to coordinated destruction and relocation of the entire village at intervals. Farming communities in Northwest Anatolia initially followed the Central Anatolian tradition: in the lowermost levels at Ilıpınar, X-VII, individual plots were built over up to eight times and houses respected a consistent orientation and layout (Roodenberg 1995; Roodenberg *et al.* 2003). In Ilıpınar VI, houses started to drift horizontally, following a major reshuffle of the site. Not only did houses no longer abide to a system of fixed building plots, but the ground of the village was collectively reappropriated, hence the periodic relocation of an entire row of houses (Roodenberg 1995). A similar pattern was documented at Aşağı Pınar in Turkish Thrace (Özdoğan 2013).

#### *Intra-settlement burial*

A potential explanation for the aforementioned pattern of building replacement is that Neolithic houses and their surroundings also served as a receptacle for the dead; as houses were accumulated one upon another over time, they maintained a strong connection with the ancestors buried on the site. Formal inhumation in tightly flexed ('hocker') position in a small rounded pit, which was often too small to accommodate a fully articulated skeleton, provides a common background to the Neolithic in Anatolia and the Balkans (Chapman 2000; Băčvarov 2004; Alpaslan Roodenberg 2008). At Lepenski Vir, for instance, extended supine inhumation was replaced by flexed inhumation at the time that Early Neolithic Starčevo pottery first entered the region (Bonsall 2007). The contracted position implies that the dead had to be bound or tightly wrapped shortly before *rigor mortis* occurred or, more likely, immediately after the effect subsided. In Thrace, about 100 discrete burials were recovered within Early Neolithic (pre-Karanovo I to Karanovo II) habitation layers (Băčvarov 2000; 2003). At Azmak, for instance, a jar containing the remains of an infant occurred within a house close to a fire installation (Georgiev 1972). The dead in this region were normally buried in-between houses or in the fill of abandoned houses – the burials generally lacking elaboration and grave goods (Băčvarov 2003). Clay source pits, refuse pits or postholes, whose shapes and sizes were not necessarily suited to the deposition of a fully articulated body in flexed position, were occasionally reused (Chapman 2000; Bailey 1993; 2000; Băčvarov 2004). The burial record demonstrates a positive over-representation of juveniles and infants, which may be explained by either a high infant mortality rate or the particular attention afforded to this age-group. The latter suggestion is supported by the evidence from Kovačevo, in which all seven graves discovered at the site belonged to newborns and very young children (Lichardus-Itten *et al.* 2002).

In Early Neolithic Greece, likewise, intra-settlement burial was a significant, though marginal practice, accounting for about 60 deaths in total; of these, a large number were buried inside caves, such as Franchthi, Prosymna and Tsoungiza (Cavanagh, Mee 1998; Perlès 2001). Juveniles and infants were especially well represented in the bone assemblage. At Nea Nikomedeia, there were 22 juveniles and infants among those that were given formal inhumation (Angel 1973). Two of the children were buried with an adult female, while three children were laid to rest in the same grave (Rodden & Rodden 1964b). At Franchthi,

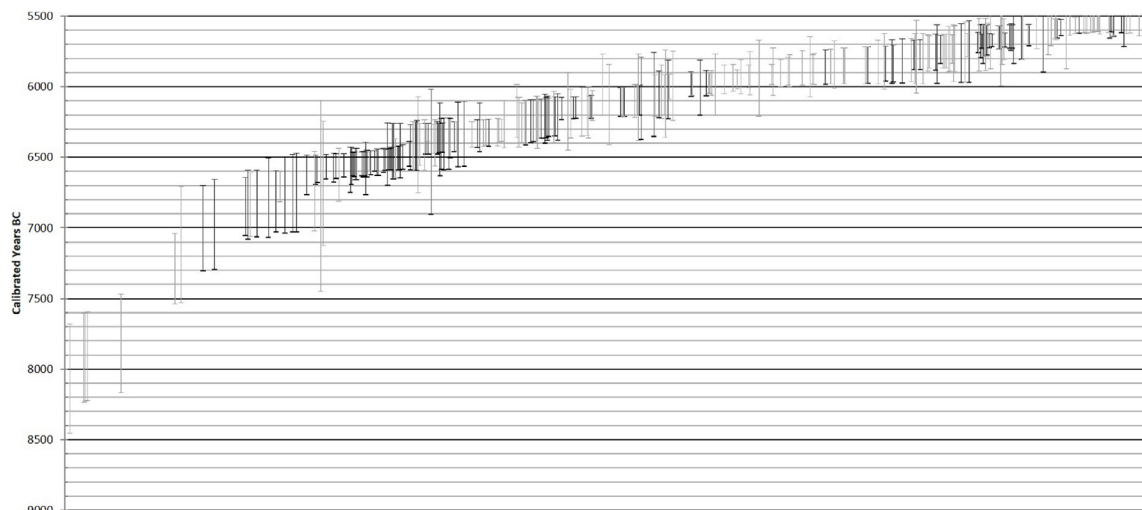


Fig. 2 14C Backbone diagram showing the chronological spectrum of the practice of house burning in Anatolia and Southeast Europe, using as proxy the distribution of calibrated radiocarbon intervals assigned to phases, in which a) an entire horizon of houses has burned (black) and b) isolated fire-related house destructions (light grey) occur. Based on a sample of 848 calibrated radiocarbon dates from 59 Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic sites in Central Anatolia, Western Anatolia, Thrace and Greece during the interval 9,000-5,500 BC cal. The dates were recalibrated using the IntCal09 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al. 2009) in OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2013). The intervals are expressed at  $2\sigma$  (95.4% probability) and ranked in chronological order from the oldest to the youngest date BP

Обр. 2. 14C Диаграма, показваща хронологическия спектър на практиката на опожаряване на жилища в Анатолия и югоизточна Европа. Тя се базира на разпределението на калибрирани радиокарбонни интервали, принадлежащи на фази, в които: а) цели жилищни хоризонти са опожарявани (в черно); б) има изолирани случаи на жилищно опожаряване (в светлосиво). Използвани са 848 калибрирани радиокарбонни дати от 59 неолитни и халколитни обекта в централна Анатолия, Западна Анатолия, Тракия и Гърция в интервала 9,000-5,500 пр. Хр. (calBC). Датите са прекалибрирани с атмосферната крива IntCal09 (Reimer et al. 2009), част от OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2013). Интервалите са представени с  $2\sigma$  (95.4% вероятност) и подредени хронологически от най-древната до най-късната BP дата

there were at least nine children and infants among the 17 Neolithic burials recorded at the site (Cullen 1999). In Knossos, all seven burials belonged to juveniles and infants (Treuil 1983). Subfloor burial, in the strictest sense, was only evidenced at Prodromos in Thessaly, where a collective grave beneath a floor yielded 11 skulls and some long bones, apparently deposited in three successive stages while the house was still occupied (Hourmouziadis 1973). The emerging picture on the Aegean coast of Turkey is similar: only three of the sites in this region, Hoca Çeşme, Ege Gübre and Ulucak, have produced formal burials; these amount to seven in total, which is a very low estimate considering the size of the exposure and the length of occupation at these sites (Özdoğan 1999; Sağlamtimur 2012; Ö. Çevik, personal communication).

Intra-settlement burial was much more prevalent in Central and Northwest Anatolia, where children and adults alike were buried within the settlement. Çatalhöyük has yielded the single largest concentration of discrete individuals for the period under review, over

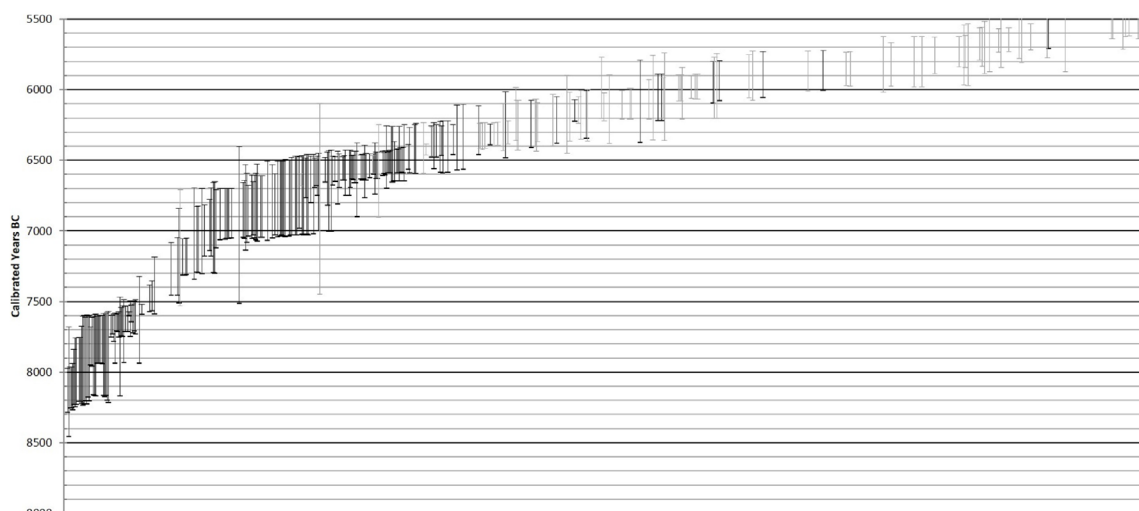


Fig. 3. 14C Backbone diagram showing the chronological spectrum of the practice of sub-floor burial in Anatolia and Southeast Europe, using as proxy the distribution of radiocarbon intervals assigned to phases, in which a) burials occurred under 'active' households (black); and b) burials are 'intramural' but the relation with the architecture remains unclear (light grey). Based on a sample of 848 calibrated radiocarbon dates from 59 Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic sites in Central Anatolia, Western Anatolia, Thrace and Greece during the interval 9,000-5,500 BC cal. The dates were recalibrated using the IntCal09 atmospheric curve (Reimer et al. 2009) in OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2013). The intervals are expressed at  $2\sigma$  (95.4% probability) and ranked in chronological order from the oldest to the youngest date BP

Обр. 3. 14C Диаграма, показваща хронологическия спектър на практиката на погребване под пода на жилища в Анатолия и югоизточна Европа. Тя се базира на разпределението на калибрирани радиокарбонни интервали, принадлежащи на фази, в които: а) погребенията се явяват под 'активни' домакинства (в черно); б) погребенията са със сигурност интрамурални, но тяхната връзка с архитектурните останки е неясна (в светлосиво).

Използвани са 848 калибрирани радиокарбонни дати от 59 неолитни и халколитни обекта в централна Анатолия, Западна Анатолия, Тракия и Гърция в интервала 9,000-5,500 пр. Хр. (кал). Датите са прекалибрирани с атмосферната крива IntCal09 (Reimer et al. 2009), част от OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2013). Интервалите са представени с  $2\sigma$  (95.4% вероятност) и подредени хронологически от най-древната до най-късната BP дата

1000 (Düring 2006; Boz, Hager 2013). Single primary inhumation beneath house floor was the norm throughout the main occupation of the site. The dead were buried in the central room away from the hearth and the oven under the northeast platform (Hodder 2006). One observes a gradual shift in the location of burials towards the end of the Çatalhöyük East sequence, after c. 6,500 BC cal. An in-between space was used, for instance, as a small communal burial ground for seven neonates and infants in Level IV (Farid 2014). By the time occupation had shifted to the West mound, the dead were no longer buried under 'active' households. Only two burials were found within the fill of abandoned structures (Biehl et al. 2012). At Tepecik-Çiftlik in Cappadocia, there was a separate burial ground for adults outside one of the main building complexes (Bıçakcı et al. 2012). The first farming communities in the Eastern Marmara region also made use of inter-dwelling spaces to bury sections of a community. In Ilıpınar, 48 individuals, including a majority of juveniles and infants (31), were buried in a 200 m<sup>2</sup> unbuilt space at the centre of the village (Roodenberg 1999).

Some of the dead were buried intramurally at Menteşe, Barcın and Aktopraklık, though, owing to the nature of the architecture at these sites (the absence of finely laminated plaster floors), it was not possible to establish whether houses were still in use when the burials took place (Alpaslan Roodenberg 2006; 2011).

## Discussion

This brief overview of selected house-related practices during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> millennia BC cal. highlights the remarkable proximity between Neolithic communities in the Balkans and Anatolia. Contemporary trends in residence and construction may be explained by similar understandings of the house as a material object and as a symbolic space. As such, practices provide a useful marker for tracing the spread of Neolithic conditions into Europe. Yet, are we dealing with spatially diffuse practices, springing up naturally wherever farming was introduced (and, if so, why?), or are we dealing instead with a deliberate transfer of knowledge from one society to another? Answering this question requires a dynamic research approach, emphasising the definition, origins and chronology of each practice, as I have argued in my doctoral thesis (Brami 2014a).

The argument of chronological precedence in Anatolia, though helpful to establish the general direction of spread, fails to address the above issue, because the Neolithic started up to 2,000 calibrated years earlier in Central Anatolia than it did in the Aegean Basin (Brami 2014b). One observes, for instance, that semi-subterranean houses were continuously re-cut in the same place at the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium BC cal. at Boncuklu in the Konya Plain, in a context in which settled farming was already practised (Baird *et al.* 2012). On the other hand, deliberate house burning appears to have developed *in situ* in Anatolia during the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC cal., as evidenced through the sequence of Çatalhöyük East – perhaps heralding an initial separation between the uptake of sedentism and the articulation of a coherent set of strategies to deal with the new pattern of existence.

Fig. 2 highlights this discrepancy in graphical form: the diagram shows the chronological distribution of phases in which burned houses occur, based on a sample of 848 calibrated radiocarbon dates from 59 Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites in Central Anatolia, Western Anatolia, Thrace and Greece<sup>2</sup>. This pattern may be contrasted with the distribution of subfloor burials (fig. 3), which started and ended comparatively earlier. The suggestion is that some practices, like subfloor burial and the vertical superimposition of houses, were associated with the development of later aceramic societies on the Central Anatolian Plateau, marginally spreading into Western Anatolia and the Balkans after c. 6,500 BC cal., while practices like house burning only took off at the turn of the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC cal. with the emergence of early ceramic Neolithic communities. Practices repeatedly going in and out of use across a broad spectrum of sites are a strong indication for historical continuity and a diffusion of practices from Anatolia to the Balkans.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that the Balkans witnessed the inception of a new set of residential and construction practices at the onset of the Neolithic period, pertaining to the ways in which houses were built, lived in and discarded at the end of their use-lives. The

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2 For detailed methodology and access to the database, see Brami 2014b.

habitus of building practices evidenced in Europe consisted of, ancient practices like sub-floor burial and vertical superimposition of houses on the one hand, which could be traced back to the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium BC cal. on the Central Anatolian Plateau, and comparatively young practices, such as deliberate house burning, on the other hand, emerging simultaneously in the Balkans and Anatolia after c. 6,500 BC cal. This patterns suggests that practices diffused in successive horizons of interaction, both alongside the first farming communities and later on, within networks of moderately similar sites.

Practices are key for understanding broader similarities in house form and use patterns in this period, given that houses themselves, by their immovable nature, were not part of the material 'package', or 'packages', that spread into Europe. A diffusion of house-related practices indicates strong interactions that go beyond the casual exchange of domesticates and objects postulated by some models of Neolithic expansion, and suggests that agents moving and re-enacting practices with which they were familiar, yet in an unfamiliar setting, helped spreading the Neolithic beyond its original bonds.

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## Практики от жизнения цикъл на неолитните жилища като маркери на неолитната експанзия от Анатолия към Балканите

Максим Брами

(резюме)

Тази статия е базирана на презумпцията, че неолитът се характеризира с първата широко разпространена поява на постоянни жилища и домакинства – което е в унисон с възприемането на уседнал начин на живот – и дискутира дали и как строителните и жилищни практики биха могли да допринесат към разбирането на процеса на неолитна експанзия от Анатолия към Балканите. Три практики с широко разпространение са подложени на анализ: опожаряването на жилища, вертикалното припокриване на жилища и интрамуралните погребения. Статията започва с дефиниране на контекстуалния метод, използван за идентифициране на различни практики, на ба-

зата на повтаряемост в материалните останки – пример е наличието на горели жилища като свидетелство за практика на преднамерено опожаряване. Следващата част е посветена на приликите в различните практики, осъществявани от неолитните общества в Анатолия, Тракия и Гърция през VII-VI хил. пр. Хр., с оглед формулирането на следните хипотези: 1) опожаряването на жилища е основна стратегия за 'затварянето' на жилищата в края на техния жизнен цикъл; 2) хората се възползват от стабилността на съществуващите сгради и строят нови жилища върху тях; 3) последната практика е тясно свързана с погребването на мъртвите във/ или в близост на жилищата. Сходствата във формата на жилищата и начинът, по който те се използват, се дължат на аналогичен подход към строителството и начина на обитаване, засвидетелстван от огромен брой археологически обекти. В заключение е подчертана необходимостта от динамичен подход, базиран на пространствено-темпорално сравнение на различните практики, който би хвърлил светлина върху въпроса за посоката на разпространение на тези практики.