COMMUNAL ARCHITECTURE

Regional Perspectives and Local Expressions During the Pre-Pottery Neolithic

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Cover image: Aerial view of Göbekli Tepe’s Enclosure C. (Photo: German Archaeological Institute, Klaus Schmidt).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study examines a distinct category of structures that emerged at the beginning of the Holocene, during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. These structures are commonly referred to as 'public' or 'communal' buildings. They differ from other (domestic) structures in both size and monumentality. Such buildings are found across a vast region, from the Southern Levant to Southeastern Anatolia. Although these buildings are generally grouped into a single category, they do not appear as a standardized type throughout the entire region. Clusters of similar structures can be identified in the archaeological record, but many differences are evident across time and space.

Around 12.000 years ago, human life underwent significant changes. People became more sedentary, and with this shift, material cultures and architecture also evolved. For a long time, this transformation was viewed as a discrete event driven by environmental factors such as climate change and associated shifts in subsistence practices. Initially regarded as an agricultural revolution due to its sudden appearance at the start of the Holocene, this change remains the subject of debate. Early theories centered on environmental factors (Childe, 1936, 1942), but perspectives have shifted toward social evolutionary explanations. Jacques Cauvin emphasized the role of the human mind, arguing that spiritual and social shifts, rather than external pressures such as climate change, drove the move to agriculture and a more settled lifestyle (Cauvin, 1994, 2000). Following Cauvin, scholars such as Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris (2011) noted that the transition varied by relationships and geography. Ian Hodder described the process as an example of 'culturing nature' in which society's growing complexity was reflected in the symbolism of objects and architecture (Hodder, 1990, 2003).

We now believe that the changes in human behaviour were not an isolated incident or a single moment in time, and that they were not solely attributable to climate change or other external forces. Instead, it was a transformation that had already begun at the end of the Paleolithic. This process is commonly referred to as the 'Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation'[1] (after Watkins 2024, p. 62) or the 'Neolithization Process'. According to our current understanding, this process first took place in West Asia. The Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation involved hunter-gatherer groups establishing permanent settlements, within which monumental architecture, symbolic imagery, and crop cultivation and animal management developed. These advances accelerated innovation and resulted in significant social, technological, and economic changes.

While the exact reasons for the emergence of the Neolithic remain unresolved, given its long duration, there probably isn't a single cause for the change. Similar questions also exist regarding the emergence of monumental architecture and communal buildings. The discovery of sites such as Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük, both located in modern-day Türkiye, has fueled scholarly debate about the role of art, imagery, and architecture in forming and maintaining

[1] In this study I will also refer to it as the 'Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation', unless stating other authors.

shared identities, knowledge, and belief systems. Much has already been written about the possible meanings and functions of public or communal architecture. Still, much remains unclear about their specific functions, origins, and temporal development, both in terms of their use and architectural form. In my view, the roles and functions of these buildings, along with their architectural significance, remain largely overlooked in discussions of the emergence of the Neolithic. Communal buildings are often grouped into a single category within the architecture of Early Neolithic sites, resulting in a less nuanced understanding of this building type. What is missing from many scholarly discussions is a detailed architectural analysis of this category of buildings and the differences among individual structures across time and space, rather than a solely interpretive focus, such as on the possible function(s) of the structure. Many structures labeled as communal or public are usually discussed only within the context of a specific site or region. Grouping these buildings and assuming they share the same functions and characteristics contradicts observable temporal and regional differences. Focusing on individual sites or buildings allows us to identify their unique features and local influences, which are often only partially included in broader archaeological studies. Conversely, comparing building sequences across multiple sites, not just within a single site or structure, can provide valuable insights into how this new type of architecture developed. This approach can improve our understanding of themes like connectivity, belief systems, symbolism, and shared identities within early prehistoric societies. This study comes at a time of increased research and new site discoveries that reveal more examples of communal architecture in Southeastern Anatolia.

This study explores the origins and transformations of communal architecture over time. I prefer the term transformation over development because (re)development might suggest an improvement or a change in function or meaning, which may not always have been the case. The goal of this study, however, extends beyond providing a current overview of communal architecture in the research area. In addition to tracing the origins of communal architecture and enhancing our shared understanding of this category within the Early Neolithic architecture of West Asia, I will also analyze regional differences. Although multiple buildings from various sites, periods, and regions are grouped within this single category, this may limit our understanding of these structures and their societal roles. The following research question and sub-questions form the basis of this study on communal architecture in West Asia: How can we explain regional and local differences in communal architecture in Southwest Asia during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic? And more specifically:

- What defines ‘communal architecture’ as communal?
- What differences can we identify among communal buildings in the research area?
- How does communal architecture relate to other settlement patterns, and does this change over time?

The data used for this study include excavation reports and secondary literature on specific aspects of sites, communal architecture, and other elements of material culture. In addition to information from excavation reports and secondary sources on the physical characteristics of

communal buildings, existing hypotheses about the interpretation of these structures in relation to defining communal architecture will also be considered. Archaeological data and secondary literature on the use and significance of these buildings will primarily be used to classify the structures discussed into types or groups of similar structures. This typology will be based on various architectural features, such as layout (e.g., plan and size), internal divisions and features (e.g., pillars, banks, decorations), and modifications. The geographic focus of this thesis is Southwest Asia, specifically the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys (located in modern-day Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq). This region is also known as the 'hilly flanks of the fertile crescent'. The grouping of sites into these regions is mainly based on their geographic location along the previously mentioned rivers. In contrast, other sites are grouped based on similarities in material culture (e.g., Mureybetian after Tell Mureybet). The focus on these regions for this study is driven by practical considerations and the aim of improving understanding of the spread of communal architecture within local and broader regional contexts. The findings of this study can eventually be integrated into research on communal architecture and related themes, such as connectivity, identity formation, and belief systems, as expressed through symbolism and material culture. However, these themes generally fall outside the scope of this thesis due to practical limitations.

The following topics will be covered in subsequent chapters: Chapter 2 will introduce the broader region and study area, periodization (chronology), and the earliest discoveries of communal architecture, drawing on the research history of the wider area. This includes geographical, environmental, and socio-cultural elements evident in Southwest Asia from the Late Epipaleolithic and throughout the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. The framework for this chapter is the region's research history over the past roughly 70 years, with a specific focus on early communal architecture. In Chapter 3, all sites and communal architecture serving as case studies for this study will be presented in greater detail, with particular emphasis on the architectural elements mentioned above, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 is the first part of the discussion and covers the concept and categorization of communal architecture, including differences and temporal change at the level of individual sites and structures. Chapter 5 also contributes to the discussion by emphasizing regional differences, comparing the Upper Tigris and Middle Euphrates River Valleys with respect to communal architecture. Chapter 6 will conclude the study by addressing possible answers to the research questions and suggesting directions for future studies on this topic.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the research area, chronology, and (climatological) circumstances relevant to this study and to the sites discussed as the case studies. The foundation for this chapter is the region's research history over roughly the past seventy years, with a focus on the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic transition. In this chapter, the emergence of the (Pre-Pottery) Neolithic period in Southwest Asia will be examined in greater detail, setting the stage for the introduction of the case studies and the following discussion on communal architecture. Following this introduction, there is a brief explanation of the cultural periods, specifically the Epipaleolithic and the later Pre-Pottery Neolithic.

While the focus of this thesis is on the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys within the current territories of Türkiye (Southeastern Anatolia), as well as Northern Syria and Iraq, the characteristics of the emergence of the Neolithic period in Southwest Asia are evident across a much larger area. Southwest Asia has maintained its geographic shape for approximately 24.000 years, despite significant landscape changes. This vast region extends from modern-day Türkiye in the northwest to the border with Syria in the southeast, following the Taurus Mountains. It then shifts into the Zagros Mountains, which mark the border between Iran and Iraq, and extends eastward across all land east of the Mediterranean, sloping southeast. Historically, much of this region was known as the 'Fertile Crescent'. The river basins of the Euphrates and Tigris are the primary focus of this study within the broader Fertile Crescent region. Although most sites discussed in this study are near these rivers or their tributaries, the nature of their relationship with and reliance on these rivers during the Early Neolithic remains unclear. The mountainous regions play a vital role in shaping the climate. Westerly weather systems crossing the Mediterranean lead to lower temperatures and snowfall, especially in the mountainous areas of Türkiye and Iran during winter. The coastal regions of Anatolia, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel get ample rainfall year-round due to their mountainous terrain. Still, rainfall drops sharply toward the east and south of the Jordan Valley. As a result, much of Jordan, Israel, and eastern Syria is semi-arid or arid. The melting snow from Eastern Türkiye's mountains, transported by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, made lands south of the Taurus and Zagros mountains fertile and suitable for farming (Watkins, 2024, pp. 8–11).

Robert Braidwood was fascinated by Gordon Childe's idea of a Neolithic or agricultural revolution. Childe proposed that agriculture began in the Fertile Crescent, a region south of the Taurus Mountains. This area was the birthplace of major ancient civilizations, including Egypt, the Biblical kingdoms, and the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. Childe believed that hunter-gatherers adapted to the drier climate at the start of the Holocene by gathering in the still-green, resource-rich Fertile Crescent, eventually shifting to crop farming and animal herding (Watkins, 2024, p. 11). Although Childe's theory lacked direct evidence, Braidwood conducted field research, often in different landscapes, working with geologists and paleobotanists. Their findings showed that the Late Pleistocene climate was much colder and only became suitable for agriculture at the beginning of the Holocene. This challenged Childe's hypothesis but didn't

clarify the causes of the shift to cultivation and herding. Braidwood focused on an environmental zone where he expected to find archaeological evidence of the transition from hunting and gathering to farming and herding. Domesticated plant and animal species originated from the Mediterranean coastal region and the hilly areas of the Taurus and Zagros Mountains. This region received more annual rainfall than Central Southwest Asia, making up the 'hilly flanks of the Fertile Crescent,' which gets over 200 mm of rain each year (Watkins, 2024, p. 12). People in this zone likely started cultivating cereals and legumes while herding sheep and goats.

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, the emergence of the Neolithic cannot be regarded as a single event but rather as a moment in time, a small step within a process of long durée and human evolution. The first signs of the emergence of the Neolithic already became visible at the end of the Upper Palaeolithic, now commonly referred to as the Epipaleolithic.

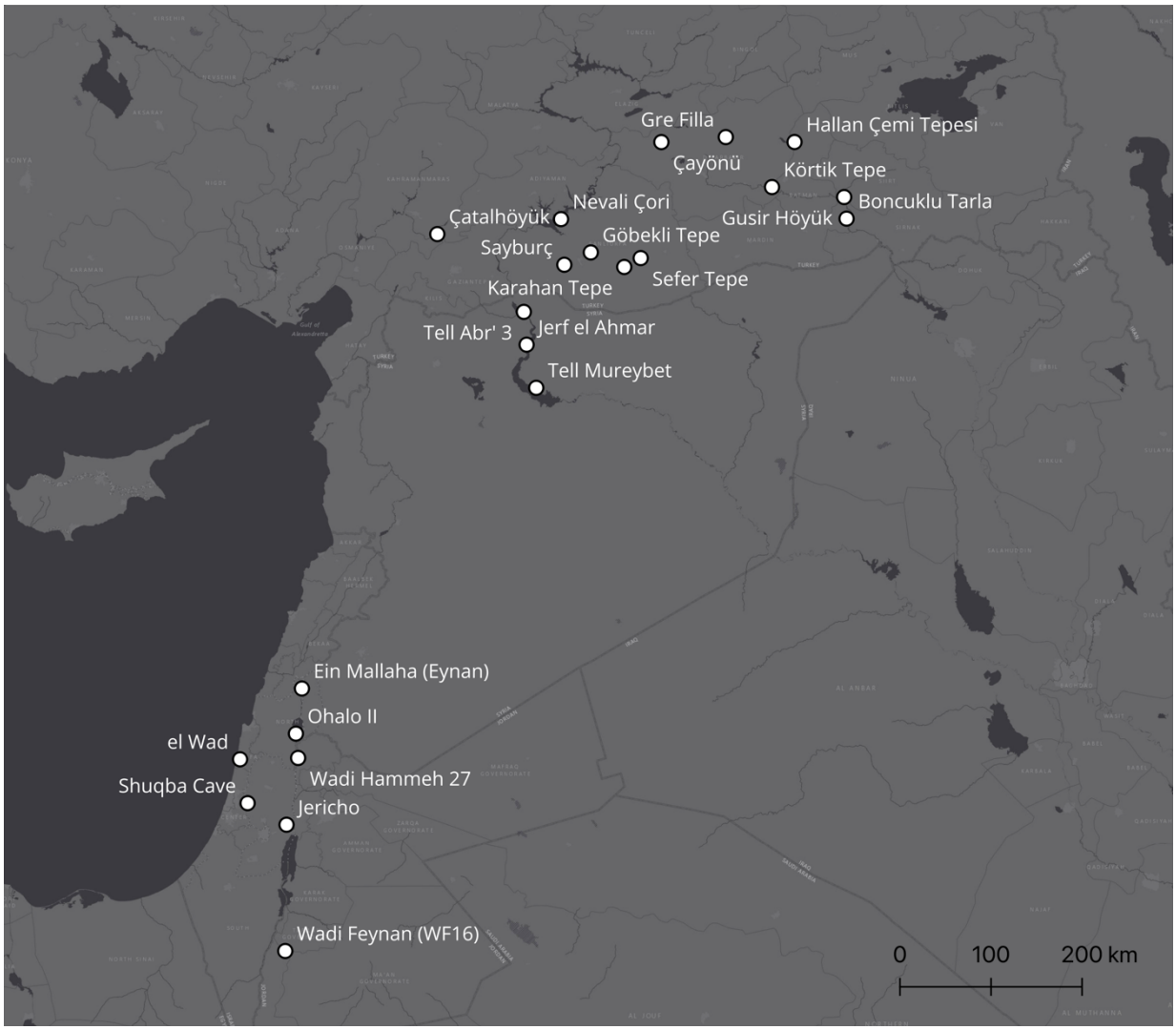

Figure 2.1.1. Research area, including the main sites discussed in this study (Figure by Melis-Langeveld, 2026).

2.2. The Epipaleolithic

Some features characteristic of the Neolithic originated in the preceding period, specifically the Epipaleolithic. The Epipaleolithic is a subdivision of the Upper Palaeolithic. The Upper Palaeolithic begins around 48.000 cal BP (46.000 BCE), and the Epipaleolithic starts around 23.000 cal BP (21.000 BCE), coinciding with the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM). The Epipaleolithic concluded with the beginning of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic around 9.600 BCE. Early prehistoric research in the Near East was Eurocentric, as shown by Neuville's (1934) six-stage Upper Palaeolithic model and Garrod's (1951) revision, both of which were based on European terminology and criteria applied to sites on Mount Carmel and in the Judean Desert. Even later, local archaeological findings were often assessed using European standards (Belfer-Cohen & Goring-Morris, 2014, p. 1381). Most of the prehistoric periodization was based on (lithic) assemblages, as is also the case with the Upper Palaeolithic in Southwest Asia and the Levant. In the 1960s, a new subphase of the Upper Palaeolithic was identified: the Epipaleolithic. This subdivision was also mainly based on lithic assemblages. Many early Epipalaeolithic sites are found in the Mediterranean region and in the northern oases of Transjordan and the Syro-Arabian deserts. Innovations from this era include mortars, bowls, pestles, and mullers—often made from basalt or phosphorite—which supplemented earlier Upper Palaeolithic grinding slabs. These items constituted a small but noteworthy component of site occupations, indicating the presence of fixed furnishings and an increased emphasis on processing plant-based foods (Belfer-Cohen 2014, p. 1391). These findings suggest a more sedentary lifestyle, with more permanent (seasonal) dwellings.

For most of their 300.000-year history, Homo sapiens lived as hunter-gatherers. The cultivation of plants and the management of wild animals began around 10.000 years ago, significantly changing human lifestyles. Humans lived in small, mobile bands that moved from campsite to campsite, relying on natural resources for sustenance. Gordon Childe suggested that climate change and aridification in Southwest Asia prompted a shift to sedentary agriculture. However, Robert Braidwood's findings challenged this idea by proposing intermediary stages between hunting-gathering and agriculture, involving increased plant-food collection that led to early cultivation. Despite extensive research in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, he found no conclusive evidence for climatic reasons for the shift towards sedentism and agriculture. He emphasized the importance of the Epipaleolithic period before the Neolithic (Watkins, 2024, pp. 24–28).

Kent Flannery and Frank Hole's ‘broad-spectrum revolution theory’, based on work at Pleistocene and Neolithic sites, proposed that Epipaleolithic hunter-gatherers expanded their diets to include a wider variety of plants and animals. This shift reduced the need for frequent movement and allowed for longer stays in one place. As a result, population growth occurred, setting the stage for domestication during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. Research indicates that sedentism was not limited to a specific time or location; instead, it was a gradual process that began in the Epipaleolithic and extended across a vast region (Watkins, 2024, pp. 24–28).

During the Epipaleolithic, societies underwent significant changes in subsistence, social, cultural, and economic aspects, marking the transition to the (Pre-Pottery) Neolithic. Communities began living in larger groups and harvesting annually. They may also have started

storing food, although evidence for this is limited. The period saw the emergence of a new stone-tool tradition within the Upper Palaeolithic Ahmarian culture, which evolved into microliths during the Epipaleolithic/Natufian (Kebaran) culture. These sequences and cultures, studied extensively in the 1960s and 1970s, varied by region and subsistence strategies. Hunter-gatherers strategically settled in areas with diverse ecological zones, utilizing a wide range of resources. Near the end of the Epipaleolithic, a noticeable cultural shift occurred, exemplified by the Natufian culture in the Southern Levant. The Late Epipaleolithic began around 14.000 BCE, after the Last Glacial Maximum, and continued throughout the Younger Dryas into the early Pre-Pottery Neolithic at the start of the Holocene.

The Natufian

Dorothy Garrod first identified the Natufian culture from her 1928 excavations at Shukba cave, and later at the site of El-Wad. Additional sites, such as Shaklay, were also discovered, marking the period as the first in which complex material traits (e.g., tools and building practices) are identifiable in a specific region. The perceived significant shift in the Late Epipaleolithic should be reconsidered, as more sites from this period now permit more accurate detection of regional changes (Garrod, 1951; Belfer-Cohen & Goring-Morris, 2014).

The Natufian culture closely resembles the earlier Epipaleolithic period but exhibits more pronounced characteristics. Evidence of (semi-)permanent settlements existed previously, such as Ohalo II, but increased during the Natufian, which also saw larger settlements, ground-stone tools, and extensive cemeteries with grave goods, indicating a more sedentary lifestyle. Additionally, settlements appear to have been occupied year-round. Each Natufian site varies in characteristics.

Most known Epipaleolithic settlements and architecture are in the Levant, south of the study area. Early Natufian architecture includes large oval and D-shaped structures (7-15 meters in diameter) at sites like Wadi Hammeh 27 and Eynan (‘Ain Mallaha’ in Arabic), supported by circular postholes for roofing. An important site for understanding the Epipaleolithic period in the Southern Levant is Eynan. Located in northern Israel, this site was inhabited roughly between 13.000 and 10.000 BCE. Situated on a slope descending toward Lake Huleh, which has since silted up, Eynan gets its name from a nearby spring also called Eynan. The site was discovered during water management work in the 1950s and has been extensively studied since then. Two structures, buildings ‘131’ and ‘51’ (see figure

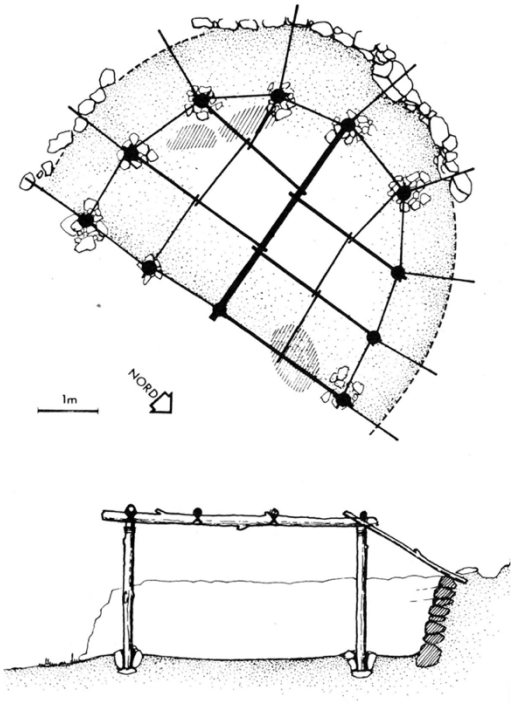

Figure 2.2.1. Eynan. Building 131/51 (reconstruction) (Haklay & Gopher, 2015, p. 5).

2.2.1), are especially significant for this study because of their unusual size and shape (Watkins, 2024, pp. 82–83). Buildings 131 and 51, reconstructed by Francois Valla (figure 2.2.1), are among the earliest examples of non-domestic architecture employing stone construction (Haklay, 2015, p. 5). The site's stratigraphy shows different building phases, including construction, occupation, and abandonment. Notably, structures 131 and 51 exhibit precise concentric geometry and a north-south axis, consistent with their positions on the slope and their openings toward the spring. Haklay and Gopher's (2015) analysis of this structure contrasts with Valla's initial reconstruction, yet it still highlights planning and geometry in Natufian/Epipaleolithic architecture. They suggest that structures 131 and 51 are the same structure; rather than two distinct structures, they comprise two building phases (Haklay & Gopher, 2015).

At Wadi Hammeh 27 in Jordan, a site located on a ridge in a wadi bed, significant erosion has reduced its size by about half. Occupied since the early Natufian (circa 12.000 BCE), it features two large circular structures with stone walls: one D-shaped with a large opening, similar to structure 131/51 at Eynan, and another with three concentric stone rings and, at its center, a small pile of limestone boulders. These structures, measuring roughly 100–130 square meters, are larger than those at other Natufian sites. Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen (2003) suggest they were likely community buildings, not just for nuclear families, possibly serving extended groups or lodges (Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen, 2003, p. 71). I propose that they may have been communal structures with functions beyond domestic ones. Three engraved stone slabs with carved lozenge motifs were found upright on the floors, along with caches of objects, debris, and burned human skull fragments, like deposits at later Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites (Watkins, 2024, p. 71). Their size, shape, and decorated slabs may indicate early communal architecture during the Late Epipaleolithic.

Recent excavations have also shown that Epipaleolithic cultures are widespread in Anatolia. Additionally, in Southeastern Anatolia, Epipaleolithic levels have been found in the lowest layers of settlements such as Hallan Çemi and Körtik Tepe. While Epipaleolithic layers have been identified at both sites, these remains are only found in small areas and therefore cannot be linked to communal architecture. As a result, Körtik Tepe will not be discussed in detail in this thesis, and only the later layers and structures of Hallan Çemi will be examined in the next chapter. Most evidence is obtained from deep soundings or beneath later occupation levels; the majority of what we know about the Upper Paleolithic and the Epipaleolithic in Anatolia still comes from cave sites (Taşkıran, 2016). The bulk of what is considered here as communal architecture dates to the subsequent Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) period.

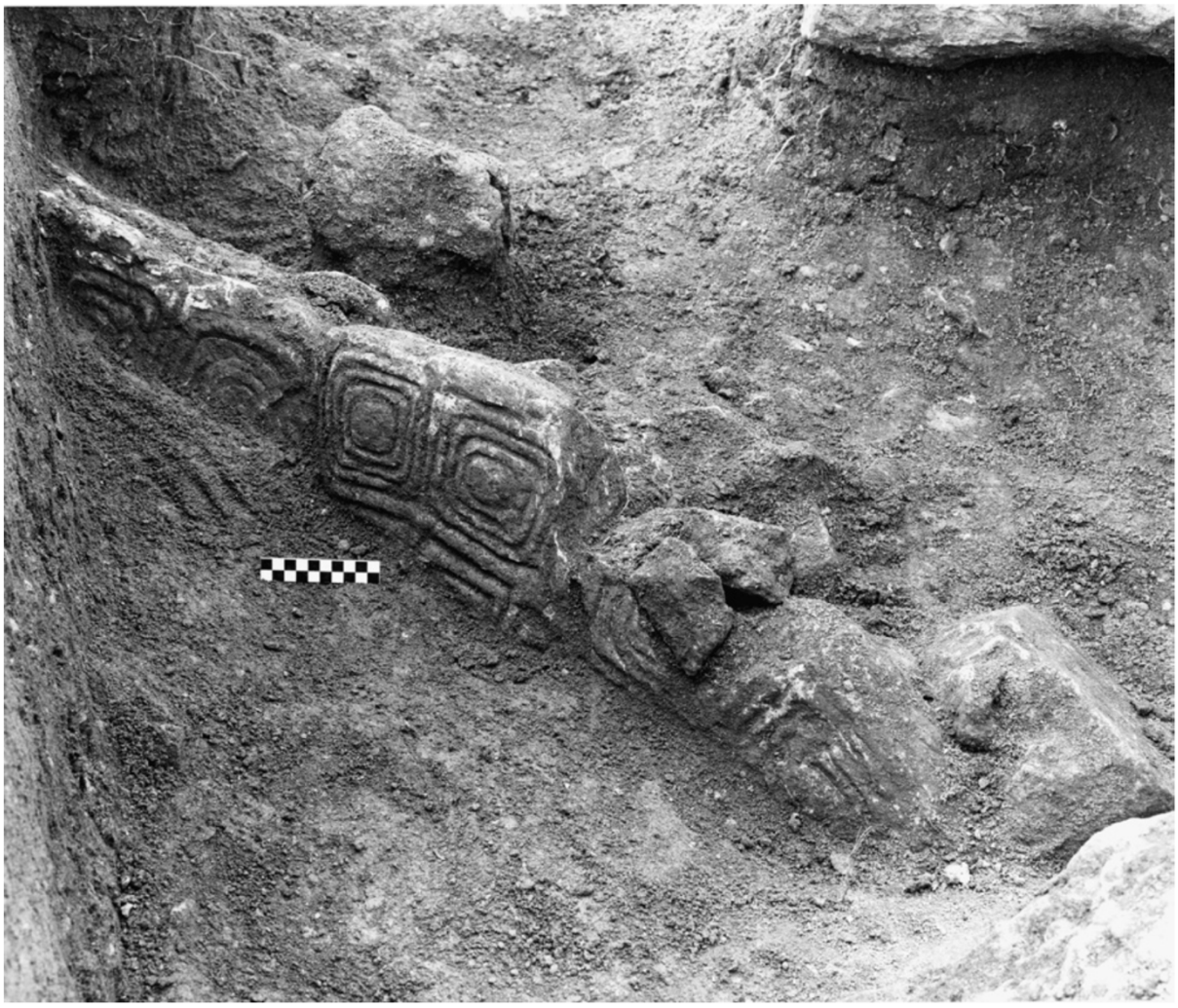

Figure 2.2.2. Wadi Hammeh 27. Three in-situ incised stone slabs (Edwards 2013, p. 85).

2.3. The PPNA

At the core of the Epipalaeolithic-Neolithic transformation is the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (between 9.600–8.700 BCE). However, as previously noted, the Epipalaeolithic-Neolithic Transformation was not a straightforward process; instead, it involved multiple developments occurring at different times and in various ways across regions. It was long believed that the Northern Levant was less suitable for permanent settlement and domestication after the Younger Dryas, mainly because few sites from this period were known (Hillman et al., 2001). However, over recent decades, an increase in open-air settlements (mostly *tell* sites) at the end of the Epipaleolithic in the major river valleys of the northern Levant and southeastern Anatolia has become evident. These sites date to just before or during the Younger Dryas and remained occupied during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. Settlements in these river valleys existed from the start of the Holocene, likely driven by a new way of living and possibly pre-domestic cereal cultivation (Watkins, 2024, p. 108). Sites such as Tell Mureybet and Jerf el Ahmar (Syria) were continuously inhabited from the Epipaleolithic through the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Watkins, 2024, pp. 107–108). Since Cauvin, scholars have reached a consensus that the emergence of the Neolithic, along with the shift to

sedentism and agriculture, was influenced by multiple environmental, demographic, social, and religious factors (Zeder, 2011). Following Cauvin, scholars like Ian Hodder and Trevor Watkins have expanded on his work, arguing that changes in human cognitive abilities are central to the emergence of the Neolithic. The capacity for symbolic thinking, acquired during the Upper Paleolithic and combined with the more permanent settlements of PPNA, marked a significant leap in human cognition (Zeder, 2011, p. 43). Scholars have also emphasized the importance of visible symbolism to accommodate increasing population sizes and growing communities.

While the Pre-Pottery Neolithic is chronologically a later (sub)phase within the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation, it is more similar to the preceding (Late) Epipaleolithic than to the Pottery Neolithic that follows. In the Southern Levant, the Pre-Pottery Neolithic is identified by changes in lithic assemblages, such as the appearance of projectile points, but this is less clear in the Northern Levant and in the region that serves as the research area for this thesis. In the Northern Levant and Southeastern Anatolia, the distinction between the Late Epipaleolithic and the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic can be drawn only on the basis of radiocarbon dating. Much of what characterizes the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic—whether domestic buildings, tools, or burials—can also be found at Late Epipaleolithic sites. Kathleen Kenyon first distinguished (and named it) the Pre-Pottery Neolithic during excavations at ancient Jericho. One notable feature of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic is the emergence of monumental architecture on a scale not seen in earlier periods. Many of these early examples of monumental architecture are also considered communal, meaning that most of these structures are interpreted as non-domestic and intended to serve the broader population.

Figure 2.3.1. The tower of Jericho (Belfer-Cohen, 2010, p. 3).

Jericho played a key role in dividing the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation into more detailed subphases. Kathleen Kenyon's discovery of Early Neolithic layers in Jericho during the 1950s marked a significant advance in understanding this transition (Kenyon, 1957). The radiocarbon dates obtained by her team showed that Jericho existed much longer than previously believed. Kenyon identified distinct layers, including Natufian stone tools, noting that only the topmost 'Neolithic' layer contained pottery. She introduced the term 'Pre-Pottery Neolithic' (PPN), which was later subdivided into PPN-A and PPN-B based on architectural differences, such as predominantly semicircular plans during the PPNA and predominantly rectangular plans during the PPNB (Kenyon, 1960). While these labels help differentiate the periods, it's essential to understand the complex, non-linear nature of the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation. Initially, the tower of Jericho was considered the earliest monumental architecture in the Southern Levant. However, discoveries in the 1990s, including sites such as Jerf el Ahmar, Göbekli Tepe, and Nevali Çori, challenged this

view. Aside from Jericho, no comparable sites were known in the Southern Levant until the discovery of WF16 in southern Jordan.

WF 16 (Wadi Feynan)

Figure 2.3.2. Structure O75 at the early Neolithic site of WF16, showing two tiers of benches, a central trough and radiating gullies. The circular structure in the foreground is the later structure O100 (Mithen, 2020, p. 2).

Identified only by initials and a number, WF16's significance goes beyond its name. Initially believed to be a seasonal camp based on early excavations, the 2008–2010 excavations were expected to reveal semi-circular structures (3–7 meters in diameter) and a few burials and artifacts. However, these expectations were quickly challenged when a wider variety and higher concentration of structures and objects, similar to those found at other sites in the Northern Levant and Southeastern Anatolia, were uncovered (Mithen, 2020, p. 5). Among the semi-circular buildings, Building O75 stands out for its unique size and internal layout. Located in the northern part of the settlement, it shares the same materials and construction methods as other buildings of the time: a stone foundation covered with mud plaster. However, unlike other structures, O75 measures 18 by 20 meters, has a resurfaced mud-plaster floor, and includes a bench along the interior of the perimeter wall. A second tier of the bench in the northwest corner creates a theater-like setting. Built circa 11.320–11.240 cal BP (9.370–9.290 cal BCE) and used for approximately 800 years, the building features a 0.75-meter-wide trough projecting outward, possibly serving as a drainage channel or an entrance. Parallel gullies with postholes likely supported a roof. Evidence of repairs and remodelling over time includes perimeter wall modifications and the replastering of floors. (Mithen, 2020, p. 6).

Tell Mureybet

In the early 1970s, dam construction in Northern Syria threatened numerous archaeological sites along the Euphrates, including Tell Mureybet. Occupied for over 2.000 years—from the Late Epipaleolithic to the PPNB—Mureybet featured circular semi-subterranean houses and stone tools similar to those of the Natufian cultures. Over time, lithic technology shifted from microliths to projectile points, and architecture evolved from semi-subterranean structures to various surface-level buildings, some with stone foundations. Within the relatively small excavation area, more small, circular, semi-subterranean buildings were discovered, along with others built on the surface. Some with stone foundations, others with mud walls, and still others with cigar-shaped limestone lumps laid in mud mortar. A few rectangular buildings were internally subdivided into two or four small rooms. One slightly larger circular building, about 6 meters in diameter, was partially uncovered within the excavations. This building was subdivided into a series of small, cell-like rooms. It is the first such building to be discovered, and since then, complete examples have been found at Jerf el Ahmar, along with other settlements farther upstream in the Euphrates Valley. Daniele Stordeur, who worked with Cauvin at Mureybet, later conducted excavations at Jerf el Ahmar, further upstream (Ibáñez, 2008; Watkins, 2024, pp. 91, 92, 108).

Jerf el Ahmar

Jerf el Ahmar, occupied for approximately 800 years during the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPNA), is situated on two hills and contains multiple layers of occupation. Archaeologists have particularly focused on its stone construction techniques, communal structures, and early rectangular architecture (Haklay & Gopher, 2020, p. 31). The site has four phases: Early, Middle, Late PPNA, and Transition PPNA/B, each phase with its own subphases. The early phases exhibit only curvilinear structures, with no communal buildings. Beginning in the Middle Phase, structures feature right angles and straight interior walls, while mostly retaining curvilinear forms. This phase occurs only on the eastern hill, while the Late and Transition phases are found on both hills. Four large communal structures are identified, with the earliest (EA7) from the Middle Phase. The site also contains other notable communal structures, EA30 (Late Phase) and EA53 (Transition Phase) (figures 2.3.3 and 2.3.4).

Structure EA30 is located on top of the western hill (Figure 2.3.3). It is a curved structure embedded in the ground and surrounded by open space. This design may indicate the structure's significance relative to nearby buildings. Around this structure are rectangular buildings. The roof of EA30 was probably above ground, supported by the perimeter wall and wooden posts inside. Two radial walls might also have supported the roof. The internal layout of EA30 features a polygonal floor plan, with elevated, cell-like enclosures along the perimeter wall, similar to those at Tell Mureybet. The divisions suggest symmetry and possibly a geometric shape (Haklay 2020, p. 34). These examples of communal architecture can be viewed as visual representations of advances in architectural planning, including floor plans, distance measurements, and geometric construction (Haklay & Gopher, 2020, p. 40). Structure EA30 includes at least two construction episodes. It has been interpreted as a single, overall remodelling event in which major walls were reconstructed, and cells were added. The transformation was likely carried out

in a single event rather than gradually over time (Haklay & Gopher, 2020, pp. 36–37). Following Stordeur's (2000) initial observations, Haklay and Gopher (2020) conducted a formal architectural analysis of these buildings, focusing on their layout and floor plans. They concluded that designing these communal buildings required an understanding of architectural floor plans and measurement units. The floor plan can be seen as an external planning tool linked to symbolic knowledge and values, such as existing tokens and pictograms. The use of measurements created a new concept of space, which also influenced the development of rectangular architecture (Haklay & Gopher, 2020).

Figure 2.3.3 Jerf el Ahmar with the curvilinear structure EA30 at the centre (Haklay, 2020, p. 33).

The other communal structure, EA53, dates to the Transition Phase at the end of the PPNA. It is a circular building with a stone wall, about 2.4 meters high, built along its perimeter. Built into the wall are slots likely meant for wooden poles to support the roof. An interesting feature of this structure is its hexagonal-shaped floor, outlined by decorated stone panels and corner postholes. This floor covers most of the interior, except for the area along the interior wall where a hexagonal bank was built. While all the structures mentioned here can be considered communal, their internal layouts suggest different uses. Structures with internal divisions, such as those found at Tell Mureybet, Structure EA30 at Jerf el Ahmar, and possibly Structure O75 at WF16, are likely more related to storage and food processing. In contrast, structures such as EA53 and the D-shaped structures at Wadi Hammeh 27 and Eynan are most likely intended for gathering.

Figure 2.3.4. Jerf el Ahmar structure EA53 with the polygonal floor/bank design (Haklay & Gopher, 2020, p. 33).

2.4. The PPNB

Kathleen Kenyon (1957) initially defined the later Pre-Pottery Neolithic period (PPNB) at Jericho as distinct from the earlier Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPNA), based on features such as rectangular buildings, differently shaped mud bricks, and distinctive chipped-stone industry characteristics. She later authored a book on the prehistory of the Southern Levant, introducing the labels PPNA and PPNB and applying them to other sites beyond Jericho (Kenyon 1960). The term PPNB came to denote both an archaeological culture and a specific time period characterized by particular cultural practices. As more sites were excavated, archaeologists observed subtle changes in toolmaking, leading to the subdivision of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPNB) into three or four subperiods: Early, Middle, and Late. The transition between the PPNB and the (ceramic) Neolithic is sometimes marked with another subphase, the PPNC. In many ways, the PPNB continues the process that began during the Epipaleolithic and accelerated during the PPNA. Dividing the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation into multiple subphases can be problematic because it has become easier to discuss these subphases only in general terms, often overlooking critical local influences and specific characteristics at individual sites.

The most notable difference between the PPNA and the PPNB (relating to the topic of this study) is the shift from circular to rectangular architectural plans. The transition to rectangular plans was accompanied by the use of mud bricks as a building material. However, as we will see, most rectangular communal structures are made with stone as the primary building material.

Generally, settlements increased in size and density, and storage spaces were linked to individual (domestic) structures, unlike the communal storage seen in the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic. Not only did this shift from circular to rectangular plans occur in domestic architecture, but it also became apparent in communal architecture. This change is most evident at sites such as Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe, where the plans of structures moved from (semi-)circular to rectangular. By the end of the PPNB, many communal structures appear to have fallen out of use, been remodeled, or had architectural elements, such as pillars, incorporated into other structures, possibly domestic ones.

From circular to rectangular

The shift from circular to rectangular architecture during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic was a gradual and complex process, reflecting not only technological advances but also broader changes in daily life and social organization. Early round buildings, similar to baskets or tents, combined walls and roofs without a clear division, a simple design that required no heavy foundations or support structures, as these buildings bore little weight. These structures were primarily built with wattle-and-daub construction and were suited to a lifestyle in which most daily activities took place outdoors.

As Neolithic communities expanded and their needs evolved, particularly in terms of the demand for larger and more specialized spaces, they began experimenting with new architectural techniques. The shift to rectangular buildings required upright walls, secure corners, and roofs that relied entirely on the walls below. These requirements gave rise to various construction phases, best exemplified at Çayönü in Southeastern Türkiye. Archaeologists have traced the development from simple, round, hut-like structures in the earliest phase to semi-rectangular 'Grill-plan' structures with subfloor stone alignments, progressing through the Channelled and Cobble Paved Phases, and ultimately to fully rectangular, cell-like buildings made of stone and mudbrick (Özdoğan, 2010). Early attempts at rectangular layouts often employed lightweight materials, and only later did substantial walls and proper foundations emerge, enabling larger, more stable rooms.

This architectural development coincided with changing patterns in how spaces were utilized. The compartmentalization of rectangular buildings enabled designated areas for storage, cooking, burials, and ritual activities, functions that were difficult to separate in round houses. In settlements like Çayönü, round buildings rarely exceeded 30 square meters. However, later grills expanded usable space to over 50 square meters, with internal divisions and open courtyards serving as the primary venues for daily life.

While domestic structures initially relied on wattle-and-daub construction, the use of stone increased over time, first for subfloor support, then for walls, and most notably in monumental communal and cult buildings, such as those at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt, 2011). These early non-domestic structures exhibited sophisticated stone masonry, in contrast to the simpler domestic dwellings of the same era, highlighting an early distinction between communal and domestic architecture.

Ultimately, the shift from circular to rectangular architecture was a key societal development, creating new ways of living and interacting. It laid the foundation for larger, more permanent settlements, increased spatial differentiation, and set the architectural groundwork for future urban growth. The end of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B marks the beginning of the ceramic Neolithic.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the geographical, environmental, and cultural background of this thesis. The emergence of the Neolithic was not an 'incident' or a single moment in time but a significant shift within a larger, gradual process called (here) the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation. The study of communal architecture in the early Neolithic period of Southwest Asia reveals how architectural developments are closely tied to the social and cultural transformations of the time. Analysis of the period from the Epipaleolithic to the end of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic reveals that changes in climate, subsistence strategies, and population growth coincided with the emergence of monumental and non-domestic architecture. The shift from mostly circular to mostly rectangular architecture reflects a change in building traditions and demonstrates shared norms across diverse communities. Comparing sites such as Jericho, Eynan, Jerf el Ahmar, and Göbekli Tepe indicates that communal architecture was a visible expression of collective identity and cohesion over a broad region and time frame, providing space for rituals, gatherings, and storage. Adaptation to local environments, use of specific materials, and careful planning of buildings suggest that knowledge transfer and symbolism played essential roles during this innovative period. Studying various sites throughout the Levant and Northern Mesopotamia reveals that regional differences are reflected in the form, use, and meaning of buildings, and that the exchange of ideas and techniques was dynamic. Ultimately, research on communal architecture has deepened understanding of the earliest communities in West Asia, their connections, and the development of shared traditions that continued to influence the region long after the Neolithic period. In the next chapter, the sites and communal structures that underpin the subsequent discussion of regionality and communal architecture will be introduced and examined in greater detail.

CHAPTER 3: SETTLEMENTS AND COMMUNAL ARCHITECTURE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the sites serving as case studies for this thesis will be examined in greater detail, with a focus on the communal architecture identified at these locations. The sites discussed in the following subchapters were selected based on available literature, their geographic location (related to the research questions of this thesis), and their contribution to a comprehensive overview of communal architecture in southeastern Anatolia. Other sites have also revealed communal architecture, while some have not yet shown such structures, either due to different excavation approaches or because only a small portion of the site was excavated, with no communal structures within the excavated areas. Although this thesis primarily focuses on sites within the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys, sites in neighboring regions also exhibit forms of communal architecture, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The following sites will be discussed in the different subchapters. Even though one of the research questions is about the usefulness of the division of these sites into the geographical regions of the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys, I will stick to this division within this chapter to establish the relationships, similarities, and differences between the communal buildings related to their geographical distance from each other. The first site to be discussed is Nevalı Çori, located to the north of the modern city of Şanlıurfa. The second site is also from the Urfa region and has become synonymous with communal architecture during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic: Göbekli Tepe. The third site, near Göbekli Tepe, is Karahan Tepe. The fourth site to be discussed is Sayburç, a relatively 'new' site in the Urfa region and still under excavation. The fifth site is Sefer Tepe, a relatively unknown site with communal architecture like that of Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe. After Sefer Tepe, the focus shifts to sites that lie within the Upper Tigris River Valley. The sixth site to be discussed is Hallan Çemi—a relatively small site containing two structures interpreted as communal. The next (seventh) site is Boncuklu Tarla. A newly discovered, recently excavated site featuring some of the best-preserved examples of communal architecture in Southeastern Anatolia. Following Boncuklu Tarla is the Çayönü site. This site is known for the relationship between communal architecture and secondary burial practices. The last site to be introduced and discussed is the recently discovered Gre Filla. The site displays various examples of well-preserved communal architecture and related objects. The chronology of the sites and structures discussed in this chapter is also schematically presented in Appendix 1.

3.2. Nevalı Çori

Nevalı Çori (c. 8.700-7.800 BCE) is located to the north of the modern city of Şanlıurfa, at an elevation of 490 meters. The site was cut in half by a stream. The Eastern part, located on a terrace of 90 x 40 meters, was best preserved. The site was discovered in 1980 by H.G. Gebel, and rescue excavations began in 1983. These excavations continued until 1991, but in 1992 the site was

submerged under the lake created by the construction of the Atatürk Dam. Research has indicated three main stages, divided into different subphases, in the occupation of the site: Phases I-V comprise the Early (Pre-Pottery) Neolithic period (the focus of this thesis), Phase VI represents a Late Neolithic (Middle Halaf) building with pottery, and Phase VII (a/b) dates to the Early Bronze Age (Hauptmann, 2011, p. 16).

Layers I - V

The Early Neolithic occupation left a deposit of 2 meters, subdivided into 5 phases or building levels (I-V). (Layers I and II are contemporary with the earliest levels of Çayönu. Besides the 2 communal structures, discussed here in more detail, 29 domestic structures have been excavated in these layers during the campaigns from 1983 until 1991. Most of the preserved buildings belong to the third layer, and a decline in the number of different buildings is visible within layers IV and V. Over time, like at many contemporary sites throughout the region, the architecture transitions from (semi) circular to rectangular in layout (Hauptmann, 2011, p. 90).

The 'Cult Buildings'

At the northwestern side of the terrace, one structure stands out from the others in its elaborate construction and size. This structure, indicated as 'Cult Building II' by Hauptmann (2011), has an almost square plan, measuring 13.9 by 13.5 meters. The outside walls have a maximum width of 90 centimeters and are preserved up to 2.8 meters. Part of the structure was built into the slope behind it. The interior of the building was coated with white clay, revealing traces of black and red paint. A bench made of quarried stone, covered with flat stone slabs, runs along the inside of the structure. The stone slabs were only preserved in the northern part of the structure, possibly due to the remodelling of the building when it transitioned into Cult Building III. Between these slabs, thirteen T-shaped pillars are placed vertically at intervals along the perimeter wall. Possibly, two additional pillars were positioned in the center of the structure, similar to those in the successive Cult Building III (Figure 3.2.1). The entrance is located in the southwest corner and is marked by two steps that lead down into the building. The floor was made from terrazzo, up to 15 cm thick, composed of limestone pieces set in mortar, with a hard, greyish-white, shimmering terrazzo surface covering an area of 81 square meters *(*Hauptmann 1993, p. 46). Because it was one of the first structures of this type to be discovered, the building is commonly referred to as the 'Terrazzo Building'. The 2.3-metre-long bench running along the southeastern wall is interrupted in the middle for 1.85 metres and set back, forming a U-shaped niche out of sight of the entrance to Building II. Over time, this part of the building appears to have undergone several remodels. Several pieces of sculpture, as well as T-shaped pillars (the top parts), have been reintegrated into the bench and a newly erected podium in the east corner (Hauptmann, 2011, pp. 95–96).

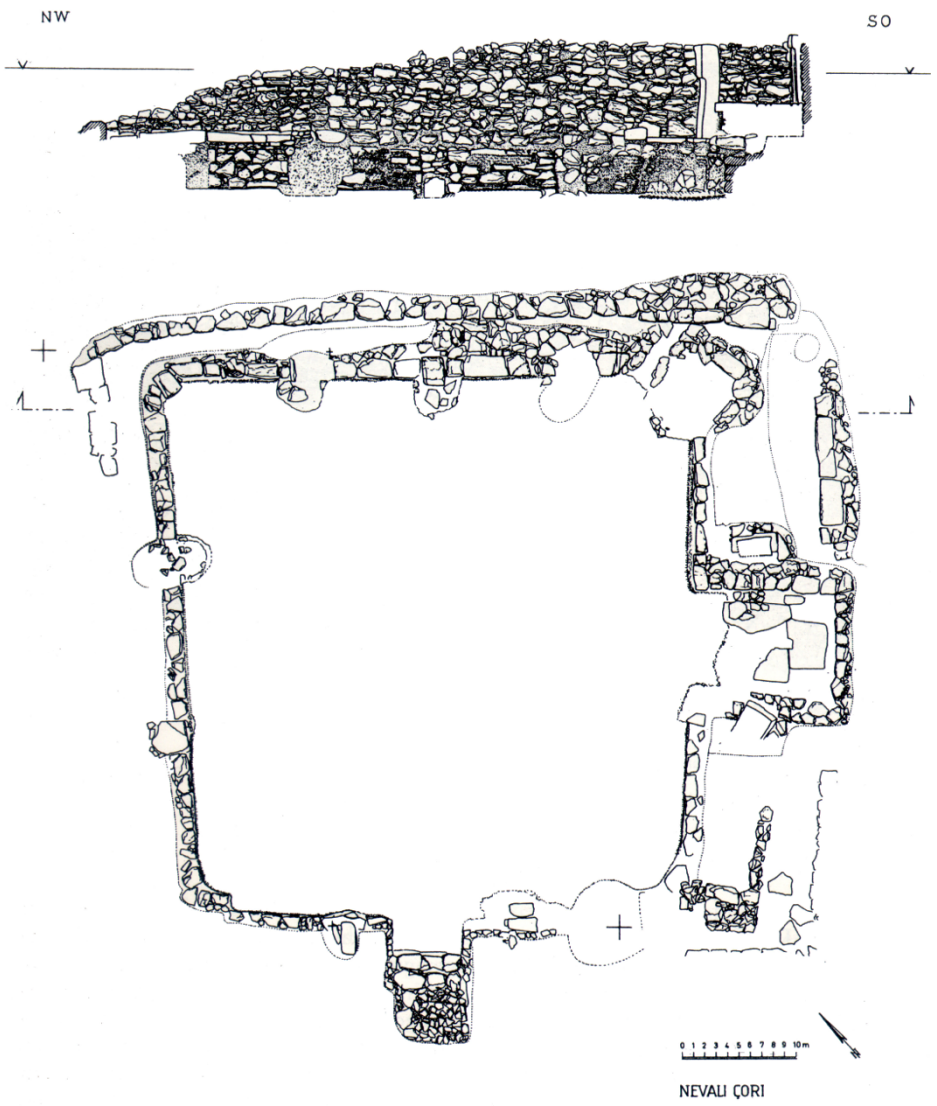

Figure 3.2.1. Nevalı Çori. Section drawing and ground plan of Cult Building II (Hauptmann, 1993, p. 44).

A second building was constructed within the still-standing walls of Cult Building II. Cult Building III has decreased in size to approximately 155 square meters, measuring now 12.1 by 12.8 meters, compared to the almost 188 square meters of Building II. Again, surrounding the interior was a bench covered with stone slabs and built in T-shaped pillars. Ten pillars at intervals in the bench and 2 additional pillars, one at each side of the steps leading into the building. Also, two pillars were placed in the centre of the structure; these pillars are decorated with reliefs. The pillars display anthropomorphic features (arms), like reliefs on pillars found at Göbekli Tepe. Although the terrazzo floor in Building II had already been repaved, it continued to be used. Again, some stone elements were reincorporated into the walls; one of these pieces is a limestone human head with a high-relief depiction of a snake on the back of the head. Right above the location of Buildings II and III lay the

remains of another structure. This structure has a U-shape and was built directly on the bedrock. Due to its size, construction, and proximity to other communal structures, this building may have had a similar function (Hauptmann, 2011, p. 96).

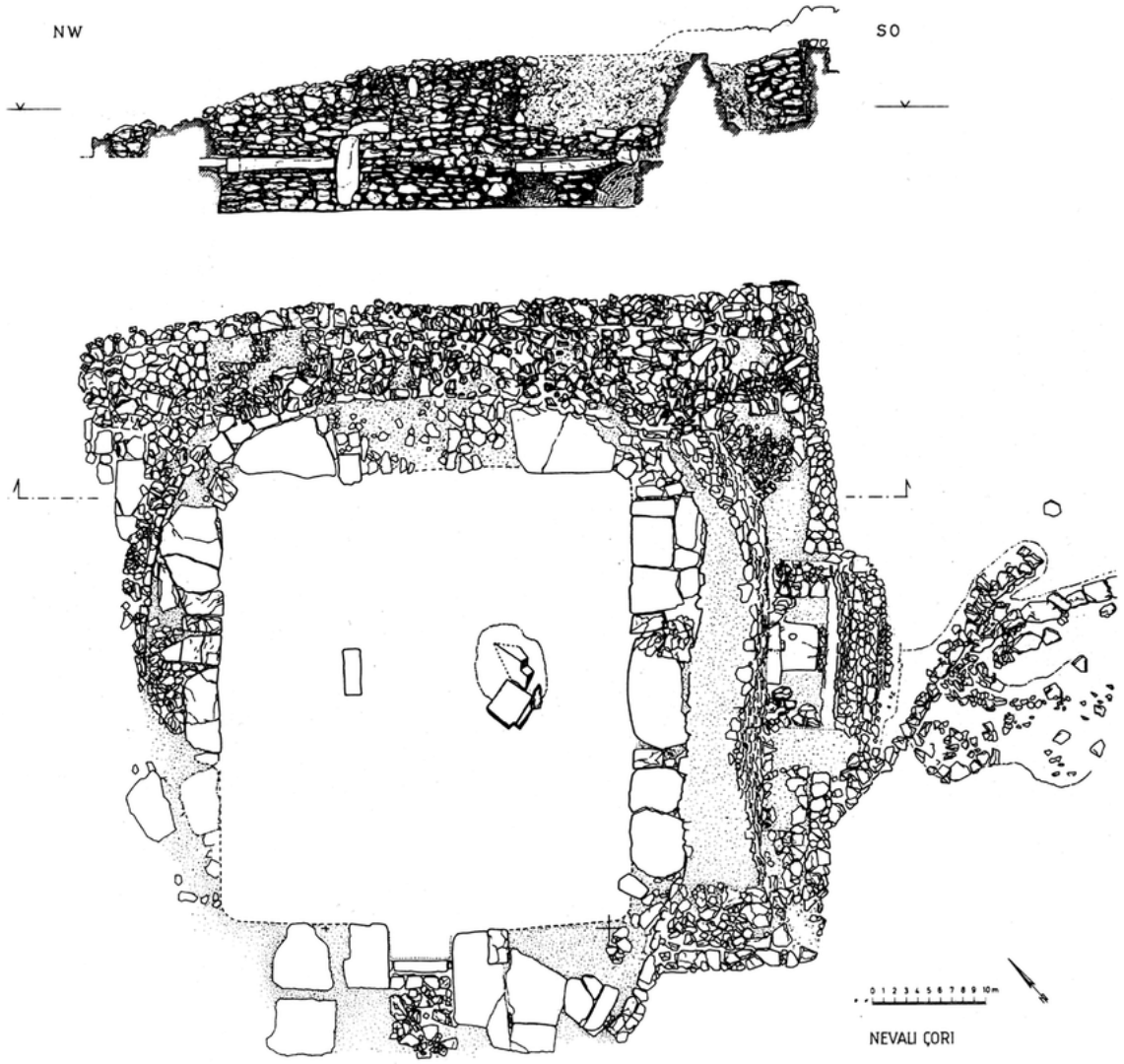

Figure 3.2.2. Nevalı Çori. Section drawing and ground plan of Cult Building III (Hauptmann, 1993, p. 49).

3.3. Göbekli Tepe

While Göbekli Tepe is synonymous with the name of Klaus Schmidt, who led excavations at the site from 1995 until his death in 2014, it was first mentioned by Peter Benedict (1980) in an article on prehistoric research in Southeastern Anatolia. Benedict described the site as consisting of several round-topped "knolls" that rise 20 meters above the limestone ridge, with an overall diameter of about 150 meters. He noted that "the two highest knolls have small cemeteries covering the top" (Benedict, 1980, p. 179). We now know that what he thought were cemeteries were the tops of the famous monoliths from communal buildings. This publication also marked the first mention of Çayönü. Benedict referred to Çayönü as a mount (4-5 meters high) and likely

did not consider Göbekli Tepe to be a Pre-Pottery Neolithic mount because of its size (Schmidt, 2000, p. 46). Initially, more attention was focused on Çayönü, which delayed Schmidt's rediscovery of Göbekli Tepe by about 14 years. After its rediscovery in 1994, Göbekli Tepe became one of the most well-known sites of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period in West Asia.

The site of Göbekli Tepe is located about 15 kilometers from the city of Şanlıurfa, on a limestone plateau overlooking the Harran Plain to the south, the Küşmer Mountains to the west and southwest, and the Tektek Mountains to the southeast. The Taurus Mountains, although farther away, are situated to the north and northeast. The elevation is roughly 15 meters, making it the second-highest point in the Germuş Mountains at 786 meters above sea level (Kinzel et al., 2020, pp. 9–10). Since 1995, eight monumental structures have been excavated at the site, though none are fully exposed. They are numbered in order of discovery: Enclosure A–H. A geophysical survey has also identified at least 20 additional structures and over 200 buried pillars beneath the mound (Schmidt, 2011, p. 43). These structures feature a circular layout, with two larger T-shaped pillars (up to 5.5 meters tall) located in the center, surrounded by multiple smaller T-shaped pillars embedded in the walls. The walls are built from local limestone, bonded with thick clay mortar, not mud brick. The nearby limestone quarries supplied the large monoliths for which the site is famous. Most pillars are highly decorated, with some resembling human figures. Some structures include benches along the interior perimeter walls. The buildings can have up to three concentric walls, indicating multiple phases of construction or restoration. The construction activity is divided into at least two main phases: Layer III, the oldest, is linked to the PPNA (9,600–8,700 BCE), while Layer II corresponds to the subsequent EPPNB (8,700–8,200 BCE). However, recent excavations and analysis of the building fill materials have prompted caution and further research to confirm whether this chronological division is accurate (Kinzel et al., 2020; Schmidt, 2011). Moris Kinzel (2020) found that the mound is composed not only of archeological deposits but also of natural bedrock. The enclosures are built on different terraces, resulting in differences in the floor levels. This discovery is also interesting in relation to the proposed hypothesis of deliberately burying communal structures after they became out of use (Kinzel et al., 2020, p. 10). The burying of buildings will be discussed more in depth in the following chapter.

After its discovery, the site was regarded as a significant gathering spot for ritual or possibly cultic activities. This idea was primarily based on the presumed absence of domestic structures, such as houses and storage rooms, suggesting that Göbekli Tepe was not a permanent settlement. Over time, as more data were gathered, this idea lost support because new evidence suggests more year-round habitation. Although there were initially no signs of domestic buildings, many pestles and grinding stones were discovered, pointing to large-scale food processing. Additionally, the presence of a variety of animal bones suggests that hunting occurred throughout the year (Peters 2014). Recent surveys have uncovered rectangular structures that may very well be domestic dwellings, mainly located on the eastern and southern slopes of the mound. These structures, located at the same level as the larger communal structures, suggest that people may have lived at Göbekli Tepe while the big communal buildings were still in use (Türkiye Today , 2025b).

Enclosure A

The "Schlangenpfeilergebaude" (Schmidt, 2000) was the first structure discovered at the site and was partially excavated between 1995 and 1967. It has since been named Enclosure A, named in order of discovery. It was built during the Early PPNA and remained in use until the Middle PPNB, based on C14 dates from the fill of the structure. The building was repaired or remodeled at least three times during its use. Its original layout is unclear, but during later phases, it appears closer to a rectangle than the other Enclosures. In between Pillars 1 and 2 runs a bench or podium. During remodeling, its internal diameter was reduced from 10.5 to 8.5 meters. As a result, the initial balance of the structure, related to the placement of external and internal pillars, changed over time: the addition of pillars during these modifications indicates an effort to maintain relative stability and symmetry within the building (Schmidt, 2000, p. 49).

Structure A comprises six T-shaped pillars, three of which are adorned with reliefs: Pillars 1 and 2, approximately 3 meters tall, display reliefs of snakes, a ram, a bull, a fox, a crane, and a *bucranium*. Pillar 5, around 2.1 meters high and positioned like an orthostat, also features the snake motif. A low relief was discovered on the left face of pillar 1, described as a “tapestry of interwoven snakes, forming a net made up of seventeen animals” (Schmidt, 2011, p. 44). Beneath this, a quadruped, likely a ram, is depicted. The middle of the pillar shows several snakes along with a decorative element interpreted as a garment, a motif often found on cornerstones from levels III and II. Pillar 2 depicts an aurochs above a fox and a crane, with a bucranium on its rear. Pillar 5 also features a snake. Three pillars (3, 4, and 17) lack decorations (Schmidt, 2011, p. 44). As with other structures from Göbekli Tepe’s older layer (Layer III), animal imagery in the enclosures is dominated by one species, often the snake, which is prominent in Enclosure A, hence the name (Schmidt, 2000, 2011; Calleti, 2020, p. 99).

Enclosure B

Enclosure B is also a semi-circular structure built around two central pillars. The “Fox Building” is located north of Enclosure A and contains up to 12 T-shaped pillars. It gets its name from Central Pillars 9 and 10, both of which show reliefs depicting a fox. The structure has an approximately 10-meter diameter, with nine T-shaped pillars embedded in its perimeter wall. These pillars are arranged radially relative to the two central pillars, except for Pillar 15, which runs parallel to them. Four building phases have been identified, with the second and third phases being the most well-known, dating to the transition between PPNA/PPNB and EPPNB. The main pillars of Enclosure B (pillars 9 and 10) each feature a male fox on their inner faces, facing the building's southeast entrance. Originally, ten T-shaped pillars were built into the enclosing walls, but during excavation, only seven have been uncovered. Most of these seven pillars are undecorated; however, Pillar 6 depicts a quadruped with a curved tail as well as a snake, while Pillar 14 shows a snake and a fox. A terrazzo floor was discovered in the center of the structure, measuring only a few square meters. This discovery was accompanied by a stone plate affixed to the floor in front of the eastern central pillar. This plate appears to be part of the enclosure, and it is thought to be most likely associated with liquid-handling activities (Schmidt, 2011, p. 44; Calleti, 2020, p. 99).

Enclosure C

This enclosure has a more complex occupation, with three possible phases observed, expressed in three concentric walls, creating a maximum diameter of 30 meters for Enclosure C. The occupation dates likely from the PPNA until the MPPNB. The third phase, dating to the EPPNB, is best known to us, and during this phase, the structure features a semicircular plan oriented toward the two central pillars. The last phase of the structure has a diameter of circa 12 meters, and ten (possibly eleven) pillars are embedded into the innermost perimeter wall. When the walls were constructed, a bench or podium (due to its height) was also built along the interior perimeter wall. This enclosure consists of three (possibly four) concentric walls, with the two inner walls supporting T-shaped pillars embedded within them. The natural bedrock forms the floor and has been carefully smoothed. In the center, two pedestals carved from the same bedrock support the two central pillars (pillars 35 and 37). These pillars were destroyed after the structure was abandoned, as evidenced by the large pit and the remains of fallen pillars at the base.

Pillar 35 has been reconstructed; it was originally 5 meters tall and features one preserved relief. This relief depicts a bull, while pillar 37 displays a fox. In front of the central pillar 35, they discovered two (pierced) limestone plates, a limestone vessel, and a fragmented limestone sculpture interpreted as a wild boar. Several other reliefs are on various pillars: pillars 12, 23, 26, 27, 28, and 45 also display wild boars. Pillars 12 and 23 also show ducks. Pillar 27 features a wild boar alongside a high-relief depiction of a predator. Wild boar sculptures are most prominently featured in enclosure C; it is therefore also called the “Enclosure of the wild boar.” (Calleti, 2020, p. 101). Only one snake depiction exists in enclosure C, shown as a relief on one of the horizontal stone slabs in the southern part. Another limestone slab depicts a wild boar lying on its back, possibly part of a doorframe or a porthole. In front of this slab stands a megalithic U-shaped stone with a sculpture of a predator. (Schmidt, 2011, pp. 44, 45; Caletti, 2020, p. 101).

Figure 3.3.1. Göbekli Tepe. Enclosure C (Haklay, 2019, p. 346).

Enclosure D

This is the largest enclosure found at the site, measuring circa 20 meters in diameter. Enclosure D was located toward the north of enclosures B and C, and dates to the EPPNA Two large pillars stand at the center of the structure, with 12 (possibly 13) additional pillars embedded in the surrounding walls. The floor is composed of smooth bedrock, similar to that of enclosure C. This structure is not only one of the largest, but also features the most relief decorations. The central pillars (pillars 18 and 31) are the largest at the site, reaching up to 5,5 meters in height. Like the central pillars in enclosure C, they sit atop two pedestals carved from bedrock. The eastern pedestal, part of pillar 18, was decorated with a row of ducks. Both pillars depict arms and a stole in flat relief, leading to their interpretation as anthropomorphic figures. The eastern pillar (pillar 18) shows a fox on its right arm. On the 'breast' of the pillar are reliefs of a crescent, a disc, and a motif of two opposing elements. The western pillar (pillar 31) is decorated with a necklace shaped like a bucranium. After the interior of the enclosure and the central pillars were fully excavated, the lower parts of the pillars' shafts revealed hands and fingers. Beneath these hands, the pillars also display belts in flat relief. The belt of pillar 18 is decorated with H- and C-shaped motifs. Hanging from these belts are loincloths covering the genital area. These loincloths appear to be made from animal skins, likely those of foxes, based on their size and shape. Because these loincloths cover the genital area, it is hard to determine the sex of these figures. Schmidt (2011) suggests that, based on clay figurines from Nevalı Çori, the figures portrayed by these pillars in enclosure D are likely male humans (Schmidt, 2011, pp. 45–46). Enclosure D was originally

referred to as the “Enclosure of the Crane” (Caletti, 2020, p. 101), however, there appears to be no clear iconographic preference for the crane, as it appears alongside multiple depictions of other animals, such as: snakes, foxes, wild asses, insects, spiders, bulls, gazelles, and other birds (Schmidt, 2000, 2011; Caletti, 2020, p. 101–102).

Enclosure E

This enclosure differs from the others discussed earlier. It is located on the western slope, near quarries believed to be the source of the monoliths, or T-shaped pillars, found within the enclosures. Enclosure E, however, has no remaining walls or pillars. It features a smooth floor carved from bedrock, similar in layout to enclosures A and D. While no pillars remain inside, there are two bedrock-cut pedestals at its center. To the north of enclosure E, two cistern-like depressions can be seen. The easternmost depression has a few steps leading down to its bottom, and an altar-like pedestal is carved into its floor. These depressions are thought to belong to enclosure E, but their purpose is unclear (Schmidt, 2011, p. 47). Arguably, Enclosure E was a predecessor to the other enclosures and might be considered the earliest of the discovered communal structures at the site. However, there is no definitive evidence supporting this idea, as the structure is hard to relate to its surroundings. The structure is attributed to Level II and, in other works, to Level III and even Level IV (Schmidt, 2011; Calleti, 2020, p. 101).

Enclosure F

This enclosure differs from the other enclosures, particularly enclosures A and D, and is distinct from them. The reason for this separation remains unknown. The enclosure is located on the western slope of the southwestern hill and was discovered just below the modern surface. The size and layout of Enclosure F resemble those of Enclosure B, with a diameter of about 10 meters. However, the pillars are smaller—up to 2.15 meters tall—compared to those in other Level III enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. The pillars feature reliefs; the most notable depicts a standing figure (including the head) with a dog directly above it. One of the main anthropomorphic pillars in this enclosure holds a fox, similar to the eastern central pillar of enclosure D. The structure's iconography aligns with that of Level III enclosures, featuring zoomorphic reliefs like foxes, boars, birds, V-shape motifs, and sculpted arms similar to those on the Nevalı Çori pillars. Another remarkable flat relief (25 centimeters in height), depicting a male figure with a long neck, was found on the back of Pillar XXV. This figure might be comparable to the beheaded, ‘ithyphallic’ figure of Pillar 43 in Enclosure D, which displays a new vestment-like decoration. The motif continues on a fragment showing a 10-centimeter-tall relief of a dog (Schmidt, 2011; Calleti, 2020, 101–102).

Enclosure G

Several meters west of enclosure D, another structure was discovered: Enclosure G. This structure likely belongs to an earlier phase of occupation at the site, identified as Level IV (Calleti, 2020, p. 102). To the north of enclosure D, a series of layers and structures, known as the

“nucleus mound,” was partially destroyed, possibly when Enclosures C and D were constructed. This suggests an earlier occupation level, although it has not yet been confirmed by radiocarbon dating of the remains. In addition to enclosure G, other curvilinear structures also appear to be part of this earlier mound (e.g., Enclosure F) (Schmidt, 2000; Calleti, 2020, p. 102).

Enclosure H

Enclosure H is among the newest structures excavated at the site, located on the northwest hill. It has a roughly 10-meter-diameter semi-circular layout. The structure features two concentric walls, indicating possibly two building phases. During the initial excavation, only one central pillar was found; it was tilted and damaged, with pieces scattered on the floor. Alongside the large central pillar, seven peripheral pillars, each displaying typical iconographic features, were also discovered. One of these peripheral pillars (Pillar 66) stood out because its widest side faced inward, and a fragment of another pillar was placed on top of it. This suggests secondary use of Pillar 66. The same may be true for Pillar 69, which was found in a different orientation with another fragment on top. Besides these pillars, which appear to have been moved or altered, the walls of Enclosure H also show signs of remodeling. Originally, the structure likely had a more elliptical shape rather than a perfect circle, and its diameter was probably larger than the current 10 meters. The northern part of the wall measures up to 4 meters in width and appears to incorporate a bank constructed from the same type of stone used for the walls (Dietrich 2016).

Structure H is significant for this study not only because of the evidence for pillar remodelling and reuse, but also because of the additional 14^{C} dates obtained and published. A total of three new dates have been established for structure H: one comes from a sample of the clay pavement of the stone bench between pillar 54 and pillar 66, while the other two are from samples of the structure’s backfill. The date for the bench is approximately 8.520 cal. BCE, and the filling samples date to approximately 8.650-8.680 cal. BCE (Dietrich, 2016, p. 65). The sample from the clay mortar indicates the latest building activity within the structure. The two charcoal samples from the fill are more difficult to interpret; they may relate to the fill process itself or to earlier activities, both inside and outside the structure, that ended up in the fill. As a result, the fill dates only provide a *terminus post quem* for the structure's filling. All three dates suggest activity during the Late PPNA and Early PPNB, implying that the construction of Enclosure H likely occurred earlier, during the PPNA. The new dates are also noteworthy when compared to previously obtained dates for other structures in the main excavation area (enclosures A-D). The dates from the backfill and wall mortar of Enclosure D are older than those from Enclosure H. Enclosures C and B have not yet been sufficiently dated, while Enclosure A appears to be younger than D and H. Therefore, these new dates from Enclosure H suggest that not all communal structures uncovered at Göbekli Tepe were in use simultaneously (Dietrich, 2016, p. 65; Calleti, 2020, p. 102).

Rectangular domestic and communal architecture

As previously mentioned, recent surveys have identified rectangular structures that may have served as domestic dwellings. These structures are located on the eastern and southern slopes

of the mound, at the open spaces between the Level III enclosures (Türkiye Today, 2025b). Earlier, rectangular structures had already been identified at the site, but they are considered non-domestic and date to the EPPNB Layer II (9th-millennium). The symmetrical arrangement of T-shaped pillars from the circular structures of Level III is also evident in the subsequent Level II. However, the number of pillars within a single structure is often reduced to just two or four central pillars. The pillars in Level II are smaller, with an average (preserved) height of up to 1.5 meters. The T-shaped pillars from Level II are likely recycled pillars from the circular structures of Layer III. Most of the Level II pillars are plain, but some display anthropomorphic features, such as arms and hands, similar to those found in Enclosure D and Cult Building III at Nevalı Çori (Hauptmann, 2011, p. 96). While most of the Level II pillars are unadorned, two pillars are decorated with lions and will be discussed in further detail. The structures themselves are also smaller than those of Level III, with an average size of 3 meters by 4 meters (Calleti, 2020, p. 103).

The Lion pillar-building *(Löwenpfeilergebäude)*

This structure is named after the two 'lions' displayed on one of the T-shaped pillars (Figure 3.3.2). The structure belongs to Level II and is located in the northeast. What has been discovered is most likely a complete building, but rather a cellar-like structure, belonging to a previously larger structure. It features a rectangular room with walls measuring up to 2 meters in height. Four T-shaped pillars are positioned in the center of the room, placed in two parallel rows, while four more pillars stand along the perimeter of the structure (Caletti, 2020, p. 103). The two inner pillars to the east depict flat-relief representations of 'lions' with open jaws, leaping as if to catch prey, whereas the other two pillars are left undecorated. One of the pillars along the southern wall depicts arms and hands and shares significant (anthropomorphic) similarities with the pillars from Enclosure D and those discovered at the communal building at Nevalı Çori. Its placement inside the wall suggests that it was reused later than its original placement. On the terrazzo floor, approximately two meters below the surface, stone slabs have been uncovered; they may be remnants of a fallen roof or part of a superstructure. Although it's not yet certain whether the building (or room) was situated underground or semi-underground, the discovery of another adjacent structure to its south, featuring a pair of pillars without relief, could indicate that this room belonged to a larger structure (Schmidt 2011, p. 43). On the bench, between the two lion-decorated pillars, a naked female human figure has been depicted. It is the only known depiction of a woman found at Göbekli Tepe so far and appears to be graffiti engraved, possibly added later to the bench for unknown reasons. The debate continues over whether these animals are truly lions. Their body positions suggest they are, but the absence of manes also raises the possibility that they might represent leopards instead. Leopards are also depicted at sites such as Tell Abr (Syria) and Çatalhöyük (Schmidt, 2011, p. 43).

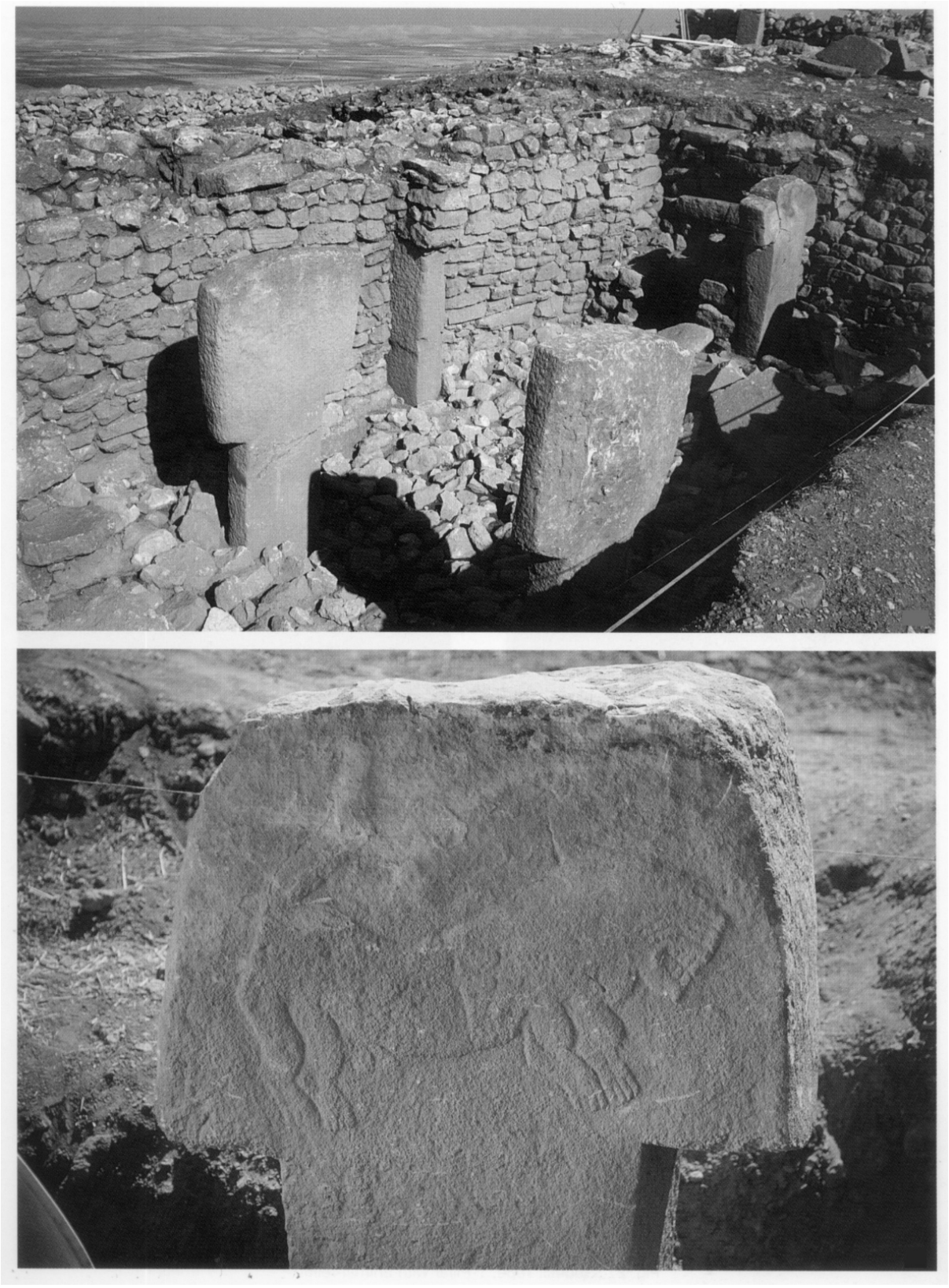

Figure 3.3.2. Göbekli Tepe. "Löwenpfeilergebäude" (top) and detail from the pillar (bottom) (Hauptmann, 1999, p.51).

3.4. Karahan Tepe

Figure 3.4.1. Karahan Tepe, Western Terrace. (Karul, 2021, p. 27).

While excavations are still ongoing at Karahan Tepe and no comprehensive overview of the results has been published yet, I will briefly discuss the site based on preliminary findings and its similarity to Göbekli Tepe.

Karahan Tepe is situated 63 kilometers east of Şanlıurfa within the Tektek Mountains. This region in the southern part of the Harran Plain mainly consists of high hills rather than true mountains. These hills are composed of limestone, a key material in the area's architecture; structures are built into the bedrock and used as building materials at most sites in the region, including Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe. The site was discovered by Bahattin Çelik (University of Harran) in 1997, who also excavated at Göbekli Tepe with Klaus Schmidt. On the northern and eastern slopes of the hill, the tops of 266 T-shaped pillars, similar to those at Göbekli Tepe, are visible. The site is named after a nearby hill with the same name (Çelik, 2000a, p. 6). Excavations only started in 2019 and are still ongoing.

As of now, only four structures have been excavated, of which the preliminary findings have been published (Karul, 2021). A particular focus in Necmi Karul's report was on the practice of burying structures once they were no longer in use. This phenomenon is also observed at sites like Göbekli Tepe (Kinzel, 2020), although scholars do not always agree on this theory and debate whether the filling was done intentionally or resulted from natural processes such as erosion (Schönicke, 2022; Kinzel et al., 2020, p. 10).

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The buried structures of Karahan Tepe

All four structures excavated at this site are located north of the Western Terrace, embedded within the limestone bedrock. Three of these structures (Structures AA, AB, and AD) form a cluster connected by doorways. Structure AC is situated 20 meters northeast of this cluster. Only the outline of Structure AC has been fully excavated; it has a diameter of 5.5 meters and appears to have been deliberately filled, similar to Structure AB.

Structure AD is the largest in the described cluster and has only been partially excavated. It is nearly rectangular with rounded corners, measuring up to 23 meters in width, making it the largest structure found at the site. The western half has been carved into the bedrock and features internal structures, including buttresses. The remaining part of the structure is outlined by a large, independent stone wall that is 1.5 meters thick. A two-step bench surrounds the interior, with multiple pillars embedded into the wall and at the center.

Structures AA and AB have a trapezoidal shape with rounded corners and are significantly smaller than Structure AD. Both Structures, AA and AB, are entirely carved into the bedrock. Structure AB measures 7 by 6 meters and is accessed through a southern entrance with a diameter of 70 centimeters, followed by a staircase with five descending steps. Another set of steps in the northeastern corner provides an exit opposite the entrance. The southern entrance and its connection to both the ground level and adjacent Structure AD suggest a relationship between Structures AD and AB (Karul, 2021, p. 23–24). Along the upper western side of Structure AB, a ridge features a human head sculpture facing slightly toward the presumed southern entrance. The east side of the structure has a straight wall with a narrow ledge along the top, likely related to roof construction. A channel carved into the bedrock enters the building from the north—noteworthy features of Str. AB includes pillars resembling phalluses, formed during excavation from the bedrock. These pillars, ten in total with remnants of an eleventh, range from 1.0 to 1.7 meters in height and 30 to 50 centimeters in diameter.

Structure AA measures 8.5 by 7 meters and has an almost trapezoidal shape, similar to Structure AB. A 6.6-meter-long bench runs along the western side of the structure, with two steps at the end connecting it to the outside. An engraved snake extends along the length of the bench, ending at the steps, where a fox is also engraved below. Structures AA, AB, and AD appear to be interconnected and may be considered part of a single building or complex (Karul, 2021, p. 25).

The fourth structure at Karahan Tepe is situated approximately 20 meters northeast of the cluster, as previously noted. Although it has not been fully excavated, its boundaries are known. With a diameter of 5.5 meters, it is underground, with the southern part embedded in bedrock and the northern part bordered by vertically placed stones.

So far, all excavated structures are categorized as 'special' or ‘communal’ and appear to have been deliberately filled after they ceased use. The demolition and filling processes for these structures will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which addresses similar practices at sites like Göbekli Tepe. Additional communal structures have been uncovered in the southern and eastern parts of the Western Terrace, as well as on the Eastern Terrace. The Southern Plain is therefore considered the residential area of Karahan Tepe (Karul, 2021, p. 25).

3.5. Sayburç

Another site, like Karahan Tepe and Göbekli Tepe, studied as part of the *Şanlıurfa Neolithic Research Project - Taş Tepler, is* Sayburç. Sayburç is located 20 kilometers southeast of Şanlıurfa, on the foothills of the Eastern Taurus Mountains. The settlement was built on two hills aligned on a north-south axis, with a smaller hill between them that connects them. The site covers approximately 3.000 square meters, and a modern village still inhabits the northern hill. Excavations have focused on the southwestern part of the northern hill and two areas in the southern hill (Özdogan, 2024, pp. 44–45). Unlike other sites from the same period in the region, Sayburç has not yet shown vertical stratification and seems to have been inhabited for only a single period. Radiocarbon dating suggests the site was in use for about 300 years during the middle of the 9th-millennium BCE (c. 8.700-8.300 cal BCE) (Özdogan, 2024, p. 47).

Communal Structures and Dwellings

In Sayburç, it is difficult to distinguish between communal architecture and dwellings. Four structures have been identified as communal based on their size and internal features, such as pillars, benches, and artistic elements. Until the first communal structure was discovered in the northern area of the site, it was believed that all structures were dwellings (houses), even though some shared features, such as pillars and benches (figure 3.5.1), that are typical of communal architecture.

The structure in the northern part of the site (Str. AA) has a diameter of 14 meters, making it larger than any other structure excavated at the site to date. Only its northern part has been e excavated, as the remainder of the structure lies beneath a modern building. The structure was carved into the bedrock, possibly with a freestanding wall, of which only a small portion remains. A bench runs parallel to the wall, with the remains of cavities (40 centimeters in width) that once supported pillars, now absent, on top of the bench. The bench is constructed from limestone bedrock, and the building's floor is also composed of smoothed bedrock. The inner face of the bench features five reliefs. Next to structure AA lies another structure (Str. AB). However, this structure is significantly damaged; it was semicircular and, like structure AA, contained a bench along its interior wall (Özdogan, 2024, p. 46–47).

Figure 3.5.1. The Sayburç relief (photograph by B. Kösķer in: Özdoğan, 2022, p. 1602).

The relief of structure AA includes five figures arranged on the inner face of the bench within a panel measuring 0.7–0.9 by 3.7 meters (see figure 3.5.1). Aside from a high-relief male figure, the others are carved flat. Their placement and stance suggest two linked scenes: while the other figures face each other, only the high-relief male faces inward, looking into the room. This central figure holds its phallus in the right hand. Flanking it are two leopards in profile, with open mouths, visible teeth, and long tails curled toward their bodies. The western leopard has a phallus, but the other does not. To the west, a similar scene depicts a second human figure and a bull, both in profile; the human, likely male, has a phallus-shaped extension on the abdomen and is shown in a slightly squatting stance, facing away from the first three figures. Although the bull's body is shown from the side, its head is depicted as if viewed from above, with both horns visible (Özdoğan, 2022, p. 1601).

In the excavation area on the southern hill, three structures have been identified as communal. None of them has been fully excavated to date. The structures in this part of the site are closely spaced and built on bedrock. Their shapes are either semi-circular or nearly quadrangular. Until the discovery of structure AA on the northern hill, it was believed that all structures uncovered on the southern hill were domestic dwellings. In the southern part of the site, communal structures are mixed with homes, similar to Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe, and unlike, for example, Çayönü and Nevalı Çori. Structure CB, with only the top 80 centimeters excavated, is semi-circular or oval in shape. Seven T-shaped pillars are placed in front of the wall, possibly embedded in or resting on a bench surrounding the interior of the structure (figure 3.5.2). Another pillar is located in the center. Similar features are found in the adjacent structure CD. The third structure, currently considered communal, lies south of structures CB and CD. Structure DA has a two-step bench along its interior, and a single (destroyed) T-shaped pillar was found lying on the floor of the building (Özdogan, 2024, pp. 54–55). Since these structures are not yet fully excavated or published in detail, comprehensive analysis is limited; however, comparisons with other structures from the same period are possible.

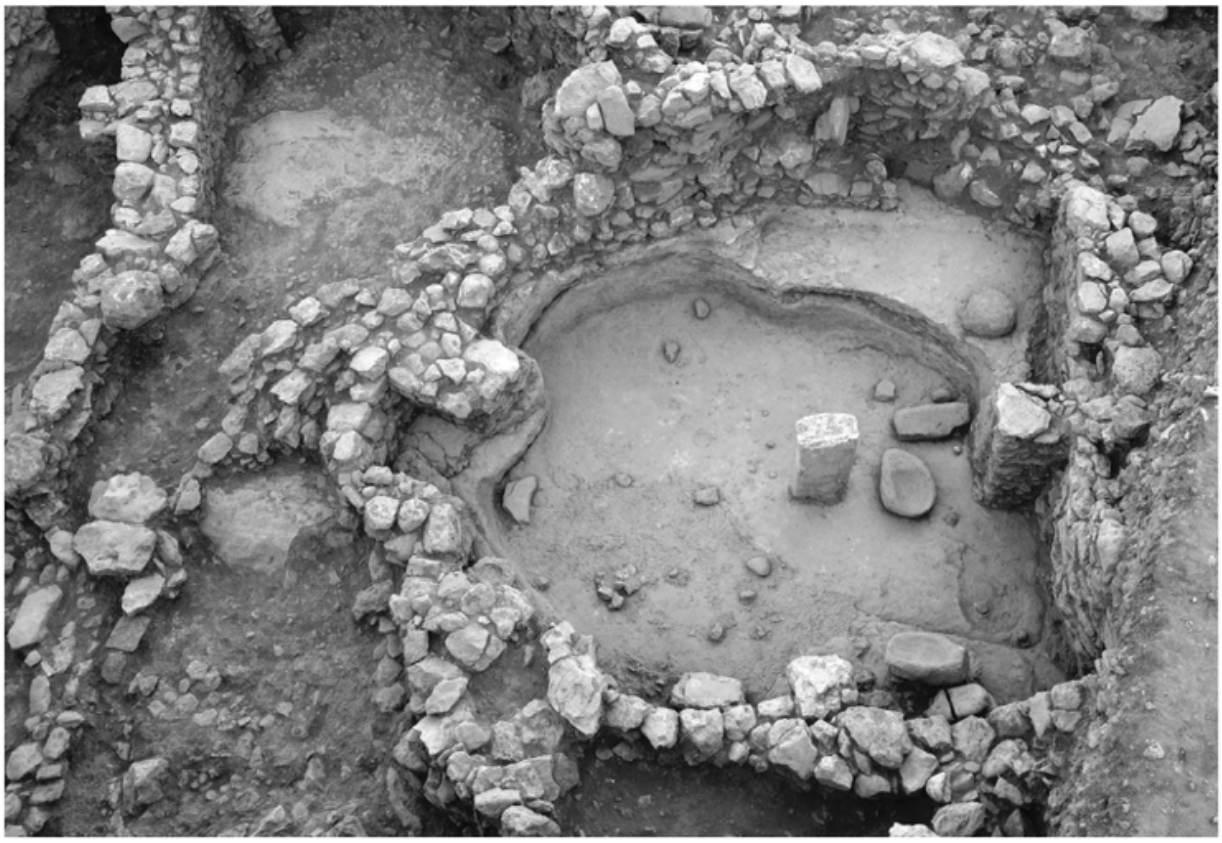

Figure 3.5.2. Sayburç. A structure identified as a domestic dwelling after excavation (Özdogan, 2024, p.49).

Figure 3.5.3. Sayburç. One of the special buildings (AB) in Sayburç features a central and seven perimeter T-pillars against the wall (Özdogan, 2024, p. 53).

3.6. Sefer Tepe

Figure 3.6.1. Sefer Tepe. Flat lying T-Shaped pillar discovered at the site (Çelik, 2006, p. 24).

Another site in the Urfa region is Sefer Tepe. The site is approximately 70 kilometers from the modern city of Şanlıurfa. It was discovered during the "Şanlıurfa Region Culture Inventory Project" between 2000 and 2003. Covering about 1,000 square meters, it sits at an altitude of 700 meters above sea level. Built directly on bedrock, the cultural deposit now rises roughly 6 meters above it. The site closely resembles Karahan Tepe before excavation, mainly because of the 16 intact T-shaped pillars protruding from the surface, spaced 1.5 to 2 meters apart. Sefer Tepe is the first Pre-Pottery Neolithic site with T-shaped pillars found east of Sanliurfa and connects with other known sites on the Harran plain and along the Middle Euphrates River Valley. Based on similarities in architecture and tool assemblages, the site has been dated to the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (Çelik, 2006; Güler et al., 2013).

In recent years, similar sites have been identified in the Urfa region. Not every site has been examined as thoroughly as Göbekli Tepe; therefore, the architecture of these sites is too complex to discuss in detail here. The following sites also feature similar architecture: Ayanlar Höyük, Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle, Sefer Tepe (discussed here only briefly), Hamzan Tepe, Harbetsuvan Tepesi, Kurt Tepesi, and Taşlı Tepe. Due to the current lack of publications on the architecture of these sites, this study cannot provide detailed coverage of them.

3.7. Hallan Çemi

Hallan Çemi Tepesi (c. 10.200-9.200 BCE) was discovered in 1990 during surveys related to the construction of the Batman Dam. Located in Batman Province, approximately 50 kilometers from the city of Batman, Hallan Çemi is a small mound on the bank of a tributary of the nearby Batman Stream, a tributary of the Tigris River. The mound is approximately 4.3 meters tall, and the site covers less than 5 hectares. Due to rising water levels, only a limited area has been excavated. The Pre-Pottery Neolithic architectural remains are divided into four levels, but only three have

been substantially excavated. Carbon dating suggests the site was likely used for a few hundred years during the middle of the 10th-millennium cal. BCE. It remains one of the earliest known year-round sites (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 61).

The spatial layout of Hallan Çemi is centered on an open area approximately 15 meters in diameter. Platforms, storage features, and hearths surrounded the square. Three structures have been excavated, belonging to the lowest building level of the site (level 3). These are C-shaped structures made from river pebbles or cobbles bonded with mud plaster. The floors are unpaved, and the structures are built directly on the surface. Each structure measures approximately 2 meters in diameter (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 62). Building level 2 includes five identifiable structures, four of which have been fully excavated. Similar to level 3, all four structures are built on the surface and constructed from river pebbles or cobbles mixed with plaster. Unlike level 3, only one of these structures has an unpaved floor. Three structures feature paved floors made from sandstone slabs. One structure stands out due to its larger size, with a diameter of about 4 meters, and includes a small, plastered basin at its center. There is no clear evidence of a different function for this larger paved structure, nor for the paved structures in general, compared to the unpaved or smaller ones (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 62). The latest building level, level 1, includes four excavated structures. All of these are made from sandstone. Two are relatively small, about 2.5 meters in diameter, and, like the structures of levels 2 and 3, are C-shaped. The other two structures are larger, roughly 5 to 6 meters in diameter. Both are interpreted as having a communal or public function, unlike the smaller structures, and are similar to structures found at contemporary sites (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 62). Hallan Çemi has been described by Rosenberg and Redding (2000) as a small settlement and community. The site itself, covering less than 0,5 hectares, and the fact that there are no more than five clearly recognizable structures per level across several hundred square meters of excavated area, indeed suggest it was not a large community. This may indicate a group size comparable to that of hunter-gatherer bands (Rosenberg & Redding, 2000, pp. 47-48).

The Communal architecture of Hallan Çemi

So far, two structures have been identified as communal. Structures ‘A’ and ‘B’ are part of the most recent build level: level 1. These structures are circular and semi-subterranean. Both are approximately 5-6 meters in diameter (Rosenberg, 1994,). The underground sections of the walls were constructed using sandstone slabs. The subterranean parts of the walls consisted of flat-lying coursed slabs and orthostats, either alone or combined. The above-ground wall sections were all built from coursed sandstone slabs. Regular gaps in the walls likely served as slots for pillars (which are absent) functioning as supports for the roof; a small stone feature at the center of each floor may have supported a central roof beam. The floors of both structures were plastered and resurfaced multiple times. (Rosenberg, 1994; Rosenberg & Redding, 2000, p. 44).

Similar features and layouts are evident in other structures at sites such as Nevali Çori and Sayburç. Both structures include benches that nearly surround the interior. The floors are composed of a mixture of fine, yellowish sand and plaster and have undergone several reconstructions during their use. Inside these structures, obsidian and copper ore were found,

possibly indicating long-distance trade. One of the structures (Structure A) housed a complete aurochs' skull, which is believed to have been displayed on the northern wall facing the entrance (Rosenberg 2000, 2011).

Dating the site and its communal structures proved difficult due to conflicting periods and dates reported in publications. In Rosenberg 1994, the site is described as a 10th and 9th-millennium site (Rosenberg, 1994, p. 83). However, the C14 dates obtained during the 1992 and 1994 excavation seasons suggested that the site dates to the Epipaleolithic. The results (samples) are, however, uncertain, and other indicators, such as material culture, indicate that at least the discussed layers date to the PPNA (Hughes, 2007, pp. 73–80). Erica Hughes (2007) addresses the chronology and dating of material culture and architecture, comparing them with sites such as Körtik Tepe and Cayönü. I tend to agree with Hughes when comparing the (communal) architecture. The semicircular plan, with pillars embedded in the wall and a surrounding bench, is characteristic of PPNA communal structures, as discussed in this study. A possibility for the early dates is that they are charcoal samples from the earliest levels at the site (levels 3 and 4), which may contain C-shaped structures that date to the Epipaleolithic. However, these structures are too small to be interpreted as communal structures and are likely domestic dwellings.

3.8. Boncuklu Tarla

One of the more recently discovered sites in Southeastern Anatolia, and presumably also the site with one of the oldest structures interpreted as being communal, is Boncuklu Tarla. The site is located approximately 125 kilometers east of the city of Mardin, in the Dargeçit district. It was discovered in 2008 during a prospecting dig related to salvage or rescue excavations in the region, which were conducted due to the pending construction of the Ilısu dam. Over the course of four campaigns, starting in 2012, a significant surface area of the site—nearly 3.200 square meters — was exposed. C14 analysis has established that the site was in use from circa 10.470 – 7.500 cal BCE (Uzdurum et al., 2023, pp. 18). Based on on-site discoveries and C14 analysis, seven levels or phases of occupation have been established, ranging from the Late Epipaleolithic to the end of the Late PPNB. These are Level 1: Late PPNB, Level 2: Middle PPNB, Level 3: Early PPNB, Levels 4a–b: PPNA-PPNB transition, Levels 5a, 5b, and 6a: PPNA, and Levels 6b and 7: Late Epipaleolithic (Kodaş, 2019, p. 4; Kodaş & Çiftçi, 2021, p. 43). Levels 6b, 6a, 5, and 4 are discussed in more detail in relation to the topic of this thesis.

The central part of the site, which served as the initial research area during the first seasons of excavation, yielded architectural remains spanning the Late Epipaleolithic to the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB). Later on, the focus shifted towards the eastern and southeastern parts of the site, revealing architectural remains dating to the PPNA and transition period from the PPNA into the PPNB. Therefore, it has become clear that different parts of the site were in use over more extended periods compared to other areas. What has become evident is that the site was at least occupied in its entirety during the PPNA and the transition from the PPNA into the PPNB (Kodaş & Çiftçi 2021, p. 45).

The PPNA communal structures

Four structures dating to the PPNA and interpreted as communal buildings have been identified at the site to date, and they are named according to their location within the grid (see figure 3.8.1). Another three structures, belonging to the Middle and Late PPNB phases, can also be interpreted as communal structures. One is in the Central Area of the site (O11), another in the Eastern Area (EA1), and two more in the Southeastern Area (D15: GD1 and GD2). Building O11 is the earliest communal structure discovered at the site. It has two construction phases; it was built during the Late Epipaleolithic and renovated during the subsequent PPNA. The two structures in D15 date to the PPNA. Structure EA1 in the Eastern Area dates to the transition period between PPNA and PPNB and is the most recent communal structure at the site (Kodaş & Çiftçi, 2021, p. 46).

Structure O11, also called the 'Butress Building, ' was initially built during the Epipaleolithic (Level 6a, c. 10,370 cal BCE) and remained in use during the following PPNA (Level 6b). The structure is subterranean with a circular plan. Its walls are made of mud plaster and stones, and the floor was also plastered. The external diameter of the early phase (Level 6a) of Building O11 measures approximately 8.10 meters (north-south) by 8.70 meters (east-west). The interior measures 7.20 meters (north-south) by 7.75 meters (east-west). The Butress Building is named after five buttresses: two in the south (buttresses 1 and 2), two in the north (4 and 5), and one in the west. These buttresses are partially embedded in the walls, setting them apart from the pillars. They are constructed similarly to the walls, from limestone blocks reinforced with mud plaster. The buttresses reach up to 1.5 meters, with Buttress/Pillar 3 only measuring 30 centimeters in preserved height. To the east, a freestanding pillar (Pillar 3) was built. The use of structure O11 continued into the PPNA, with some modifications (Level 6b). A new floor was added, 30 centimeters above the previous one. Besides the new floor, the walls and buttresses were also altered or replaced. The outer diameter remained unchanged, but the inner diameter decreased due to the new wall, measuring 7.10 m north-south and 6.65 meters east-west. Internal features such as the buttresses and pillar changed because of the new wall. Buttresses 1, 2, 1,2,4, and 5 became smaller, more embedded in the new wall, and Pillar 3 was removed. Two new pillars (Pillars 1 and 2) were constructed. are no other structures found in this part of the site dating to the Epipaleolithic (Kodaş & Çiftçi, 2021, p. 47–50).

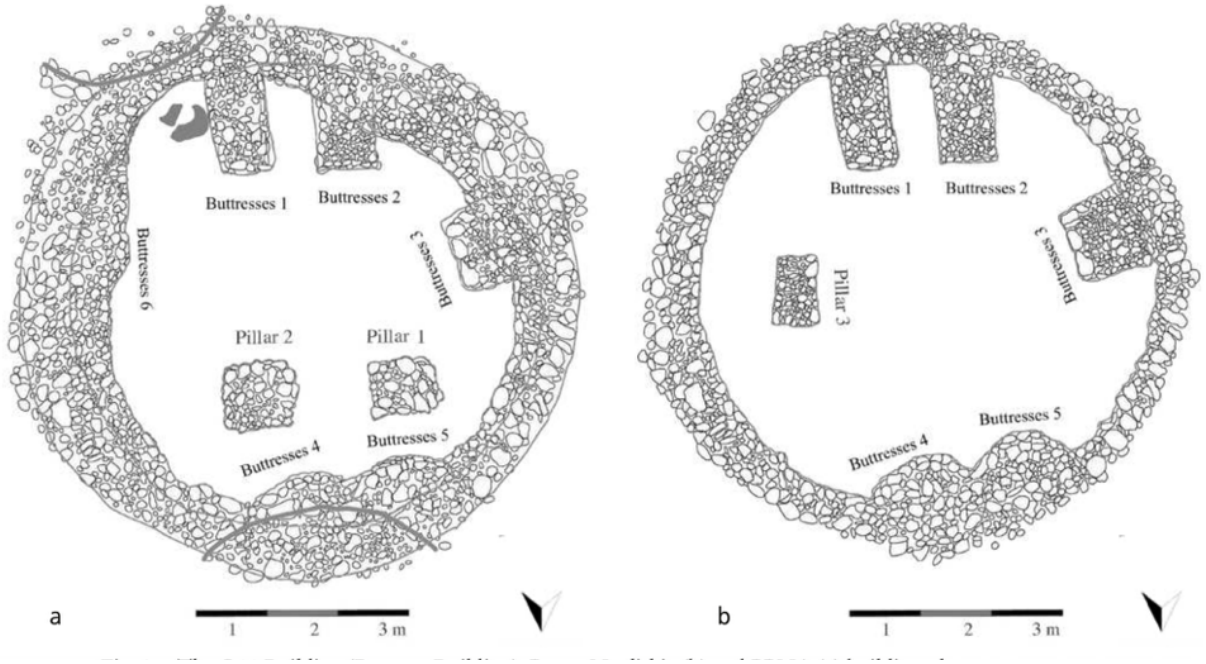

Figure 3.8.1. Boncuklu Tarla. Structure 011. Phase 6a (a) and phase 6b (b) (kodaş & Çiftçi, 2021, p. 48).

Structures D15-GD1 and D15-GD2 are both located in the southeast. D15-GD2 remains relatively well preserved compared to D15-GD1, which was mainly destroyed by erosion and more recent agricultural activity. D15-GD1 was built on top of D15-GD2 after it was no longer in use. D15-GD1 measures 5.5 meters in diameter. Two rubble stone pillars are symmetrically placed in the center of the structure, only preserved up to about 30 centimeters high. D15-GD2 has a more oval or semi-circular plan. The structure is underground, with outer dimensions of 7.5 meters north-south and 7,0 meters east-west; interior dimensions are 7 meters north-south and 6.6 meters east-west. The walls are made from small pebbles and lime plaster. The floor has been renewed at least twice. Four limestone block pillars with mud plaster are in the center and are preserved up to about 1.5 meters high. Benches were built next to the northern and western walls. The northern bench was used during the first phase, while the western bench was added and used during the second phase. During this second phase, a cell or bin-like feature was added to the northeastern corner. The placement of the benches, the cell, and the pillars suggests that both benches were located between Pillars 1, 2, and 4, and were built next to them (Kodaş & Çiftçi, 2021, p. 50–54).

Another notable structure is D15-GD4. While it shares characteristics with structure O11, it has been interpreted as a domestic building. GD4 features an ellipsoid ground plan, oriented east-west, with at least two major building phases documented (Uzdurum et al., 2023, pp. 19–20). The interior measures approximately 7.25 meters east-west and 6.25 meters north-south. Wall tops are approximately 0.66 meters wide. Built with rubble stone masonry using granite river pebbles and smaller limestone boulders, the walls in the upper courses appear as double-faced rubble stone, though it's uncertain if this applies to the entire wall or only the visible upper parts.

The walls are preserved up to 2.25 meters above the floor, suggesting they may originally have been about 0.2–0.3 meters higher, based on the collapse material within. The inner surfaces were coated with thick mud plaster and embedded with flat, river-polished pebbles, likely for decorative purposes. The wet-in-wet plastering technique causes the wall core to blend seamlessly with embedded pebbles, making them hard to distinguish. An earthen bench, approximately 0.75 meters wide, runs along the southern, western, and northern walls, later extended by about 0.70 meters on the southern side, resulting in a total width of over 1.40 meters and a length of at least 4.20 meters. The last interior wall, on the opposite side, was built above the northern bench in a later construction phase. The original plan may have been more circular, as suggested by some wall features, but the final phase is more ovoid or elliptical, oriented east-west. The interior features include two free-standing masonry pillars made of river pebbles and rubble stones, two vertically positioned limestone slabs (pillars), and two masonry buttresses attached to the western exterior wall. The northernmost stone slab has collapsed southward onto accumulated sediment. These slabs were originally placed in slots within limestone boulders, similar to features seen at Göbekli Tepe's rock-cut podia (Kurapkat, 2015). The floor appears to be coated with a plaster-like material, though it has not yet been analyzed; preparations are ongoing. The floor contains several fireplaces, roasting pits, and basins or pits, some of which were sealed and later replaced. A large roasting pit, measuring about 1.25 meters by 1.34 meters, is located against the eastern exterior wall. It was filled with rubble stones before being sealed with mud and replaced by a smaller roasting pit in front of the southern bench. The building's exact function remains unclear. With roasting facilities, fireplaces, and benches, it may have served as a domestic space for a large family or a group (Uzdurum *et al.,* 2023, p. 19). Alternatively, it may have been a communal building. Since we do not know exactly what activities were carried out in these buildings, we must be careful not to rule out the possibility based solely on the roasting pits, even though other elements usually ascribed to communal buildings, such as benches, steles (stone slabs), and pillars, are also present.

In the eastern part of the excavation site, another communal structure was discovered. Structure EA11, also known as the 'pillar building,' dates to Level 4a, which marks the transition between the PPNA and PPNB periods. It is the only structure of its kind in this area, covering about 550 square meters. The structure is surrounded by residential dwellings (circular and semi-circular), open spaces, and structures believed to have been used for storage. EA11 is semi-subterranean, with a surface area of approximately 70 square meters. Its walls are constructed from limestone, and the floor is made from hardened mud and clay. The building's plan is nearly square, measuring 8.50 meters in length (east-west) and 8.30 meters in width (north-south). Inside, four large stone slabs were found, which are interpreted as pillars based on the excavators' observations (see figure 3.8.2). In addition to these four symmetrically placed stone pillars, there are two buttresses in the southwest wall. Opposite these buttresses, in the northeastern wall, are two niches that match in width and depth. A smaller niche, measuring 40 by 40 centimeters, is located near the southwestern wall close to the western corner. The buildings probably date to Level 4a, characterized by a grill-plan design at the site, similar to older phase grill-plan structures found at Çayönü (Kodaş, 2021, pp. 163–164; Kodaş & Çiftçi, 2021, pp.

54–56). Structure EA11, with its rectangular plan, resembles later PPNB buildings more closely than the PPNB-dated O11.

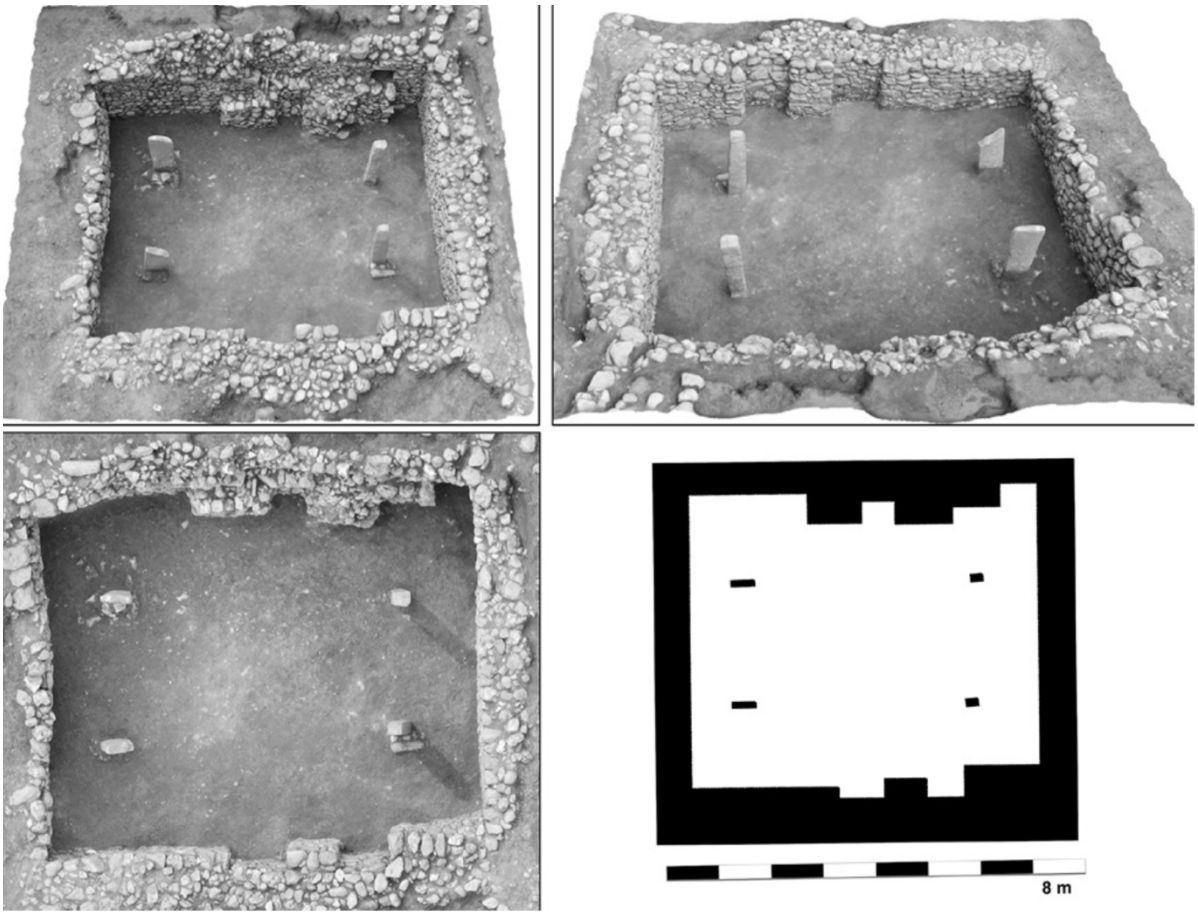

Figure 3.8.2. Boncuklu Tarla. Structure EA11 (Kodaş, 2021, p.163).

Middle and Late PPNB communal structures

Excavations revealed that the PPNB layers spread over 2.300 square meters in the central area of the mound. Seventeen Middle PPNB structures have been found, three of which may be non-domestic, notably Building 1.1. (figure 3.8.4.) Built during the Middle PPNB and renovated for use in the Late PPNB, Building 1.1 measures approximately 15 by 13 meters, featuring a central terrazzo-floored room surrounded by five cells to the west and north, with a long rectangular area to the south. The building's foundations consist of several rows of either small or large limestone blocks. Four pillars stand on pedestals within the central room, and step access is believed to be in the northeast corner. Adjacent rooms are entered from the east, not directly from the central space (Kodaş, 2025, pp. 24–31).

Two other buildings, Building 2.1 and Building 8, share similar features with Building 1.1 and could also be seen as an example of communal architecture. Another possibility is that these communal buildings were remodeled and repurposed over time, from comunal to domestic structures. Another possibility is that the concept for communal structures was appropriated for domestic structures as well. Building 2.1 is located next to and immediately northwest of Building

1.1. Its unusual ground plan led to it being identified as a communal building within the Middle PPNB settlement. It is a single-room structure measuring 7.60 meters in the east–west direction and 8.50 meters in the north–south direction. A large buttress is located along the southern wall. A bench, approximately 1.40 meters wide, runs along the northern wall. The entrance is on the western wall, with a stone-paved exterior floor (terrace) about 1.20 meters wide in front of it.

Building 8 is the third Middle PPNB structure believed to be (likely) communal. Its distinctive plan sets it apart from other Middle PPNB structures in the settlement, leading excavators to interpret and categorize it as a communal building. It measures 6.50 meters north–south and 6 meters east–west. The walls are up to one meter thick, which is uncommon for a structure of this size during this period. It contains only a single main room. No wall was found on the eastern side, and it is unclear whether this was built intentionally without an eastern wall or if the wall is simply not preserved. Additionally, both the western and northern walls show signs of rebuilding on the interior. The northern wall shares a boundary with what is likely a domestic structure, Building 7 (Kodaş, 2025, p. 27).

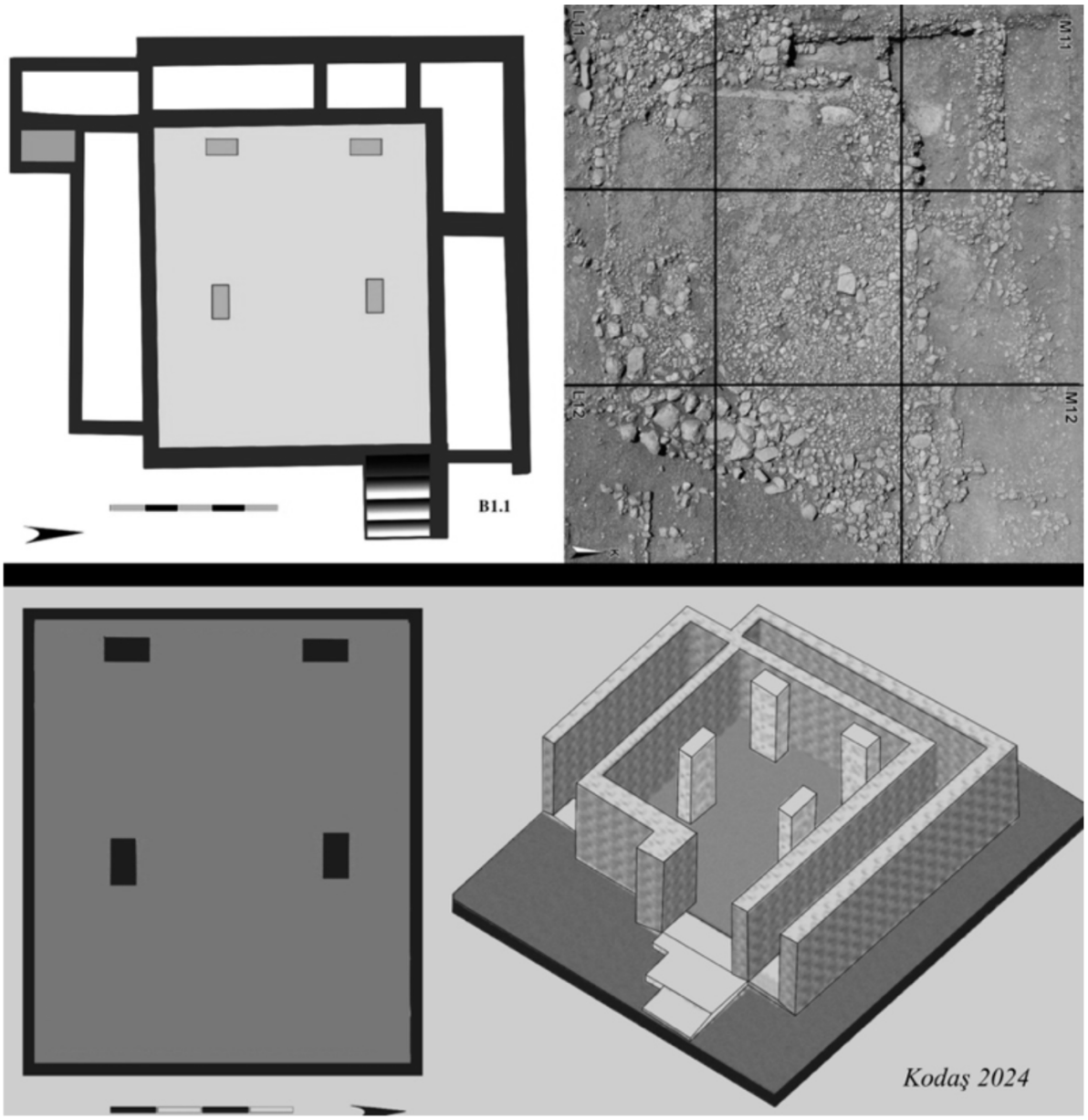

Figure 1.8.3. Boncuklu Tarla. Building 1.1 (Kodaş, 2025, p. 25).

3.9. Çayönü

Çayönü (c.10.200-7.500 BCE) is a well-excavated site near the hilly outskirts of Southeastern Anatolia. It has been inhabited since circa 10.000 BCE. Excavations began at the site in 1964, led by Prof. Dr. Halet Çambel and Prof. Dr. Robert J. Braidwood. From 1964 to 1991, an area of 8.000 square meters was excavated and studied. The site is strategically located between distinct ecological zones, providing residents with numerous resources and building materials. It lies on the north bank of the Bogazçay, a tributary of the Tigris River. The site is also near several streams and springs. Sitting at an elevation of 832 meters above sea level, it measures 160 meters north-south and 350 meters east-west. The cultural deposits range from 4.5 meters in the south to 6.5

meters in the north. The site was continuously inhabited from the PPNA to the Iron Age. The focus here is on the so-called 'Çayönü Main Phase' or first phase, which includes the PPNA, PPNB, and PPNC levels of the site (Özdoğan, 2011, pp. 185–191).

The subphases of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic mound reveal a gradual evolution in architecture. They are named after specific building types, such as grilles, cells, or channelled structures, or by other features, such as cobble-paved buildings. All notable communal buildings are also named based on their key features. Six distinct architectural subphases have been identified, named after their unique house plans or features: round buildings (PPNA), grill buildings (PPNA/EPPNB), channeled buildings (EPPNB), cobble-paved buildings (MPPNB), cell buildings (LPPNB), and long room structures (PPNC) (Özdoğan, 2011, pp. 192–193). In addition to these architectural stages, a sequence of four cultural phases aligns with the standard periodization of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic into PPNA, PPNB, and PPNC—the latter transitional into the Pottery Neolithic. The communal structures will be discussed within this framework, considering both their architectural phases and the cultural subphases to which they belong. The architecture at Cayönü, in contrast to most of the other buildings discussed in this study, does not appear to have been remodeled or altered during its lifespan, except for the Skull Building. Rather than renovating existing structures, a new structure was built when a structure became obsolete.

The first settlement (PPNA, PPNB, and PPNC)

The architecture of the first settlement consisted of circular underground structures (best described as huts or shelters) about 4-5 meters in diameter. These huts were built of reeds and branches, plastered with mud (wattle-and-daub construction). Over time, these structures, considered dwellings, grew larger and their construction became more durable, with stone footings and plastered floors. One notable dwelling (RA) features a red-painted floor. Another structure (BN), with a stone footing and a more oval shape, is thought to be one of the earliest examples of communal architecture at the site. However, this structure is disturbed by a grill building (GG) constructed atop it. The earliest grill buildings sit directly on top of the semi-subterranean circular structures. Their name comes from the parallel rows of stones forming a grid, which served as the foundation for a platform. The superstructure of these buildings was still made from wattle and was similar to a basket, plastered with daub. The transition from semi-subterranean buildings to raised structures with rectangular plans likely resulted not only from water level concerns threatening the semi-subterranean forms but also from a desire or need for internal divisions within the structures. The grill platforms probably served as living quarters at the rear of the house, with a central, utilitarian room with a plastered floor in front. Adjacent to this central room, there were usually a few compartments, some lined with stones, which may have functioned as storage units. The grill foundation of the buildings is believed to be non-supportive of the superstructure. Postholes along the building outline and flat stones inside the central rooms, used as bases for the central posts, have been found. During the initial phase with semi-circular structures, most daily activities—such as flint knapping and food prep—seemed to have mainly taken place in the open spaces between the dwellings. With the shift to grill-type

buildings, these activities more clearly occurred inside the structures, particularly in the rooms elevated on the grills, where craft activities have been documented.

After the first subphase, featuring mainly circular or semi-circular structures, the building plans shifted towards grid-based buildings and rectangular architecture. Over time, the grid plans evolved, along with the walls and superstructures of the buildings. In addition to traditional grid plans, cell-plan and channelled buildings began to appear. From the Channelled Building Subphase onward, the settlement pattern changed again. Open spaces between buildings became more prominent, and there appears to be a clearer division within the settlement. The western sector developed into both an industrial and residential area, while the eastern sector became more of a communal space. In the western area, workshops or ateliers were dedicated to specific activities, such as leather processing, based on the different toolkits found within these workshops (Özdogan, 2011, p. 200). While most domestic buildings were constructed above ground, the communal buildings remained semi-subterranean structures located in the eastern sector of the site. The oldest identified communal building is the “Flagstone Building." The second is the “Bench Building," and the third is the “Terrazzo Building." These buildings are interpreted as communal structures, and three of them will be discussed in more detail below. A fourth building, which differs slightly in its contents, called the "Skull Building," will also be discussed. (Özdoğan & Özdoğan, 1998).

The Flagstone Building

The Flagstone Building (FA), excavated in 1964, is one of the largest communal structures at the site. It is also the oldest discovered communal structure, dating to the grill-plan sub-phase (LPPNA-EPPNB). It takes its name from the floor, which is made of flat flagstones. Built primarily on virgin soil on the southern slope of the mound, it contains traces of an earlier structure in the northeast corner. Its northern retaining wall predates the Bench Building and cuts through earlier layers of wattle-and-daub construction. The building's walls were topped with a layer of rubble, similar to that of the bench building, placing it stratigraphically below the later intermediate phase and above the earliest sub-phase. It was constructed on a terrace, partly embedded in the mound. The building is about 10.7 meters wide. Its depth is difficult to determine due to erosion (Schirmer, 1990, pp. 378–385).

The walls are constructed of rough-cut limestone blocks set into the excavated slope. The northern wall is considerably thicker than the other walls and reaches a height of 1.3 meters. Many flat, but broken, stones were used for the wall’s construction. Embedded into the north wall, there are two buttresses, each 1.2 meters wide and 50 centimeters deep. Aligned with the buttresses are two large upright stone slabs. Large flat flagstones, placed side by side, form an even floor. The largest flagstone measures approximately 1.7 meters in length. Smaller stones, so-called orthostats, were placed upright along the base of the walls, providing a footing for the walls. The walls were possibly originally plastered. In the eastern part of the structure, the evidence for this remains inconclusive. The edge of the initial row of stones seems to define the boundary of the floor, but a double wall further east also appears connected to the same back wall. It’s possible that the first row of stones functioned, not as a wall, but as a bench.

Additionally, a third, upright standing, stone slab was located in the eastern section of the building, in front of this 'bench', potentially as part of the original furnishings of the building. The flagstones used for the walls (footing) and floor may be related to water management, including improved drainage and prevention of muddy floors (Schirmer, 1990, pp. 378–385).

Figure 3.9.1. Çayönü. Isometric plan of Flagstone Building. (Schirmer, 1983, p. 474).

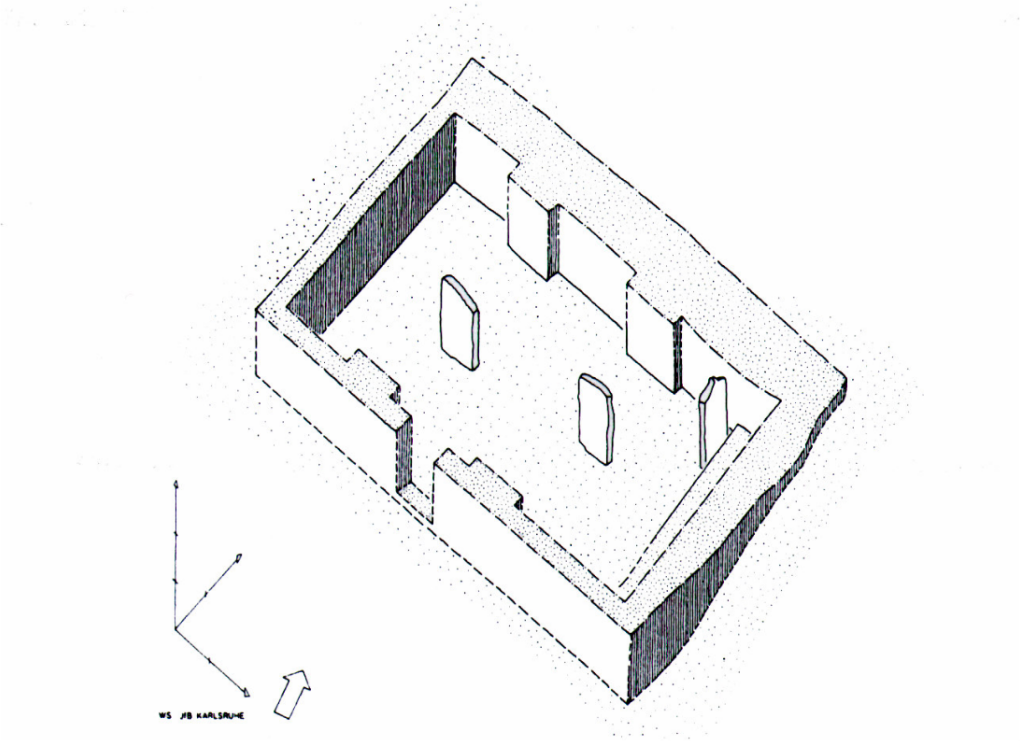

Figure 3.9.2. Çayönü. Isometric reconstruction of Flagstone Building. (Schirmer, 1983, p. 475).

The Bench Building

The Bench Building (BK) was already discovered and excavated in 1978. The building is named after the benches that run along its interior. It is the smallest communal building found at the site. Its surface or floor was covered with fine sand. The southern wall of the Bench Building was built over the back wall of the Flagstone Building. Therefore, it is most likely that the Bench Building was constructed after the Flagstone Building, although they may have been used simultaneously. The suspected back of the building is cut into the slope of the mound and intersects with the remains of grill-plan structures. The building was covered with debris from the intermediate subphase, which contained the first cell-plan buildings. This suggests that the Bench Building predates the subphase with cell-plan structures, was contemporaneous with the latest grill-plan structures, or represents an intermediate phase between the grill and cell structures. Some evidence indicates it was in use during the final phase of the so-called Skull-Building (Özdogan, 1989, p. 71).

The Terrazzo Building

This significant building (BT) was first identified during the 1970 season. It is located in the eastern part of the mound, in an area dedicated to communal architecture. The structure was built at the edge of the Plaza, which will be discussed later on. The Terrazzo building is a single-space structure with a rectangular floor plan, measuring 11.75 meters by 9 meters (exterior dimensions), oriented towards the SW. The structure was only partially intact, but all four stone walls remained enough to aid in reconstructing the missing sections, including a central entrance in the southern wall (Schirmer, 1990, 378–385). A circular feature near the northwestern corner, also called a "lunar hearth" (Haklay & Gopher, 2019a, p. 3), was partially preserved. This feature has a stone rim with traces of human blood found on it. Additionally, remnants of human blood were discovered on a stone slab with a human face relief, located near the northwestern corner of the building (Schirmer, 1990, p. 382).

Each wall appears to have been constructed with two symmetrically placed buttresses, although the remaining portions are poorly built and probably did not support the superstructure; however, this has not been definitively proven (Schirmer, 1990). Schirmer (1990) suggests that the undressed stone walls are remnants of stone foundations on which mud bricks were laid, as in the construction of domestic cell buildings. The preserved walls of the flagstone building, which reach up to 1.3 meters high, include the east and west walls, about 1 meter wide; the northern wall, around 0.75 meters wide; and the southern wall, roughly 0.5 meters wide, all visible just above floor level. The terrazzo-like floor, which gives the building its name, consists of a 12-centimeter-thick layer of limestone fragments set in lime mortar on a base of coarse limestone debris, topped with a 1-centimeter layer of limestone pieces embedded in lime mortar. Both the limestone pieces and the mortar are pink colored. Two precise, parallel white stripes, each 5 centimeters wide and 4 meters long, made from crushed white limestone, are embedded into the top layer. The entire floor was polished, although the central part was destroyed—likely leading to the building's abandonment (Schirmer, 1990; Özdogan, 2011; Haklay & Gopper, 2019b).

In stratigraphy, the structure belongs to the cell sub-phase, possibly to the second or even the third (latest) architectural layer (LPPNB). Although the terrazzo building was found quite close to the topsoil, parts of a large-room structure (BF) from the uppermost sub-phase were built over its northern side. Just below the walls of the still-in-place terrazzo building, the walls of two earlier structures are detectable. The construction techniques of these walls, with at least one featuring small buttresses, suggest they were also communal buildings. However, without removing the terrazzo building, these lower structures cannot be revealed. It seems highly likely that the tradition of building special structures moved further north to the location of the terrazzo building after the destruction of the skull building (Özdogan, 1989, p. 71).

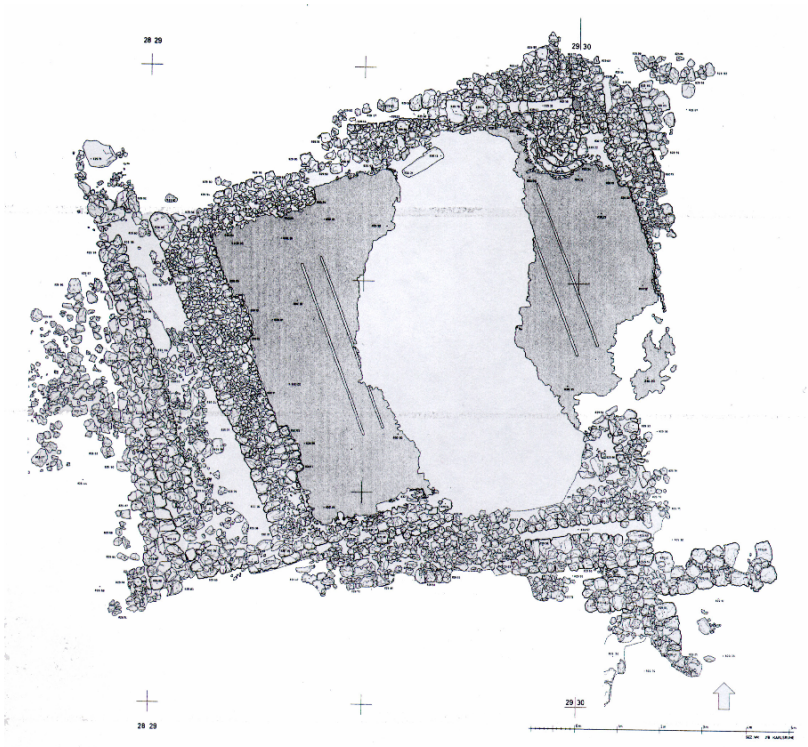

Figure 3.9.3. Çayönü. Plan of Terrazzo Building and surroundings. (Schirmer, 1983, p. 466).

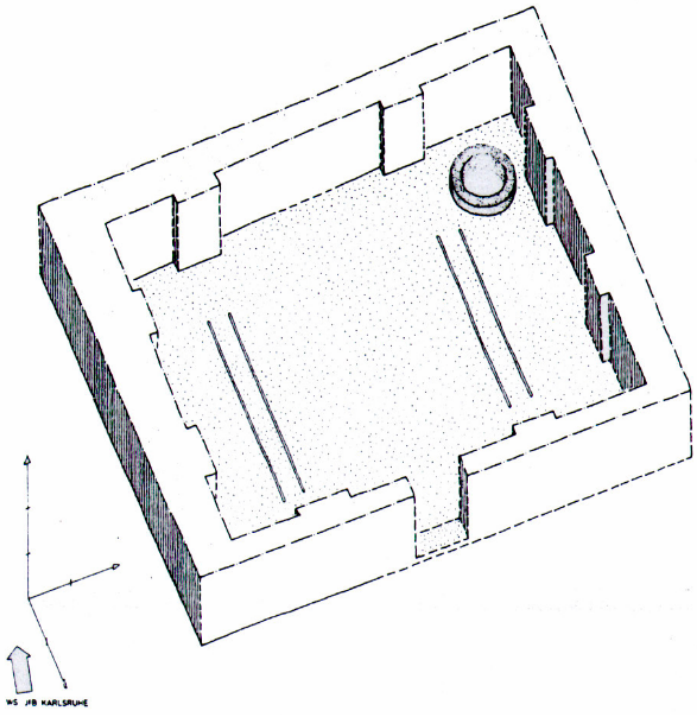

Figure 3.9.4. Çayönü. Isometric reconstruction of Terrazzo Building. (Schirmer, 1983, p. 468).

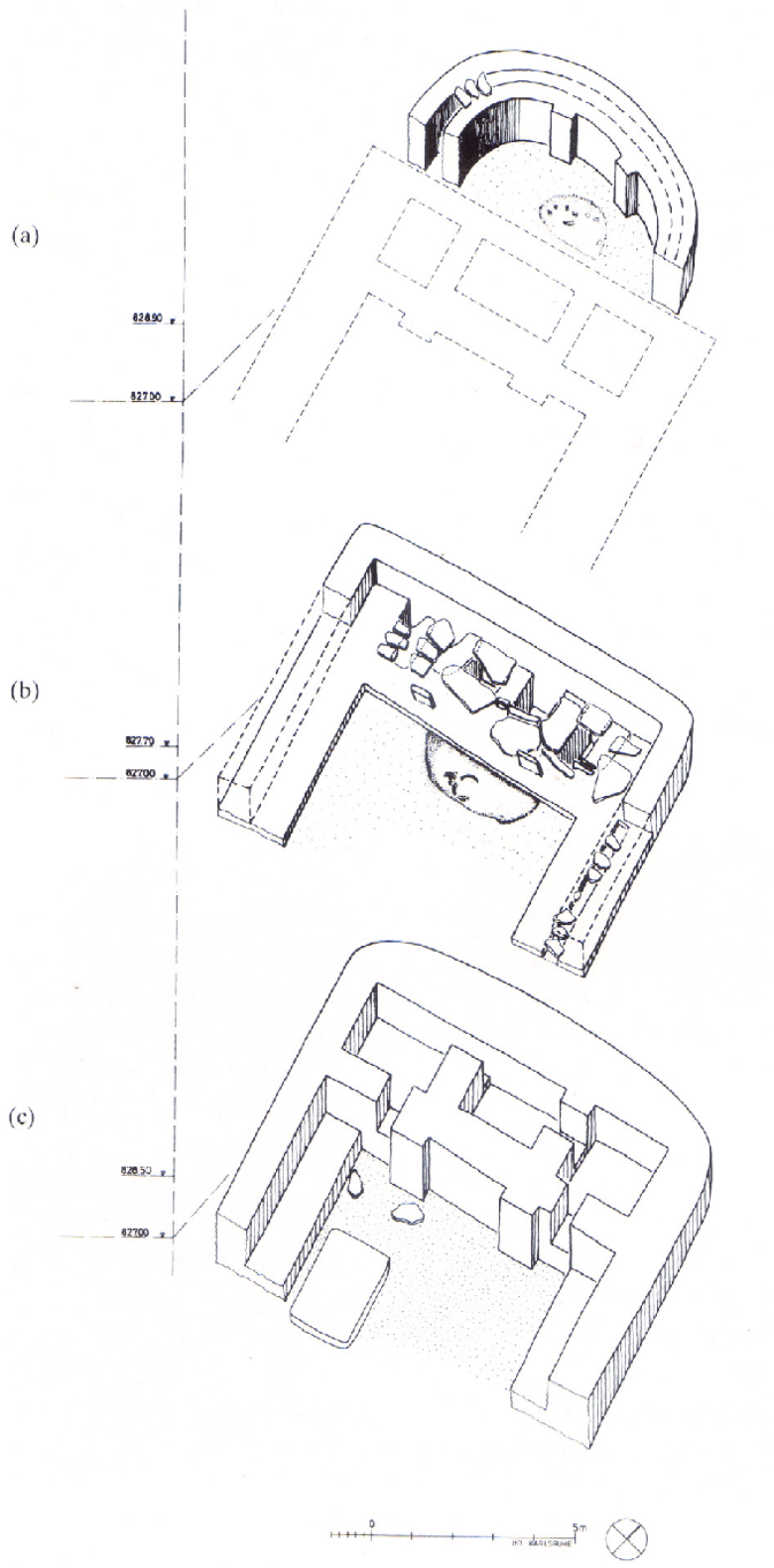

Figure 3.9.5. The different building phases of the Skull Building (Schirmer, 1990, p. 380)

The site is most renowned for the Skull Building, excavated between 1980 and 1985. Initially, only the well-preserved apsidal curved wall (figure 3.9.5) was known. This non-domestic structure contained secondary burials of over 450 individuals, mostly skulls and long bones, indicating a secondary burial context. Named after the first skulls found, further excavation revealed many long bones, a phenomenon not observed at any other site to date. The Skull Building underwent at least five reconstructions over five phases and was in use for a couple of hundred years during the Early and Middle PPNB. After it stopped being used, it was deliberately burned and filled (Lichter, 2016, pp. 73–74). Its earliest phase featured a curved wall, with the overall structure likely rectangular (figure 3.9.5). The latest phase dates to the final part of the intermediate sub-phase, though earlier versions are harder to date due to construction on the mound's slope. Only parts of the original building (BM1), mainly the curved wall, remain—sitting directly on virgin soil. If this curved wall belongs to the earliest round sub-phase, then all five rebuilding stages might span the wattle and daub, grill, and intermediate sub-phases. Alternatively, these reconstructions could have occurred after the grill plan sub-phase. The second, better-preserved version of the building (BM2) resembles the flagstone structure, characterized by a large stone slab floor and standing stones. It remains unclear whether this version coexisted with the flagstone building or was built afterward (Özdogan,1989, p. 71).

The later Skull Building (BM2) was constructed in multiple phases. Initially, a deep trench was excavated into virgin soil, into which multiple 'cellar-like' rooms were constructed. These rooms were topped with large stone slabs supported by stone joists. This floor, similar to the floor of the Flagstone Building, was then enclosed on three sides by carefully constructed walls. The fourth side, the southern exterior, features a large room, possibly a courtyard, with a floor one step lower than the flagstone floor above the cellars. Two upright stone slabs, aligned with the internal walls of the 'cellar' chambers, separate the flagstone floor from the large room in the southern part of the structure. This construction resembles the placement of the slabs in the flagstone building. The original southern end has been lost to erosion, and the original shape of the side walls is uncertain. It seems likely that benches lined the outer walls along the large floor. Additionally, a double stone wall, with a channel-like gap between its two faces, was discovered on the building's eastern side.

The building underwent various changes over time, as briefly summarized by Schirmer (1990). The northern section was divided into three chambers, matching the sizes of the underlying cellars. Partition walls were built, and the floors of these chambers were raised. The southern part of the floor was covered with lime plaster, and buttresses were added, embedded into the western and possibly eastern walls. During renovations, the chamber floors were raised further, and the floor in the southern part, along with the adjacent pit, was coated with lime plaster. At the same time, two buttresses on the inner northern wall replaced the previous upright slabs, which were now walled in. Openings in the walls connected these chambers to the large outer room, which contained a prominent, carefully polished but now broken, flat stone slab—possibly serving as a 'table' (Schirmer, 1990, pp. 378–382). These observations are significant only when considered alongside subsequent findings. Some chambers held neatly stacked skulls and other human bones that reached the ceiling. Later, additional skulls were added to the

previously described chambers. The horns of cattle, found in a pit within the floor of the earlier building level and in the older skull structure (BM1), may offer clues about the purpose. On the surface of the large stone 'table', there was clear evidence of both human and bovine blood, preserved as hemoglobin crystals. A single upright slab in front of the western wall appears connected to the building's final phase, distinguished by an even higher floor level that now covers the stone table (Schirmer, 1990, 378–382).

The Plaza

Although this study focuses on communal architecture (buildings), Çayönü also includes a significant open area that was likely used for community purposes (e.g., gatherings). This plaza first appeared during the intermediate sub-phase. It became a key element of the settlement organisation at the start of the cell sub-phase, measuring about 50 meters by 25–30 meters. It was maintained throughout the cell sub-phase with several (at least 3) floor renewals using reddish clayey soil and burnt mudbrick debris, often aligned with repairs to nearby structures. During the LPPNB, two rows of standing stones were present at the plaza. The plaza remained an open space into the uppermost sub-phase after the cell phase concluded (Özdogan, 1989, pp. 71–72).

3.10. Gre Fılla

Gre Fılla is situated on the eastern bank of Ambar Çayı, five kilometers west of the Kocaköy district in Diyarbakır province. The site was discovered during the *Diyarbakır Small Streams Survey*. It features a cultural deposit approximately 7 meters thick. The main occupational phases date to Late PPNA (V) and PPNB (IV), with five (I-V) occupational phases identified overall. Although poorly preserved, Roman and Byzantine architectures have been found atop the PPN phases, along with sherds from the Pottery Neolithic. During the 2020-2021 excavations, thirteen trenches were dug—four in the south and nine in the north of the site. Gre Filla displays architectural styles from various sites within the Upper Tigris River Valley (Ekinbaş Can, 2025).

The PPNA (Phase V)

Gre Filla Phase V consists of three architectural levels dating to approximately 9300–8800 cal. BCE. These levels are part of the PPNA. Within these levels, three distinct types of dwellings are identifiable: C-shaped, rectangular, and rounded or semi-circular structures. The PPNA levels are only found in the northern part of the site. During this period, only one of the communal structures was used at a time, alongside several surrounding dwellings. These structures resemble similar ones from sites like Çayönü (Phase II-III), Hallan Çemi, and Körtik Tepe. The dwellings and communal structures appear to have been buried after they ceased to be in use. Similar processes seem to have occurred at Karahan Tepe and Göbekli Tepe (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, pp. 12–20).

Structure K41.3, located in the northern sector, is the only structure interpreted as being communal and belonging to the PPNA. It was partially excavated in 2020 (north), and in 2021, the southern half was also excavated. In 2022, the excavations reached the earliest levels of this structure. The structure is an oval-shaped, semi-subterranean building with stone walls and a central chamber measuring approximately 16 meters in diameter. Added to the main chamber, built next to the northern, northwestern, and southeastern walls, are three semi-circular units. These units measure about 1m^2. The function of these units, which may have been intended for storage, is still being researched through archaeobotanical and archeozoological analysis. The floor of the main chamber was plastered with an orange-colored mud plaster. Close to the perimeter wall, postholes lined with small stones (pebbles) are indicative of a roof support. Within the main chamber, three large flat stones were placed against the western, eastern, and southern walls. All three stones can be interpreted as a stele. These stelae, along with a stone pillar, as well as the size and layout of the building, indicate that Structure K41.3 must be interpreted as a communal building. Also important to note here is that this building was constructed on virgin soil; it is therefore likely that it was built at the beginning of the settlement, or stood at the edge of the settlement (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, 12–20).

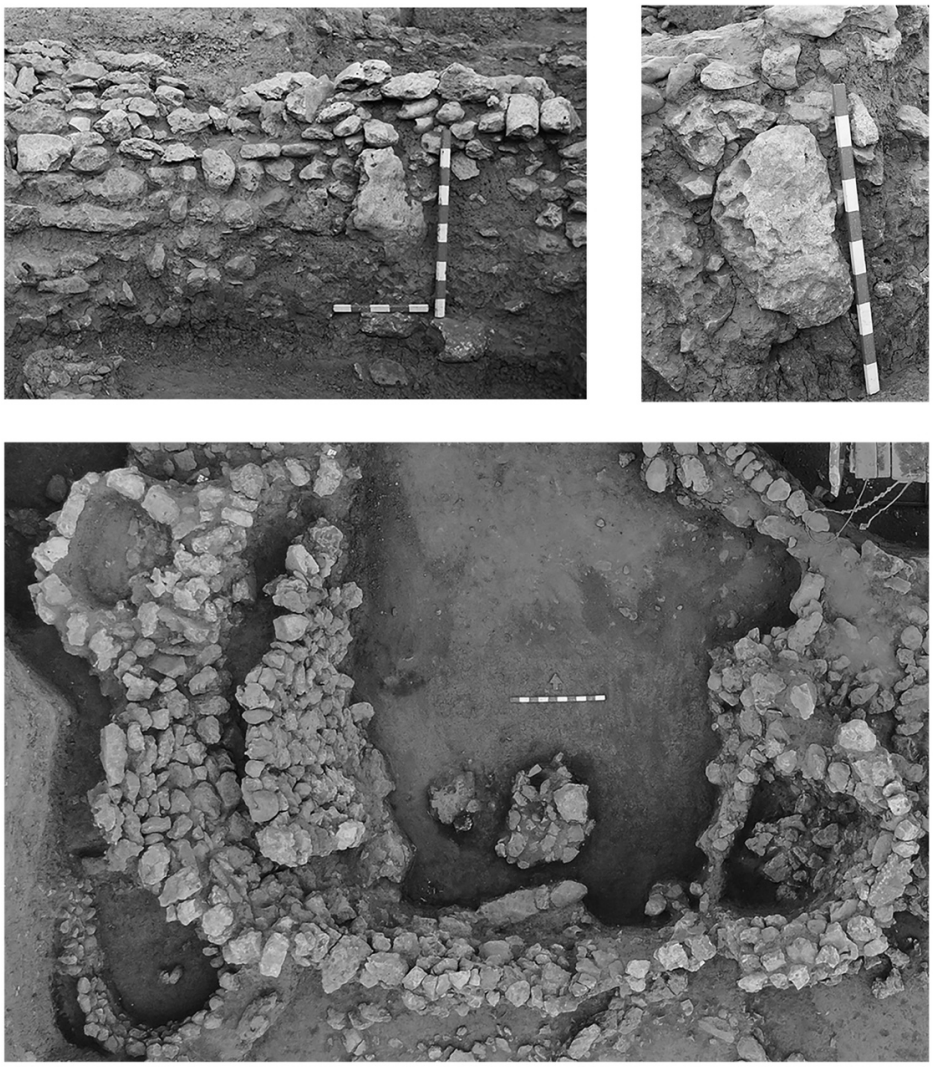

Figure 3.10.1. Gre Filla. Structure K41.3 dating to the PPNA (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, p. 16).

The PPNB (Phase IV)

Phase IV, belonging to the PPNB, consists of a larger cultural deposit compared to Phase V. Phase IV has been dated to 8.800–7.500 cal. BCE. In comparison with the three identified architectural levels of Phase V, Phase IV has 13 architectural levels, and during the 2020/2021 seasons, 120 categorized structures were documented. Domestic buildings include single or multi-room large structures, with cell-planned and grill-planned layouts. The 120 structures also include several structures categorized as communal buildings (Ekinbaş Can, 2025). Communal structures are found in both the northern and southern sectors. Unlike the communal structure belonging to Phase V, the communal structures of Phase IV are built one after another in the same location. All communal buildings feature a layout with four stone pillars; the smallest of these structures covers approximately 60 square meters (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, pp. 4–10).

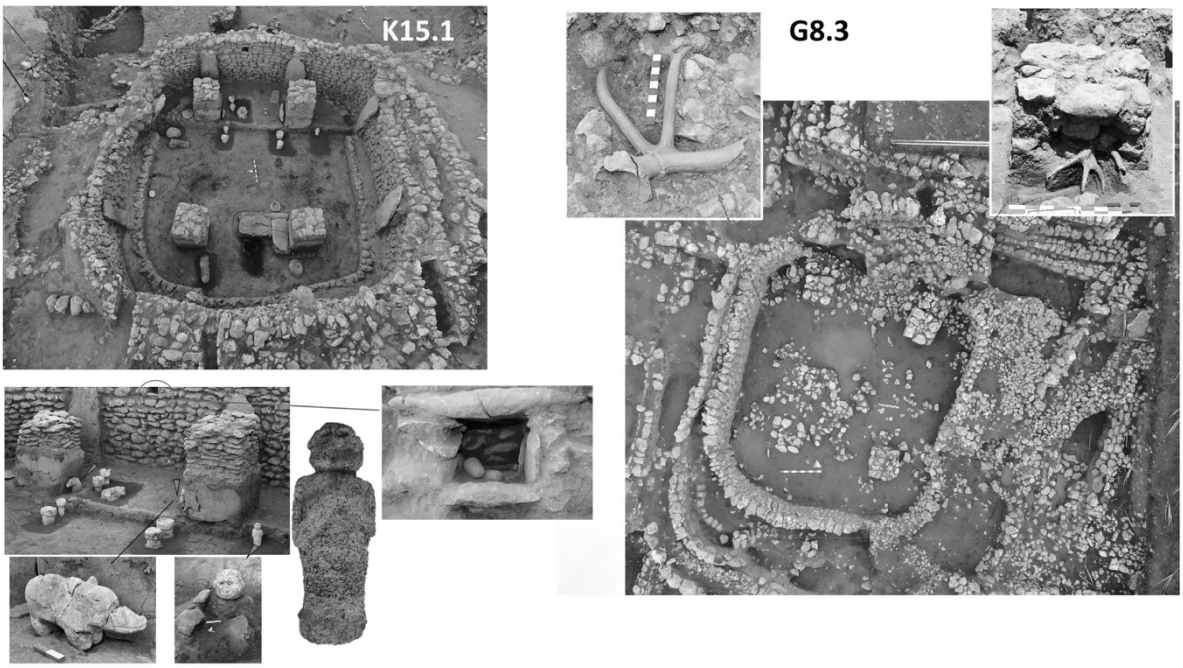

Figure 3.10.2. Gre Filla. Structures K15.1 and G8.3 dating to the PPNB (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, p. 9).

K7.1 has a rectangular layout with rounded corners and an internal division into four sections, related to the four pillars. The structure covers an area of about 76 square meters. In front of the northern perimeter wall, a colored terrazzo floor was discovered, although it is poorly preserved. The four pillars are made of limestone blocks and were possibly plastered. Between the two eastern pillars, a so-called stele nest was found. The stele nest measures 172 centimeters by 126 centimeters and was built with a single row of large stones, surrounded by four walls. Carbonized material was found between these walls, likely belonging to the roof-bearing posts of the building. Besides structure K7.1, several other rectangular communal structures can be found in both the northern and southern sectors of the site. They all have four pillars in the center of the building, except for structure K8.2, where the pillars were likely removed before the building went out of use and was filled in. Most of these buildings have multiple perimeter walls, suggesting repairs or remodeling over time.

Another structure worth discussing in more detail is structure K15.1. Located in the northern sector, it has a similar shape to other communal structures. It features four central pillars made from limestone blocks, each pillar measuring approximately 1meter by 1 meter in size. The pillars were plastered, and traces of red paint have been found on them. Eight undecorated limestone steles, measuring between 1.16 and 1.35 meters in height, 40 to 88 centimeters in width, and 18 to 23 centimeters in thickness, were evenly spaced and attached to the inner face of the perimeter wall. A bench was built along the perimeter wall, connected to a platform against the eastern wall (figure 3.10.2). Discoveries on the platform and near the east perimeter wall reveal aspects of the inhabitants' symbolic world. In between the eastern pillars, a limestone statue of a wild boar stood, flanked by two stone altars and a mortar with a grinding stone. Additional altars, some featuring distinct human faces, appeared both on the platform and in front of it. A human statue with folded arms was found near the southeastern pillar. Between the western pillars, an L-shaped altar table was built from stone slabs, with a stone bowl to its east and a pit to its west. The central stone bowl contained a hole and stopper, with a stone phallus placed beside it (figure 3.10.2) (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, pp. 4–10).

Structure G8.3 is the smallest communal building found at the site. It measures about 50 square meters and was located in the southern sector. The northern perimeter wall has collapsed. Between the two southern pillars, a stone altar was discovered; it had a hole in the center, and beneath the altar was a pit filled with stones and broken vessels. Likely, this pit was used to drain liquids like blood from the altar into the ground. Similar altars were also found in the communal buildings in the northern sector. Many antlers were recovered from the fill of the building after it was abandoned. An antler was also attached to the southern face of the northwestern pillar (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, pp. 4–10). The communal structures uncovered at Gre Filla are very similar to those at sites like Gusir Höyük and Boncuklu Tarla, which are also located in the Upper Tigris River Valley.

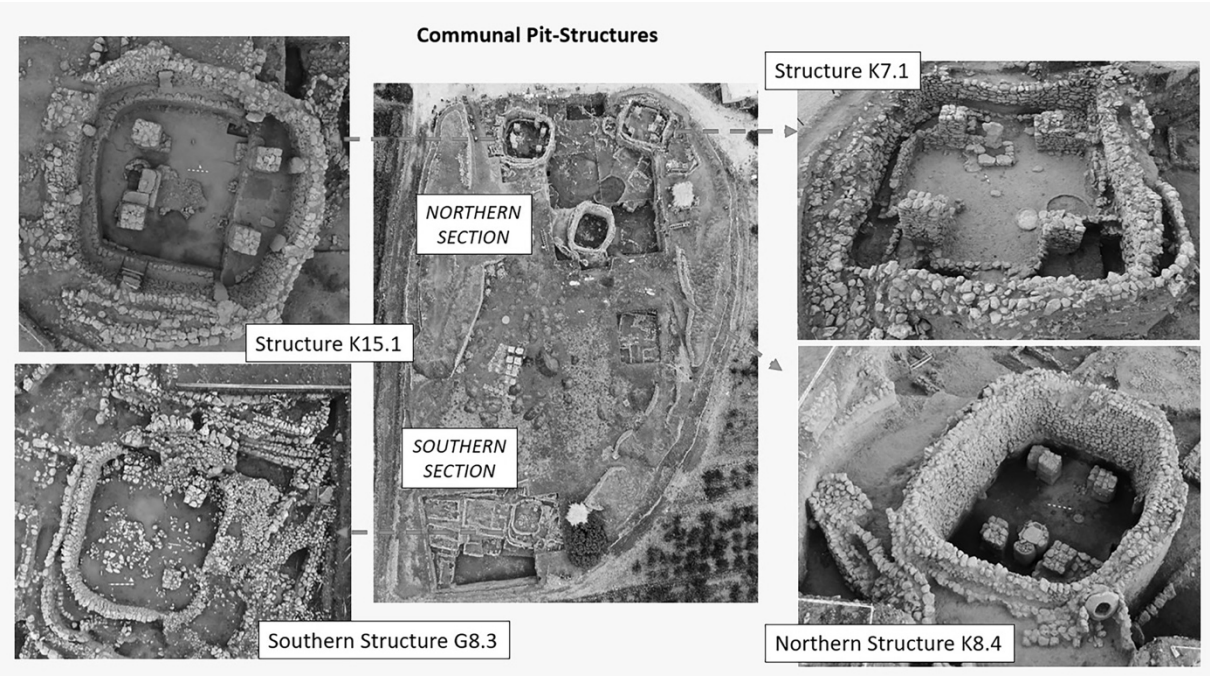

Figure 2. Figure 3.10.3. Gre Filla. Communal structures in the north and south excavation area (Ekinbaş Can, 2025, p. 3).

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter's case studies reveal that communal architecture in the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys is both widespread and varied. All sites inhabit buildings that differ in some respects, regarding size, construction, and internal layout, each expressed uniquely.

In the Urfa region, Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe are renowned for their detailed stonework and T-shaped pillars. Nevalı Çori's rectangular Cult Buildings II and III include benches, terrazzo flooring, and T-shaped pillars within a compact, nearly square plan, suggesting repeated rebuilding at the location within the settlement. Karahan Tepe features bedrock-cut, semi-subterranean spaces and pillars, similar to those at Göbekli Tepe. Still, it also emphasizes rock-cut architecture, including phallic pillars carved from bedrock and connected complexes such as Structures AA–AD. Sayburç stands out because communal and domestic buildings are more integrated: communal structures with benches, T-shaped pillars, and narrative reliefs (notably the leopard–human–bull panel) are located within a small, apparently single-phase settlement, with some houses sharing features typical of communal buildings. Sefer Tepe, as well as other sites not extensively discussed in this study, demonstrate that the Urfa region's tradition of T-shaped pillars extends beyond a single site and can be observed on a relatively high number of sites in the region.

In the Upper Tigris River Valley, Hallan Çemi appears as an early, small community, with two larger, semi-subterranean circular structures with benches and resurfaced floors, alongside smaller C-shaped buildings that indicate communal spaces in this region from an early period. Boncuklu Tarla displays early and long-lasting communal architecture, with a sequence from the semicircular, subterranean O11 with buttresses, to oval pit-buildings with multiple pillars (D15-GD1/2), and also rectangular structures like EA11 and Building 1.1, marking a shift from circular to rectangular communal architecture. It also exhibits close spatial relationships among communal buildings, homes, open areas, and storage. Çayönü provides the most detailed record of architectural change, with named structures like the Flagstone Building, Bench Building, Terrazzo Building, and multi-phase Skull Building illustrating the transition from grill-plan to cell-plan architecture. It is also notable for linking communal architecture with large-scale secondary burial, rituals, and the possibility of outdoor gathering at the Plaza. Finally, Gre Fılla demonstrates that Pre-Pottery Neolithic communal architecture in the Upper Tigris River Valley is even more varied: With structures dating to both the PPNA and PPNB, they display different methods of construction compared to structures at other sites. Their appearance is rectangular and semisubterranean, often with four pillars. The construction of the pillars is made from unworked limestone, similar to the walls, and most notably, the buildings have rounded corners. It appears as if the structures are an intermediate concept between semicircular and rectangular architecture.

Overall, these sites display shared principles—semi-subterranean layouts, benches, internal pillars, and careful floor and wall treatments—expressed through diverse scales, plans, ornamentation, and relationships with domestic space. This diversity underpins the typological and regional analyses in later chapters.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNAL ARCHITECTURE

4.1. Introduction

Before we turn to the topic of regionality and the differences between the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys, this chapter explores the following sub-questions: What makes communal architecture communal? How can this category be defined based on the architecture of the early Neolithic in Southwest Asia? What differences can we identify between communal buildings within the research area (introduced in the previous chapter), and how does communal architecture relate to other settlement patterns? After presenting multiple examples of communal architecture from a diverse range of sites and spanning a long period, this chapter further examines how communal architecture developed over time. It builds on the data discussed in the previous chapter, mainly the various characteristics of buildings addressed in this thesis. This analysis will help to clarify the unique features of communal architecture at both the site and regional levels, with the regional aspect being discussed in depth in the next chapter. Following this introduction, a brief discussion will cover the definition of communal architecture—what characterizes it—and its development over time, primarily at the site level. Part of this discussion includes the so-called 'lifecycle' of these buildings.

While this thesis focuses more on the architectural elements rather than the meaning and function of these buildings within prehistoric societies, the question here is not only what makes these structures communal in their function and use but also how these structures relate to the concept of architecture in general. Schirmer (1990) argues that not every "simple" building can be classified as 'architecture' because this term implies conscious planning as it becomes visible within the physical appearance of a structure (Schirmer, 1990, p. 364). For a long time, due to the prevailing perception of the period among scholars and the available data, it was assumed that all structures present within the archaeological record could be no more than ordinary dwellings and therefore could not be considered architecture (Özdoğan 2010). Most of the domestic structures discovered up to that point were constructed of organic materials, such as wattle and daub or tauf.

The use of stone was generally limited. When used, it was mostly for foundations to support superstructures made from organic materials. As a result, the Tower of Jericho is considered the earliest known example of architecture from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period. Similar to the later discovery of Çatalhöyük. The earliest examples of communal or cult buildings from the Early Neolithic Period appeared during the 1964 field season at Çayönü, but it wasn't until the second half of the 1980s that even the excavators regarded them as normal dwellings (Özdoğan 2010, p. 30). While domestic structures were mainly built using wattle and daub with superstructures of organic materials, larger structures found at sites like Hallan Çemi, Göbekli Tepe, or Çayönü feature high-standing stone retaining walls that clearly demonstrate skilled masonry. The walls at Göbekli Tepe, which reach up to three meters in height with round plans, indicate that the use of stone and masonry was not unfamiliar to the builders. This contrasts with the style of domestic buildings. It is difficult to determine if there was a taboo against distinguishing cult buildings from houses; it was only by the PPNB stage that high-standing stone

walls were used in what are understood as domestic dwellings. Özdoğan (2010) suggests that this difference in building methods reflects the status assigned to buildings during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic Period (Özdoğan, 2010, p. 30).

4.2. The Lifecycle of Communal Architecture

Archaeologists often use the concept of 'object biographies' to describe the lifecycle of an artifact, from raw materials and construction to its use, potentially including secondary use and primary deposition. Additionally, post-depositional processes, the rediscovery of the artifact, and secondary uses, such as becoming a museum piece, are described in the object's biography. The same applies to buildings, including the communal structures examined in this context.

In most cases, the raw materials used to construct communal structures are sourced from sites nearby. At Göbekli Tepe, the stone comes from a quarry on the adjacent plateau, where partly cut monoliths were still found (Clare et al., 2018, p. 121). The use of the structures is not the only thing interpreted as communal; the building process was likely communal as well. Especially at sites such as Göbekli Tepe, Karahan Tepe, and Cayönü, where multiple structures have been discovered, it is likely that the construction of these buildings was also a group effort. Comparisons have been drawn between the Indonesian tradition of tomb building and the construction of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. Calculations based on comparable efforts show that approximately 600 individuals were involved (or needed) in dragging one of the larger (5.5-meter-long and approximately 15-ton) central T-shaped pillars from the quarry to the site, a feat that would likely not be achievable by a single small community. Recently, it has been posited that the populations of PPNA settlements could have reached approximately 150 individuals, based on calculations that combine the horizontal extent of PPNA sites with ethno-demographic data. Because the exact construction processes of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe and other communal structures remain unknown, these theories remain highly speculative. Still, they can provide insights into the scale and importance of these structures within the broader community. What can be expected is the involvement of a large part of the community and possibly people from outside of the local community (Clare et al., 2018).

Since the discovery of communal architecture, much has been hypothesized and written about its emergence and possible reasons for its existence. While the exact function of these buildings is still largely unknown to us, and likely never will be fully understood, most of the existing theories about the role of these structures within society have to do with the neolithization process itself, and are likely related to population growth, shared histories and belief systems, or possibly even emerging hierarchies related to the population increase and the transition to a more sedentary lifestyle. Indicative of the relationship between communal architecture and community formation might be the remodeling of structures over time. Most of the structures discussed in this study have been remodeled over time. Again, Göbekli Tepe provides clear evidence, in this case coming from enclosure C. This enclosure underwent successive reductions in the size of its central enclosed area, as evidenced by its three temporally successive concentric dry-stone walls. In addition to the remodelling of the walls,

many of the T-shaped pillars within the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe also appear to have originated in other structures and were reused. A clear example comes from enclosure D (Pillar 21). The enclosing limestone wall partially hides the low reliefs carved on its broad south-facing side. A similar example can be found in enclosure H, where pillar 66 faced inwards, with one of its broad sides rather than the narrow front face (Clare et al., 2018, pp. 121–127; Piesker, 2014, pp. 14–54).

One of the most notable phenomena associated with the lifecycle of communal structures is the (assumed) intentional filling of these structures after they are no longer in use. This practice began during the Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic period and continued into the Pottery Neolithic period (Özdoğan, 2018, pp. 7–24). The burial of buildings is not observed at all PPN sites and is best documented at sites such as Göbekli Tepe (Clare, 2018) and Karahan Tepe (Karul, 2021). There is much debate surrounding this topic, and while some evidence supports this theory, other evidence points to natural formation processes related to the sites' geography. Moris Kinzel established multiple rock surfaces at Göbekli Tepe, forming terraces. The terraces, combined with seismic activity, other natural events, and processes (eg, erosion), could have led to collapse and necessitated repairs (Kinzel, 2020). When this much-debated phenomenon was discovered at Göbekli Tepe, attention was also paid to it during excavations at nearby Karahan Tepe. At Karahan Tepe, the deliberate filling of the buildings has been attested for every structure excavated on the Western Terrace so far (structures AA, AB, AC, and AD). Different layers of fill, composed of large stones, smaller stones, and thick earth with irregular stones, suggest human activity rather than natural processes. Supporting this idea is the inclination of the fill layers in structure AD, which slope from the periphery toward the center. This is the opposite of what natural formation processes would produce, as proposed by Moris Kinzel (2020) (Karul, 2021).

Other structures are not entirely abandoned or demolished but are remodeled; for example, this is the case at Nevalı Çori (Structures II and III). Sometimes a new structure is built on the foundations of a previous one, as is likely at Cayönü (Terrazzo building). Additionally, at Cayönü, the Skull building was deliberately burned and filled after it ceased use. While the (symbolic) lifecycle of communal structures might be comparable with those of humans, “highlighting integrated systems of memory and embodiment” (Kuijt, 2008, p. 172), the reasons for the deliberate filling of (some of) the structures remain unknown.

4.3. Typological Analysis

As noted in the introduction to this study, structures interpreted as ‘communal buildings’ are often classified in this category based on characteristic elements, such as pillars and benches, and on their relative size to other structures. In the remainder of this chapter, the divining characteristics of the structures will be discussed in more detail. An overview of the main features of the individual structures is also provided in Appendix 2.

Pillars

While pillars are mainly associated with Göbekli Tepe in Şanlıurfa, Turkey, they are also found at various sites across the northern Near East. They can be classified into four groups based on their materials and form: T-shaped stone pillars with capitals, plain stone pillars without capitals,

compact marl-concrete pillars with no sign of capitals (clay or packed earth), and anthropomorphic stone or clay pillars.

T-shaped and anthropomorphic stone pillars, except for a fragment from Tell Abr 3 in northern Syria and for Cult Buildings II and III at Nevalı Çori, are predominantly found in the Urfa region, at sites discussed in this study such as Göbekli Tepe, Sefer Tepe, and Karahan Tepe. But also at sites not discussed in detail within this study: Kurt Tepe, Ayanlar, Taşlı Tepe, Höyük, Kılışıık, Hamzan Tepe, and Hurbetsu (Kodaş, 2021, pp. 162–163). The pillars at Göbekli Tepe are unique in that some central pillars reach up to 5.5 meters in height, whereas most T-shaped pillars at other sites are smaller; structures dating to the PPNB generally feature smaller, less decorated pillars. T-shaped monoliths are remarkable for their craftsmanship and their weight. The craftsmanship and effort that must have gone into the creation of these pillars are also evident in their recycling, as has become apparent from the Göbekli Tepe enclosures and other structures. When structures were altered or abandoned, the pillars seem to have been reused at other structures or their successors, as has become evident by the empty slots in the walls and the (mis)placement of pillars in their secondary context. The flat surfaces of the monoliths also make them suitable for relief carvings.

Another type of pillar is one composed of multiple stacked limestone blocks. They can be made from cut stones or naturally shaped stones. The choice between pillars made from a single piece of limestone (monoliths) and pillars made from multiple stacked rocks (covered with plaster) is most likely based on the availability of raw materials and workload constraints. The craftsmanship and effort required to construct the pillar and create the reliefs on the T-shaped pillars set the structures apart from ordinary dwellings. In addition to freestanding pillars, there are so-called buttresses consisting of numerous smaller stones or limestone blocks. These buttresses are sometimes plastered, and the individual blocks or stones are held together with mud plaster. Buttresses likely serve the same function as freestanding pillars but are usually integrated into perimeter walls. Buttresses are best known from structure O11 at Boncuklu Tarla. Pillars and buttresses constructed from multiple stacked stones are best known from Gre Filla and Boncuklu Tarla, with Boncuklu Tarla being an interesting site where the older structures, such as O11, feature buttresses and pillars made from stacked stones, and later structures, such as EA11 and Building 1.1, feature monoliths constructed from a single piece of limestone.

Decorations and symbolism

Communal architecture is closely related to symbolism, as evidenced by figurative and more abstract decorations associated with the structures. While in most cases these depictions are featured on pillars and benches, they also appear as statues, figurines, and other objects (e.g., skulls). Many of the depictions involve (non-domestic) animals and anthropomorphic beings. The existing link between the sites investigated to date can be established not only from an architectural perspective but also from an artistic/iconographic perspective. While this study will not discuss the possible meanings or interpretations of the depictions, the iconography can be used to identify shared belief systems or cultural interactions across communities. The most notable features include animal reliefs on the *stelae* and pillars, as well as figurines, round reliefs,

and zoomorphic reliefs found within the structures. These depictions are significant because they characterize the buildings. For example, at Göbekli Tepe, each enclosure typically emphasizes a dominant animal. For instance, in Enclosure A, the snake is predominant; in Enclosure B, foxes feature prominently; in Enclosure C, wild boars are most visible; and in Enclosure D, birds (along with snakes) hold a key role (Calleti, 2020, p. 105). Their gaze, oriented toward the interior of the enclosures, appears to serve a specific purpose. The next chapter will further explore the theme of regionality, particularly in relation to shared symbolism.

Not all buildings feature anthropomorphic or decorative pillars. Some communal structures feature minimalist decoration, such as the geometric patterns on the benches at Jerf el Ahmar and Wadi Feynan. The rich symbolic and figurative record of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic deserves a study on its own (e.g., Stosik, 2024; Siddiq, 2021; Mithen, 2023). It is therefore not discussed in depth in this study. However, in addition to the previously discussed examples of figurative and geometric depictions that are associated with communal architecture, similar depictions were also discovered on smaller (personal) items such as plaquettes, sherds, and so-called 'shaft straighteners' at Jerf el Ahmar and Körtik Tepe. While communal architecture has been discovered at Jerf el Ahmar, this is not the case at Körtik Tepe (at least according to the excavators; Özkaya, 2009a/b), where only domestic structures have been found. Similar items are also discovered at Göbekli Tepe and Hallan Çemi.

Internal Features

Communal structures typically include architectural features such as pillars, buttresses, benches, and, in some cases, internal walls or partitions. Conversely, they usually lack features characteristic of domestic structures, such as hearts. An important observation from the examined examples is the builders' understanding of scale and geometry. Although most circular structures are not perfectly round—therefore often called semicircular—they exhibit a clear sense of proportion and geometric awareness. Early evidence of the existing notion of proportion and geometry appears at Jerf el Ahmar with structures EA30 and EA53 (figures 2.3.3 & 2.3.4). Similar features are found at Mureybet, about 50 kilometers away, where structures are elliptical, radiologically divided, and semisubterranean: the central area remains open, surrounded by small rooms and benches that most likely served for storage, craftwork, or social and ritual purposes. Structure EA53 appears to be mainly designed for gatherings, lacking internal divisions but featuring a hexagonal bench built on principles similar to those of EA30 or Mureybet's communal structures. The bench is supported at the front by chalk slabs decorated with triangular geometric engravings, and wooden posts support the roof at each corner of the hexagon. The motifs on the slabs extend onto the posts' plaster, forming a continuous frieze. Danielle Stordeur highlights the geometry of these buildings, noting that the hexagon of the bench fits perfectly within a circle concentric with the structure (Dermech, 2021, pp. 19–22).

A study by Alexis McBride (2013) on performance and experience, based on multisensory analysis, has shown that the structures were highly open and undifferentiated, emphasizing shared, "highly charged" (McBride, 2013, p. 63) experiences rather than the materialization of hierarchical relationships. According to McBride's calculations, the number of people who could

be seated on the benches ranges from approximately 13 at Jerf el Ahmar (EA53) to about 36 at Göbekli Tepe (Enclosure D), and roughly 25 at Nevalı Çori (McBride, 2013, pp. 63–64). The capacity of most benches in the other structures discussed in this study would fall within these ranges. The benches along the perimeter walls of many of the discussed structures suggest that it was common for people to sit inside these buildings. A distinction (e.g., hierarchy) among the people present at the events cannot be discerned from the internal divisions visible in the architecture; it appears that those seated on the benches are considered equal. In smaller structures (less than 10 meters in diameter), people could likely communicate with one another; in larger structures, this would be difficult across opposing sides but possible from the center toward the periphery and thus the audience on the benches. While the exact number of people, their roles within the communities, and the use of the structures remain unknown, it would be interesting to compare the size of the structures and their capacity with the size of the settlement and the expected population to assess whether there is a correlation. Unfortunately, most of the sites discussed in this study have not been fully excavated, so the available data are not yet suitable for such a quantitative analysis.

The structures from Jerf el Ahmar, Göbekli Tepe, and Nevalı Çori discussed in McBride's (2013) study appear to be oriented centrally, as indicated by the benches along the perimeter wall and the placement of the pillars (McBride, 2013, p. 54). However, not all communal buildings appear to share this orientation. For example, at Gre Filla, structure K15.1 features familiar elements, including four pillars, a bench, and a rectangular plan with rounded corners. The most notable aspect of this structure is that the bench forms a U-shape around the northern, western, and southern perimeter walls, leaving a platform in the east between the two eastern pillars. On this platform, a limestone statue of a wild boar, two stone altars, and a mortar with a pestle were found. Additionally, a human statue was discovered near the southeastern pillar. Between the two western pillars, another altar made of stone slabs was found, along with two stone bowls. These findings suggest that this structure was likely oriented toward the platform and the altar, rather than towards the center or pillars, as observed in the enclosures of Göbekli Tepe. Similar structures are observed at Nevali Cori and Çayönü, although these are rectangular. Cult building II at Nevali Cori also features a bench surrounding the internal perimeter walls and includes a podium or niche in the southeastern wall. Similar features are found in the Skull building at Çayönü, where an apsidal curved wall with a niche on one side stands out within the otherwise rectangular structure. This may imply that these structures served multiple, distinct functions. Sometimes activities centered on a person or object, and other times the focus was directed toward a podium or altar. There may also have been multiple stages within the events held in these structures, with different areas of the building used for other purposes.

Construction and Building Materials

While the processes of constructing communal architecture, as well as the craftsmanship and erection of the monolithic pillars, remain largely unknown, more information has become available about the materials used in the construction of the communal buildings. Unlike most domestic structures, which are made with dirt, clay, and organic materials (superstructures), the

primary building material in communal architecture is stone. In addition to stone, another important category of materials comprises earthen materials, including mortar (for walls and buttresses), floor plaster, and roofing. While none of the communal buildings thus far discovered have revealed apparent roof remnants (except for some port-hole stones found at Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe), it can be expected with a high certainty that the communal structures were roofed. The roofs of the structures were likely constructed from organic materials, such as wooden beams, and may also have been plastered, as were many of the walls, floors, and buttresses. The placement of pillars both at the center of the structure and along the perimeter serves, in my opinion, primarily a practical function as roof supports, alongside their symbolic importance due to the reliefs, which are not present on all pillars. This theory is supported by the Terrazzo Building at Cayönü, which lacks pillars but employs symmetrically placed buttresses embedded in the interior perimeter walls.

Not much attention has been paid to the possibility of existing (rain)water drainage applied within communal architecture. In some cases, it appears that existing drainage systems are associated with blood and other residues associated with altars and offerings. For example, within structure K15.1 and G8.3 at Gre Filla, where basins seem to be linked to the practice of providing. At other sites, such as Building O75 at Wadi Feynan, the gullies appear to be related to water management and are part of drainage systems. Water management may have been essential to preserving the architecture, as evidenced by numerous repairs to flooring and walls damaged by erosion. Another attempt to protect the building's construction against erosion and water damage is evident in the Flagstone Building at Cayönü. The floor of this structure is made of flat-lying flagstones that seem far more durable than plastered floors. Additionally, the footings of the perimeter walls are also lined with smaller standing flagstones. The absence of flagstone flooring in presumably later communal structures at Çayönü is unclear, but it may be related to the time-consuming effort required to work the stone.

Most materials have local sources (e.g., limestone in the Harran Plain and pebbles from nearby rivers), and often these materials appear to have been recycled or reused. Likely for practical reasons and their remaining value as being complicated and time-consuming to craft, but for example, in the case of pillars, they may have also been reused as ‘spolia’, carrying meaning. The Lions Pillar Building at Göbekli Tepe is a good example of this, where they reused T-shaped pillars, likely originating from earlier enclosures, and also used millstones for the structure's walls. The reuse of pillars and other building elements also indicates that not all communal structures were in use simultaneously.

Semi-circular or Rectangular Plans

The plans or layouts of communal structures can be subdivided into two main categories: round/oval or semi-circular, and rectangular. At some sites, a transition from circular to rectangular structures is evident, as both semicircular and rectangular structures are observed. This is, for example, the case at Göbekli Tepe, where the enclosures in the main excavation area are semicircular, in contrast to the rectangular lion-pilar building. A similar transition is visible at Boncuklu Tarla, where the earliest communal structure, O11, features a semicircular plan,

whereas the later structure, EA11, has a rectangular plan. There also appears to be an intermediate or hybrid form with a rectangular plan and rounded corners, found at Gre Filla. While the transition from circular to rectangular plans is well attested in domestic architecture (Özdoğan, 2010), this is less clear for communal structures. The question one might ask is whether there is a correlation between the chronological periods (e.g., PPNA-PPNB) and the plans of the structures.

When assessing the data (Appendix 2, Table 4.3.1), it is apparent that all communal structures with a rectangular plan are attributed to the PPNB, with some dated to the transition between the PPNA and PPNB, such as the Flagstone Building at Çayönü. It also becomes apparent that some communal structures retain their original semicircular plan, being in use long into the PPNB period. This is most evident at Göbekli Tepe (Enclosures A and C) and at Sayburç. At Boncuklu Tarla, the distinction between the PPNA and PPNB is more pronounced, with a transition from semicircular to rectangular plans from the PPNA to the PPNB. At Gre Filla, an intermediary stage between semicircular and rectangular plans may have existed, with structures dating to the PPNB exhibiting rectangular plans with rounded corners.

Two interesting comparisons are the enclosures of Göbekli Tepe and the 'Cult Buildings' of Nevalı Çori, and the differences in plan between the communal structures and domestic architecture at Jerf el Ahmar. At Nevalı Çori, both communal structures are dated to the PPNB and feature a rectangular (almost square) plan, with a bench surrounding the interior, two central T-shaped pillars, and additional T-shaped pillars embedded in the perimeter wall. At Göbekli Tepe, most enclosures date to the PPNA and likely remained in use during the EPPNB. The communal structures of both sites share similar characteristics (T-shaped pillars, benches, and a central orientation) and have semicircular plans. Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe are approximately 45 kilometers apart. While they share features such as T-shaped pillars (and their placement) and benches along the interior walls, the most apparent difference between the structures lies in their plans. The differences in plan may indicate a transition from semicircular to rectangular architecture, while maintaining their functions and other characteristics, such as T-shaped pillars and an internal layout with two central pillars.

At Jerf el Ahmar, all communal structures (EA7, EA30, EA53, and EA100) are semicircular and semisubterranean; some feature a single space (EA53 and EA100), and others are subdivided into cells (EA7 and EA30). The single-room structures feature a bench along the interior wall and were likely used for gatherings, whereas the subdivided structures could have been for storage. The surprising aspect of these structures is that, while they date to the PPNA, the surrounding contemporary domestic architecture features rectangular plans and was built above ground. Alexis McBride interprets the plan of the communal structures as closely related to their function (McBride, 2013, p. 52).

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter reveals that Early Neolithic communal architecture in the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris Valleys is more diverse than the category of communal buildings suggests. These

structures vary in design, construction, features, and symbolism, linked to historical trends and local traditions. A key difference exists between semicircular, often semi-subterranean buildings (at Jerf el Ahmar, early Göbekli Tepe, Boncuklu Tarla's O11) and later rectangular structures (Nevalı Çori Cult Buildings, Çayönü's Flagstone, Terrazzo, Skull buildings, Boncuklu Tarla's EA11). Some sites, like Gre Filla, show transitional forms with rectangular plans and rounded corners, indicating gradual local change. Variations in materials and techniques highlight the importance of communal buildings. While early domestic structures often use organic and earthen materials, communal buildings primarily feature stone, especially in walls, floors, pillars, and buttresses. The contrast between massive monolithic T-shaped pillars at Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe and stacked-stone or marl-concrete pillars elsewhere reflects differences in material access, labor, and preferences for monumentality. Remaking and reusing pillars show their ongoing practical and symbolic importance. Internal layouts and decorations introduce variation; some buildings focus on paired central pillars and perimeter benches, like at Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori. Others are organized around features like altars or sculptural elements, such as Gre Filla K15.1 and the Skull building at Çayönü. Bench capacities and open interiors imply spaces for shared participation rather than hierarchy. Variations in orientation and focal points suggest different ritual or social practices. Carved animal iconography and geometric patterns show diverse ways communal architecture expresses symbolism. The lifecycles of these buildings vary: some are filled, buried, or burned (e.g., Göbekli Tepe, Karahan Tepe, Skull building), while others are remodeled or reused. These differences in plans, techniques, and organization point to multiple architectural traditions, making communal architecture a flexible, monumental, collective, and separate from domestic spaces.

CHAPTER 5: LOCAL AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNAL ARCHITECTURE

5.1. Introduction

Chapter five addresses the main research question of this thesis: *How can we explain regional and local differences in communal architecture in Southwest Asia during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic?* This question centers around the theme of regionality. When does a local influence become a regional phenomenon? The interconnectedness among multiple sites within the research area and beyond has become apparent through similarities in material culture and architecture. Regionality in this context refers to common practices observed across a geographical region. Most of the sites discussed are located along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers or adjacent to one of their many tributaries. This has resulted in the division of the region into subregions, namely the Middle Euphrates River Valley and the Upper Tigris River Valley. This chapter examines the usability of this geographical division, in contrast to a division based on communal architecture. Is it sufficient to group sites by geographic location, or should we also consider architectural factors? As has already been done multiple times with material culture, for example, with pottery or lithic assemblages.

Local and regional differences are likely to occur because the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation was a process of long duration, as has been explained in Chapter 2. Specific trends and trajectories became variable both in time and space. Influences originating from inter-regional contacts are merged with local influences, creating unique elements of material culture, symbolism, and, in this case, also communal architecture. Before discussing regional variation in communal architecture, it is essential to note that comparisons of sites and structures are influenced by the number of sites discovered and their locations. The current density of sites likely does not reflect the density and distribution of settlements during their period of habitation. As will be discussed further, in areas with lower densities of discovered sites, greater nuance is evident among the settlements and, consequently, more subgroups could be identified. The grouping of sites into clusters or regions is not new: e.g., the Mureybetian (Tell Mureybet, Abu Hureyra, Jerf el Ahmar, and Tell Abr) and the sites surrounding the modern city of Sanliurfa (including Gobekli Tepe, Karahan Tepe, Sefer Tepe, and Sayburç). They are grouped based on similar characteristics (in material culture) and proximity to one another. The imbalance between the number of discovered prehistoric sites in the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River valleys and in the intervening plains and plateaus is attributed to the construction of multiple dams on both the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. This has led to increased archaeological research in these areas, which continued after the discovery of sites such as Göbekli Tepe. The lack of sites between regions makes it more difficult to compare the areas and to examine the exchange of specific influences (Özdoğan, 2024, p. 3). Nonetheless, an attempt will be made here, especially concerning the communal architecture of both regions.

5.2. Regionality

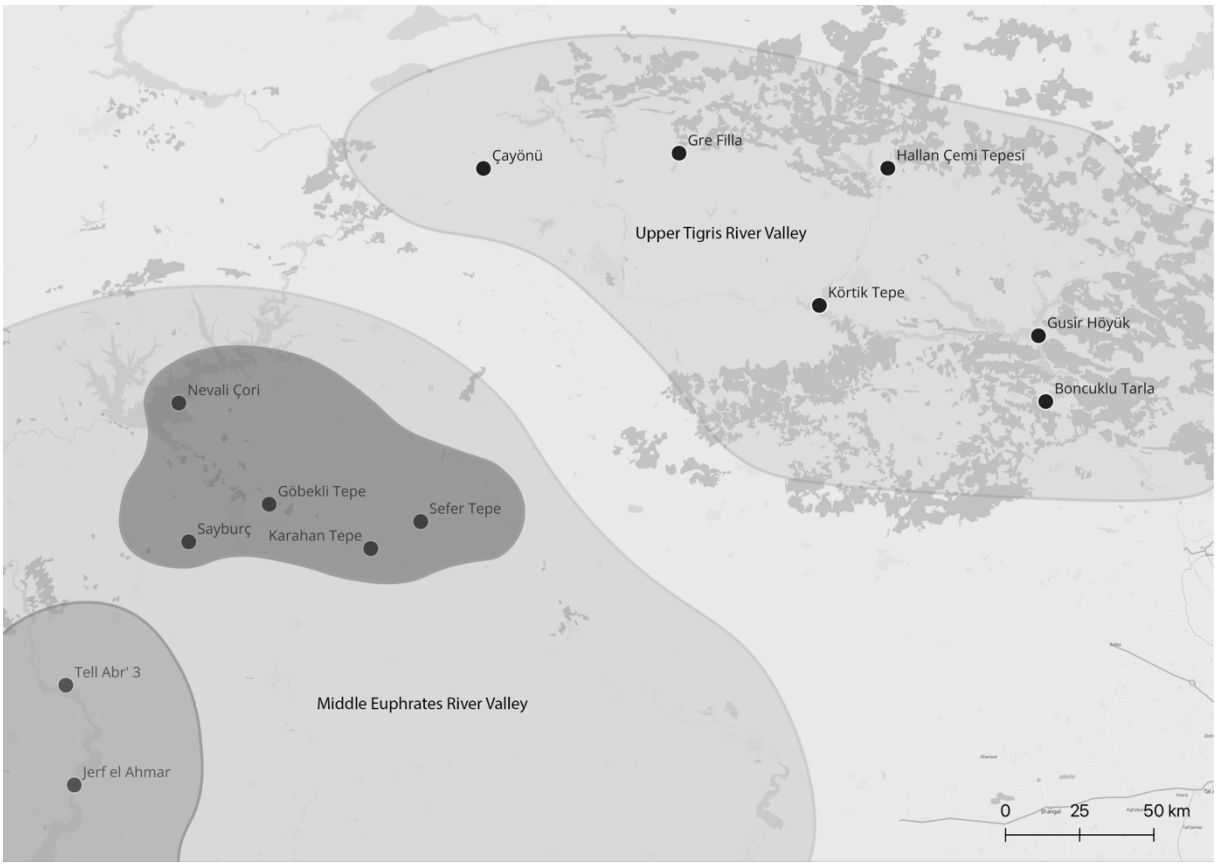

Figure 5.2.1. Map visualizing sites and their potential relationships based on architectural features (Figure by Melis-Langeveld, 2025).

Middle Euphrates River Valley

In the Urfa region, Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe are not the only sites featuring (semi-circular) communal architecture with terrazzo flooring and T-shaped pillars. Relatively untouched and recently discovered sites like Ayanlar Höyük, Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle, Sefer Tepe, Hamzan Tepe, Harbetsuvan Tepesi, Kurt Tepesi, and Taşlı Tepe date from the end of the PPNA to the start of the PPNB. These sites are spread across the province and nearby districts, including Viranşehir, Siverek, and the central highland district overlooking the Harran Plain. They share similar architectural characteristics, suggesting shared principles of communal architecture (Calleti, 2020). A recently discovered site, known as Mendik Tepe, is also located in the Urfa region and is currently being excavated as part of the Tas Tepeler project. Although no scientific reports have yet been published, this site may predate Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe. While only a small percentage of the site has been excavated, structures of various sizes have been discovered, some being interpreted as communal buildings. Mendik Tepe has standing stones that are not T-shaped, marking a site-specific architectural character (Türkiye Today, 2025a). The differences in pillar types, compared with Göbekli Tepe and other sites with T-shaped pillars in the region, could

be explained by the hypothesis that Mendik Tepe predates these sites. It is also important not to rule out the unique character a site and its architecture might have.

When comparing communal structures in the Middle Euphrates River valley, two clusters of sites are evident. The so-called Mureybetian sites comprise Tell Mureybet, Jerf el Ahmar, Tell Abr' 3, Harbetsuvan, and the site surrounding the city of Sanliurfa. The former sites have been briefly discussed within Chapter 2, but fall outside the scope of this study. However, it is essential to note that although these sites are relatively close to those in the Urfa region, their communal architecture differs substantially. They do not feature T-shaped pillars; the pillars were likely wooden posts. Additionally, the functions of communal structures may vary from those in the Urfa region, with some serving as storage facilities and others likely intended for gatherings.

The sites in the Urfa region, in general, share similar characteristics, with PPNA architecture characterized by a semicircular plan and T-shaped pillars along the perimeter and at the center. Some, but not all, of the structures feature a bench surrounding (parts of) the interior. The PPNB communal architecture generally comprises rectangular plans, with T-shaped pillars embedded into the perimeter walls and placed in the center. During the PPNB, communal structures at these sites tend to become smaller, as evidenced by the reduction in the size of the T-shaped pillars. The pillars are probably reused from abandoned PPNA structures. A noteworthy difference between Sayburç and other sites, such as Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori, concerns the stratigraphic ordering of architectural levels. At Göbekli Tepe, the structures are built on what appear to be terraces, sometimes partially overlapping or superimposed on earlier structures. At Nevalı Çori, Cult Building III was built at the exact location as Cult Building II, possibly even using building material such as the two central pillars from Building II. At Sayburç, there are currently no signs of multiple architectural layers (Özdoğan, 2022). The structures were either used simultaneously or horizontally stratified rather than vertically.

Upper Tigris River Valley

The communal architecture of the Upper Tigris River valley provides a much more diverse picture. While this region also includes sites with architecture interpreted as communal, the structures differ more between individual sites. At Boncuklu Tarla, Hallan Çemi, Gre Filla, and Çayönü, subterranean communal structures have been discovered. They differ from domestic architecture in size and features, resembling communal structures in the Middle Euphrates River valley, with stone construction, pillars or buttresses, and, in some cases, benches along the interior perimeter walls. As in the Middle Euphrates River valley, the characteristics of individual structures also change across periods, as discussed in the previous chapter. The communal architecture at PPNA sites in this region features a semicircular plan, similar to that of PPNA structures in the Middle Euphrates River Valley. The method of construction and placement of the pillars, however, differs from that of structures in the Middle Euphrates River Valley. At Boncuklu Tarla, the O11 structure features both pillars and buttresses constructed from multiple stones, similar to the walls. In contrast, in structure EA11, the pillars are made from a single piece of limestone. The four pillars in structure EA11 are symmetrically placed, aligned with the buttresses embedded in the walls. Similar features are observable at Çayönü's Flagstone Building, while the

later Terrazzo Building and Skull Building only featured buttresses embedded into the walls instead of freestanding pillars. Additionally, unlike the pillars at the Middle Euphrates sites, these pillars are not decorated. This does not mean that there are no symbolic representations associated with these structures. The structures appear suitable for events similar to those in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, with the structures oriented toward the center, or, in some cases, toward a side podium, and benches surrounding some interiors.

While it has become clear that there are both similarities and differences within the category of communal architecture at the level of individual communities and sites, as well as within and between broader regions, the question remains: to what extent did these communities interact with one another, and were there shared principles of communal architecture? These could include their functions, the meanings they held for the community, or simply common architectural and stylistic principles. Evidence of long-distance interactions is found across the broader Fertile Crescent, where the presence of objects such as obsidian, minerals, and lithic raw materials—along with shared ritual and cultural practices and feasting—indicates extensive networks of interaction among communities (Wang et al., 2022). Although the isotope analysis dataset is limited for sites in Southeastern Anatolia, results from Nevalı Çori suggest that during the PPNB, the inhabitants of the site interacted less with nearby communities, such as Göbekli Tepe, but maintained connections with sites much farther away (Wang et al., 2022, pp. 1–12). However, it remains largely unknown how these connections and modes of exchange influenced belief systems and cultural knowledge beyond the visible similarities in material culture and architecture discussed in this study.

Comparing cultures based on material goods and architecture

While it is possible to identify similarities and differences in communal architecture across the previously described regions, the question remains: how can we explain these similarities and differences? We do not know how the inhabitants of the sites discussed in this study perceived themselves in relation to one another, or what shaped their identity. This difficulty arises for archaeologists and scholars when studying many, if not all, prehistoric societies. While reading Ian Kuijt's (2008) study on the regeneration of life, I came across Richard Wilk's (2004) study, which addresses precisely this difficulty and offers a way to think about it. Wilk argues that the establishment of boundaries, in both time and space, of archaeological cultures has always been problematic. He writes the following: "Whole epochs of prehistory are still recognized by *horizon markers*, generally styles attributed to a single cultural origin that become widespread, providing a temporal boundary, like a dated layer of volcanic ash from a single eruption." (Wilk, 2004, p. 84). This is, in my opinion, also true for much of what we know about prehistory in West Asia, including the 'cultures' related to the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation. Stone-tool assemblages define most Upper and Epipaleolithic cultures recovered at specific sites and are named after the site of their origin (e.g., the Kebaran culture is named after the Kebara cave in Israel). The same applies to the Mureybetian sites (Tell Mureybet, Tell Abr, and Jerf el Ahmar) that are grouped not only based on their geographical location but also on similarities in material culture and architecture (Ibáñez, 2008). As has also become evident in this and previous chapters on

communal architecture, defining boundaries between styles and cultures is very difficult. Wilk (2004), therefore, argues that archaeological cultures are merely analytical constructs that serve scholars (Wilk, 2004, p. 84). Wilk does not stop here and continues to explain that different cultures can become more connected over time, sharing similarities within material culture [and architecture] while at the same time becoming more distinctive and self-cautious (Wilk, 2004, p. 89). What he offers as a 'solution' to this duality is the concept of *common difference*. This concept holds that, for cultures to be compared and to interact with one another, there must be a common idiom. He argues that the world is full of certain institutions that provide standards for groups to compare themselves and their (material) culture to this idiom (Wilk, 2004, p. 91). This concept does not solve the problem of defining boundaries between cultures, but, in my opinion, it can certainly help our understanding of the interactions between different cultures despite the contradictions that arise when comparing their material culture or other aspects that seem to define these cultures.

Shared beliefsystems

Shared belief systems or common understandings of the natural world surrounding them might very well have been the common idiom among the communities that inhabited the sites discussed in this study. Although this is purely hypothetical and difficult to prove on the basis of the archaeological record alone, it is evident that the emergence of the Neolithic in West Asia also coincides with an intensified visual expression of symbolic imagery. One might even argue that the emergence of communal architecture and intensified expressions of (shared?) symbolism through reliefs and other figurative art were not coincidental but closely related.

From a stylistic perspective, the repetition of motifs and iconography that extends beyond individual sites may indicate the presence of a group of specialized artists operating within the same cultural tradition, and possibly even a shared belief system and/or communal history (Calleti, 2020). This is evident both within Göbekli Tepe, where foxes depicted on the pillars, for example, are all created according to the same figurative canon, and beyond its confines in other settlements in the Urfa region. At Karahan Tepe, for instance, two snake reliefs were found on pillars, one snake was depicted with a triangular head and a zigzag body, similar to those discovered at Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe (figure 5.2.2) (Caletti, 2020; Mithen et al., 2023). Animals represented at sites in the Urfa region are also present at sites in the Upper Tigris River Valley, such as in Gre Filla (structure K15.1), in the form of figurines and statues (figure 3.10.2). As previously mentioned, figurative and geometric depictions are not limited to those on pillars and *stelae*; they are also depicted on smaller objects such as figurines, stone bowls, plaquettes, and so-called 'Shaft-straighteners'. These objects were discovered at sites including Körtik Tepe, Jerf el Ahmar, and Göbekli Tepe, located in both the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys. The point here is not to expand on other studies (e.g., Mithen et al., 2023; Watkins, 2008; Goring-Morris & Belfer-Cohen, 2002; Siddiq et al., 2021; & others) regarding connectivity and shared belief systems during the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transformation. Examples of shared, or at least comparable, imagery are also linked to the communal structures at these sites. Not only does it indicate a special place for these structures within the organization of settlements, but the

imagery and what it symbolizes, following Wilk's (2004) concept of *common differences,* may very well be the binding factor between the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris Rives Valleys.

Figure 5.2.2. Snake imagery from Nevali Çori (left) and Göbekli Tepe (middle and right) images are not to scale (adapted from Mithen et al., 2023, p. 838).

5.3. Conclusion

The study of communal architecture in the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris Valleys reveals unique regional styles and shared principles. In the Urfa region, sites such as Göbekli Tepe, Karahan Tepe, and Sayburç exhibit a consistent tradition. PPNA communal structures are semicircular, with terrazzo floors, T-shaped pillars, and, in some cases, benches. During PPNB, structures became more rectilinear, smaller, and possibly reused pillars. Stratigraphy varies: Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori exhibit superimposed cult buildings, whereas Sayburç lacks vertical rebuilding, indicating different approaches to architectural renewal.

The Upper Tigris River Valley exhibits greater diversity in communal buildings at sites such as Boncuklu Tarla, Hallan Çemi, Gre Filla, and Çayönü. These buildings share traits with Middle Euphrates River Valley sites, including subterranean or semi-subterranean layouts, stone construction, pillars or buttresses, benches, and centrally focused internal arrangements. However, they lack the T-shaped monoliths and detailed pillar decorations typical of the Urfa region. Roof supports also vary depending on both the region/site and the chronological period.

During the PPNA in the Euphrates River Valley, it was common for pillars to be embedded into the perimeter wall, with one or two central pillars also functioning as roof supports. The Pillars in the Urfa region seem to have been exclusively T-shaped and constructed from single blocks of limestone. The use of pillars in the Upper Tigris River Valley is more nuanced, with some constructed from stacked and plastered limestone blocks or unworked stones, and others from single blocks of worked limestone. None of the pillars in the Upper Tigris River Valley is T-shaped. During the PPNB, the number of pillars used as roof supports is reduced, and they are often embedded into the wall, forming niches. The Upper Tigris River Valley also displays another type of pillar in the form of buttresses constructed of unworked or worked limestone, sometimes plastered. The communal structures of this region also often feature four central pillars rather than two, as is common at sites in the Urfa region.

Applying Wilk's (2004) concept of 'common difference', these patterns reveal that archaeological cultures and architectural traditions are not fixed but are theoretical constructs sometimes hiding internal diversity. Communities across regions used shared concepts to build communal architecture—subterranean or semi-subterranean structures—distinguished by size, layout, and features, yet expressed them in diverse ways.

Shared or similar belief systems likely provided a framework that connected these communities despite architectural preferences. The increased use of symbolic imagery from the Epipaleolithic to the Neolithic, particularly around communal buildings, highlights a link between architecture and iconography. Recurrent motifs—such as foxes and snakes at Göbekli Tepe, Karahan Tepe, and Nevalı Çori, or animal figurines and decorated objects at Gre Filla, Jerf el Ahmar, Körtik Teppe—show a shared symbolic vocabulary across various sites. Figurative and geometric imagery on pillars, stelae, figurines, bowls, and other objects indicates connections between communities on an intra-site level.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Defining the category of communal architecture

In this study, the concept, variability, and broader importance of communal architecture in Southwest Asia during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic were analyzed to address the main research question: *How can we explain regional and local differences in communal architecture in Southwest Asia during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic?* To answer this question, the first three chapters introduce what is generally called communal architecture, within the larger context of the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic Transition. In Chapter 4, the main features of communal architecture are discussed, along with the variability among individual structures and sites. Chapter 5 then examines differences between communal buildings across the research area and considers how these structures relate to settlement patterns and how these relationships evolve over time.

When distinguishing between structures that are domestic and those serving as communal facilities, the size of the building and features like benches and pillars—both size-related—are key indicators often cited in studies as signs of communal architecture. Another way to identify a communal structure is by noting the absence of typical domestic features, such as hearths. Beyond these basic markers, additional characteristics define communal architecture. In this study, a structure qualifies as communal when it meets three interconnected criteria. First, there is a collective effort in construction and maintenance; these buildings required organization and coordination beyond a single household or nuclear family. Their size, complexity, and ongoing upkeep suggest they were created and maintained by a larger community, either at the settlement level or within a specific group. This collective activity already indicates social importance. Second, features indicating functions beyond household use include benches along interior walls, open central spaces, specific access points, and often symbolic or decorative elements like reliefs, statues, or altars. These features imply the spaces were designed for gatherings, rituals, performances, or activities involving the entire community. Their larger scale compared to standard houses emphasizes their role in accommodating groups rather than individual families. Whether their purpose was ritual, political, economic, or a mix, their architecture clearly marks them as non-domestic spaces. Third, their location and visibility within the settlement are crucial. These structures are often placed in central, prominent, or distinctive locations that set them apart from the surrounding homes. In some cases, they may have served as the physical and symbolic centers of the settlement, guiding daily routines, gatherings, and rituals. An example of this is The Plaza at Çayönü and the nearby communal structures. Overall, these criteria show that communal architecture is characterized not by a single purpose but by a combination of construction methods, design, and placement that reflect shared use and community significance.

Regional and local differences in communal buildings

Against this conceptual background, the study explored how communal structures differ across Southwest Asia and what might explain these differences. The evidence shows both broad regional trends and site-specific variations. Throughout the research area, communal structures

share common features: investments in construction beyond typical dwellings, especially during the PPNA, interior layouts designed for group activities, and separation from ordinary domestic space. However, these shared traits are expressed in different ways. At most sites, communal buildings are monumental and linked to a rich iconographic collection. At other sites, they are smaller in size and decoration, or more integrated into domestic architecture.

Local differences in construction techniques, building forms, and internal features probably reflect a mix of factors. The natural environment and ecological conditions affected the availability of building materials and the durability of structures, and local traditions likely influenced how communities conceptualized suitable communal spaces. Additionally, differences in symbolic repertoires—such as the motifs carved on pillars, the shapes of statues and figurines, or the treatment of animal and human imagery—indicate regionally distinct traditions of meaning and practice. Regarding imagery and iconography, the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys show similarities, despite architectural differences. These variations imply that, while communities shared some broad trends (e.g., the shift from circular to rectangular architecture), they expressed their ideas on communal architecture in locally specific ways.

Communal architecture, settlement patterns, and change through time

The study also briefly explored how communal architecture connects to other aspects of settlement organization and how these relationships change during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. Communal buildings do not stand alone; they are part of larger patterns of spatial layout, house types, and population dynamics. An important factor is the relative size and number of communal structures compared to the estimated population of a settlement. In some cases, a single large communal building seems to have served a sizable community, possibly hosting gatherings for the entire settlement. In other contexts, multiple communal structures coexisted, potentially indicating the presence of distinct groups, factions, kin networks, age groups, or rituals. Future research that systematically compares the size and capacity of communal buildings with population estimates will be important for understanding whether ‘communal’ use involved whole communities or mainly specific segments of society, such as elders or ritual specialists. This remains difficult for all sites discussed here because most have not been fully excavated, and at some sites, the focus has been on communal structures, as seen at Göbekli Tepe.

Historical processes of interaction and connectivity have contributed to both convergence and divergence in communal forms, as argued by Christopher Wilk (2004). Exchange networks, mobility, and inter-community contacts likely facilitated the spread of architectural ideas, symbolic motifs, and ritual practices. At the same time, communities may have intentionally emphasized local particularities in their communal buildings to assert distinct identities within broader networks of interaction. Regional similarities and local idiosyncrasies thus reflect the balance between shared trajectories and locally specific innovations.

Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research

If the next twenty years of excavation in the study area yield as many new sites and data as the previous twenty years, it will be valuable to revisit the proposed research questions and determine whether our understanding of communal architecture in relation to regionality has changed. In particular, discovering sites between the research areas used in this study would provide important new insights into the spread of communal architecture, local trends, or regional phenomena. Additional sites will deepen our overall understanding of the concept but will also likely reveal new site-specific or individual characteristics of buildings that warrant further detailed study. An interesting approach to the theme of regionality would be to compare the iconography displayed on pillars, statues, figurines, and other small objects to see if this indicates connections and, perhaps, shared beliefs and identities among communities within a region. Another intriguing study would be to assess whether there is a correlation between the number and size of communal structures in use at the same time and the settlement's expected population. This can provide valuable insights into how these structures were used; for example, by establishing correlations between the size and number of communal structures. If, for instance, large populations are associated with relatively small communal buildings, this might suggest that gatherings were limited to select groups rather than entire communities. Conversely, very large communal spaces relative to population size could imply large-scale assemblies or gatherings at a regional level.

Communal architecture shows that the emergence of the Neolithic in Southwest Asia at the start of the Holocene was a key moment in human history. The structures relate to many aspects of the communities that built and used them. Although much remains unknown about these structures, they can offer valuable insights into technological innovations, belief systems, social hierarchies, and connectivity.

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Appendix 1

Figure 3.1.1. Occupation of sites and structures discussed in Chapter 3 (figure by Christiaan Melis-

Appendix 2

Table 4.3.1. Datasheet of structures discussed within this chapter, containing the basic characteristics of individual structures as discussed in Chapter 3 (Table by Christiaan Melis-Langeveld, 2025).

Site	Structure	Phase	Period	Absolute Dates	Plan	(Semi) Subterranean	Dimmensions	Nr. Pillars	Style Pillars	Bench/Podium	Additional Comments
Nevalı Çori	Cult Building II	I-V	PPNB	–	Rectangular	No	c. 13.9 m x 13.5 m	13-15	T-shape	Yes	
Nevalı Çori	Cult Building III	I-V	PPNB	–	Rectangular	No	c. 12.1 m x 12.8 m	14	T-shape	Yes	
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure A	III-II	EPPNA-MPPNB	9.000 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø 10.5-8.5 m	6?	T-shape	Yes	*C14 date obtained from the fill of the structure
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure B	III-II	LPPNA-EPPNB	8.960 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 10 m	9-12	T-shape	No	*C14 date obtained from the fill of the structure
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure C	III-II	PPNA-MPPNB	8.430 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 12-30 m	12-13	T-shape	Yes	*C14 date obtained from the fill of the structure
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure D	III	EPPNA-?	9.675-9.314 cal BCE	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 20 m	13-15?	T-shape	No	
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure E	III/II/IV?	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø?	?	–	–	
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure F	IV? (III)	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 10 m	?	T-shape	No	
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure G	IV? (III)	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø?	?	T-shape	No	
Göbekli Tepe	Enclosure H	III-II	PPNA-EPPNB	8.680-8.520 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 10 m	8	T-shape	Yes	*1/3 C14 dates was obtained from the fill of the structure
Göbekli Tepe	Lions Pilar Building	II	(E)PPNB	–	Rectangular	Yes	?	8	T-shape	Yes	
Karahan Tepe	Structure AA	–	LPPNA-EPPNB	–	Trapezoidal, rounded corners	Yes	c. 8.5 m x 7m	–	–	Yes	
Karahan Tepe	Structure AB	–	LPPNA-EPPNB	–	Trapezoidal, rounded corners	Yes	c. 7 m x 6 m	11	Phallus-shape	No	
Karahan Tepe	Structure AC	–	LPPNA-EPPNB	–	Trapezoidal, rounded corners	Yes	Ø c. 5.5 m	?	?	?	
Karahan Tepe	Structure AD	–	LPPNA-EPPNB	–	Rectangular, rounded corners	Yes	Ø c. 23 m	?	T-shape	Yes	
Sayburç	Structure AA	–	LPPNA-MPPNB	c. 8.700-8.300 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 14 m	?	?	Yes	* C14 dates obtained from charcoal remains above floorlevels
Sayburç	Structure AB	–	LPPNA-MPPNB	c. 8.700-8.300 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	?	?	?	Yes	* C14 dates obtained from charcoal remains above floorlevels
Sayburç	Structure CB	–	LPPNA-MPPNB	c. 8.700-8.300 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	?	8	T-shape	Yes?	* C14 dates obtained from charcoal remains above floorlevels
Sayburç	Structure CD	–	LPPNA-MPPNB	c. 8.700-8.300 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	?	?	T-shape	?	* C14 dates obtained from charcoal remains above floorlevels
Sayburç	Structure DA	–	LPPNA-MPPNB	c. 8.700-8.300 cal BCE*	Semi-Circular	Yes	?	12?	T-shape	Yes	* C14 dates obtained from charcoal remains above floorlevels
Hallan Çemi	Structure A	Level 1	PPNA*	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 5-6 m	?	?	Yes	* See chapter 3 for chronology and absolute dating
Hallan Çemi	Structure B	Level 1	PPNA*	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 5-6 m	?	?	Yes	
Boncuklu Tarla	Building O11	VII-VIa	EPI-PPNA	10.370 cal BCE	Semi-Circular	Yes	c. 8.1 m x 8.7 m	8	Buttresses	No	
Boncuklu Tarla	Building O11	VIb	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	c. 8.1 m x 8.7 m	6	Buttresses	No	
Boncuklu Tarla	D15-GD1	VIa-Va	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 5.5 m	2	Limestone Blocks	?	
Boncuklu Tarla	D15-GD2	VIa-Va	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	c. 7.5 m x 7.0 m	4	Limestone Blocks	Yes	
Boncuklu Tarla	Building EA11	IVa/b	PPNA-PPNB	–	Rectangular	Yes	c. 8.5 m x 8.3 m	4-6	Limestone Monolith	No	
Boncuklu Tarla	Building 1.1	II-I	MPPNB-LPPNB	8.297-7.522 cal BCE	Rectangular	Yes	c. 15 m x 13 m	4	Limestone Monolith	No	
Boncuklu Tarla	Building 2.1	II-I	MPPNB	8.297-7.522 cal BCE	Rectangular	Yes	c. 7.6 m x 8.9 m	12?	Buttresses	Yes	
Boncuklu Tarla	Building 8	II-I	MPPNB	8.297-7.522 cal BCE	Rectangular	Yes	c. 8.5 m x 6.0 m	–	–	No	*The depth of the structure is difficult to measure due to erosion
Çayönü	Flagstone Building	G1-6	LPPNA-EPPNB	9.400-9.000 cal BCE	Rectangular	Yes	c. 10.7 m x ?*	32	Limestone Monolith	Yes?	Yes *no C14 dates are published, dates are based on relationships between structures
Çayönü	Bench Building	G5-6-CP1-3*	EPPNB-MPPNB*	9.000-8.600 cal BCE*	Rectangular	Yes	?	?	?	Yes	
Çayönü	Terrazzo Building	C1-C3a-b	LPPNB	8.600-8.300 cal BCE	Rectangular	Yes	c. 11.75 m x 9.0 m	8*	Buttresses	No	*Buttresses embedded into the walls, no freestanding pillars
Çayönü	Skull Building	G5-6-CP1-3	EPPNB-MPPNB	9.200-8.600 cal BCE	Rectangular	Yes	?*	?*	?*	Yes	*Dimmensions and data on pillars has not been stated clearly.
Gre Fila	K41.3	V	PPNA	–	Semi-Circular	Yes	Ø c. 16 m	12?	?	No	
Gre Fila	K7.1	IV	PPNB	8.800-7.500 cal BCE	Rectangular, rounded corners	Yes	76 m2	4	Limestone Blocks	No	
Gre Fila	K8.2	IV	PPNB	8.800-7.500 cal BCE	Rectangular, rounded corners	Yes	?	?	Limestone Blocks	No	
Gre Fila	K15.1	IV	PPNB	8.800-7.500 cal BCE	Rectangular, rounded corners	Yes	?	4	Limestone Blocks	Yes	
Gre Fila	K8.4	IV	PPNB	8.800-7.500 cal BCE	Rectangular, rounded corners	Yes	?	4	Limestone Blocks	No	
Gre Fila	G8.3	IV	PPNB	8.800-7.500 cal BCE	Rectangular, rounded corners	Yes	55 m2	4	Limestone Blocks	No	

SUMMARY

This study examines communal architecture in Southwest Asia during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic and explores how local and regional differences in these non-domestic structures can be explained. The main research question addresses how to account for regional and local variation in communal architecture, supported by three sub-questions: what defines communal architecture as 'communal'; what differences exist between communal buildings in the study area; and how these structures relate to broader settlement patterns and how that relationship evolves over time. Focusing on sites in the Middle Euphrates and Upper Tigris River Valleys (with special attention to: Göbekli Tepe, Nevalı Çori, Karahan Tepe, Sayburç, Sefer Tepe, Hallan Çemi, Boncuklu Tarla, Çayönü, and Gre Fılla), the thesis uses excavation reports and secondary literature to develop a typology based on plan (semicircular versus rectangular), internal features (pillars, buttresses, benches, altars, niches), construction materials (earth and stone), and evidence for rebuilding, reuse, and the deliberate burial or burning of structures when abandonned.

The study suggests that a structure can be considered communal when its construction and maintenance require coordinated effort beyond a single household; when its internal layout, size, and features suggest functions that extend beyond domestic use (e.g., gatherings, rituals, collective storage, performances); and when its location and visibility within the settlement distinguish it from ordinary dwellings. Over time, the study reveals a broad shift from early semi-subterranean, mostly circular or oval communal buildings in the Late Epipaleolithic and PPNA to increasing use of rectangular plans, especially in the PPNB, with many local characteristics and transitional forms. Many structures exhibit a so-called 'lifecycle' of construction, modification, and final closure through filling or burning. Regionally, the Middle Euphrates River Valley is characterized by semi-subterranean circular enclosures and, later, rectangular cult buildings featuring T-shaped monolithic pillars, terrazzo or smoothed bedrock floors, and richly detailed animal reliefs. At the same time, the Upper Tigris River Valley displays a more diverse array of communal structures, including stacked-stone pillars or buttresses, four-pillar rectangular plans, benches, stelae, and altars, but no T-shaped monoliths serving as pillars.

Despite these differences, both regions also share core principles: the use of stone for monumental, often semi-subterranean structures; benches and roof-supporting pillars; carefully prepared floors; and close connections between communal architecture and symbolic imagery. Drawing on Richard Wilk's concept of 'common difference', the study concludes that these buildings reflect both shared supra-regional idioms and locally specific traditions. Communal architecture thus emerges as a flexible category of community-centered structures whose variation mirrors environmental conditions, material availability, local building traditions, and different ways of materializing shared beliefs and social relations during the Epipaleolithic-Neolithic transformation in West Asia.