

## THE BURIALS IN ÖKÜZINI CAVE (SW ANATOLIA)

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*Abstract: The burials in Öküzini Cave yield important information concerning the burial practices of either the Late Neolithic or Early Chalcolithic periods. The age determination is indicated by a few pottery fragments. Radiocarbon dates of the burials themselves are as yet unavailable. No other graveyards have been discovered in any of the numerous Mount Katran caves. In addition, Neolithic and/or Chalcolithic open-air sites, such as small mounds, have not been located in the Antalya Travertine Plain. These burials are therefore the first evidence for ceremonial activities of people of either Late Neolithic or Chalcolithic age. The presence of such archaeological remains poses important questions concerning cultural connections between the Travertine Plain of Antalya, Mount Katran's caves and the Central Anatolian Plateau.*

### INTRODUCTION

Until recently, a large number of studies have focused on Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements, burials and graveyards in Anatolia, but the Antalya Region with its numerous caves remained unknown due to rare investigations of these periods. Fortunately, new excavations at Öküzini Cave have yielded a burial ground dating to the Neolithic and/or Chalcolithic period. Charcoal samples from the uppermost layers produced radiocarbon dates ranging from 9650±50 BP and 7880±80 BP (Yalçinkaya 1995:568).

### 1. BURIALS AND GRAVE STRUCTURES

We discovered five graves in the uppermost layers which are located on the east side of the cave (Fig. 1). The burials are generally paved with limestone blocks (Table 1). The size of these limestone blocks vary between 25 cm and 60 cm in length, and between 10 cm and 40 cm in width. Thickness is approximately between 10 cm and 30-35 cm. Smaller stones were also used to pave the burials.

It is notable that Grave II exhibits very clear structural arrangement (Fig. 2). Medium sized stones were fixed onto the larger surrounding base stones. This arrangement created a short wall-like structure around the burial. However, during excavation, we found some of these stone elements both inside and outside the perimeter of the grave, indicating that this wall-like structure seems to have been more or less damaged. This could be due both to natural phenomena and human activities. Interestingly, there are stone slabs at the base of this grave.

In particular, the largest stone slab has been placed under the skull. The inside diameters of this grave are 110 cm to 60 cm and outside diameters are 155 cm to 110 cm (including the stones). The shape of this grave is thus quite elliptic.

We may also say that the other graves exhibit clear structural arrangement as well. Moreover, in spite of their adjacent positions, it seems that there was no destruction of the grave structures when the inhabitants of Öküzini prepared a grave next to previous ones.

Grave V is close to the recent entrance of the cave and far from the other graves. Like the others, it has been paved with stones, and some paving-like stones were found at one side of it. The other side of the grave may have been disturbed by soil erosion towards the large, previously excavated pit (Kökten's excavations), because no paving stones were found (Fig. 2). There are two important observations to make concerning Grave V. First, just after recovery of this grave, we were faced with the half skeleton which was lying on stone slabs as seen in Grave II. Second, there were some sporadic human bones that do not belong to this half skeleton, based on bone identification. This may be evidence of another burial in the same grave. It appears that it is no longer possible to find the rest of the remains of this second burial, due to disturbance and movement by soil erosion, as mentioned above.

In Grave IV, it is interesting that only a single human phalanx was found. However, human foot bones were found next to the outer part of this grave although we have still some doubts as to whether they belong to Grave IV or not. The grave seems to have been covered by stone slabs. During the 1996 excavation season, we removed these upper stone slabs and we found that there were two more flat stones in the grave ground (Fig. 2). We think that these latter stones were probably the base stones of the burial. Surrounding stones of this grave are comparatively much bigger than the others, but both ends were paved longitudinally with small angular stones. There were also many sporadic stones around the grave. According to our observations, the inference is that this grave had been reopened by the people. We do not have any idea about when this could have occurred and it is also difficult to understand exactly what the exact aim was for doing so.

## 2. SKELETONS AND BURIAL POSITIONS

Skeletal remains were generally broken due to trampling. In addition, the effects of different weather conditions, such as the alteration of humidity and water activities and/or dryness in a year, played a major role in the deterioration of the bones. The best preservation is seen on the limb bones among all the skeletons, though they are also fragmentary. In addition to the limb bones, compact bones such as foot and hand bones are complete and the least damaged. The crania, vertebral columns, pelvis and ribs are mostly fragmentary.

The skeletons are oriented more or less on a north-northeast and south-southwest axis (Fig. 2). The skulls have been oriented to the south-southwest in the graves. Graves II and III faced towards the east wall of the cave, but Grave I faced towards the inside of the cave and Grave V faced towards the cave's roof (Fig. 2, Table 1).

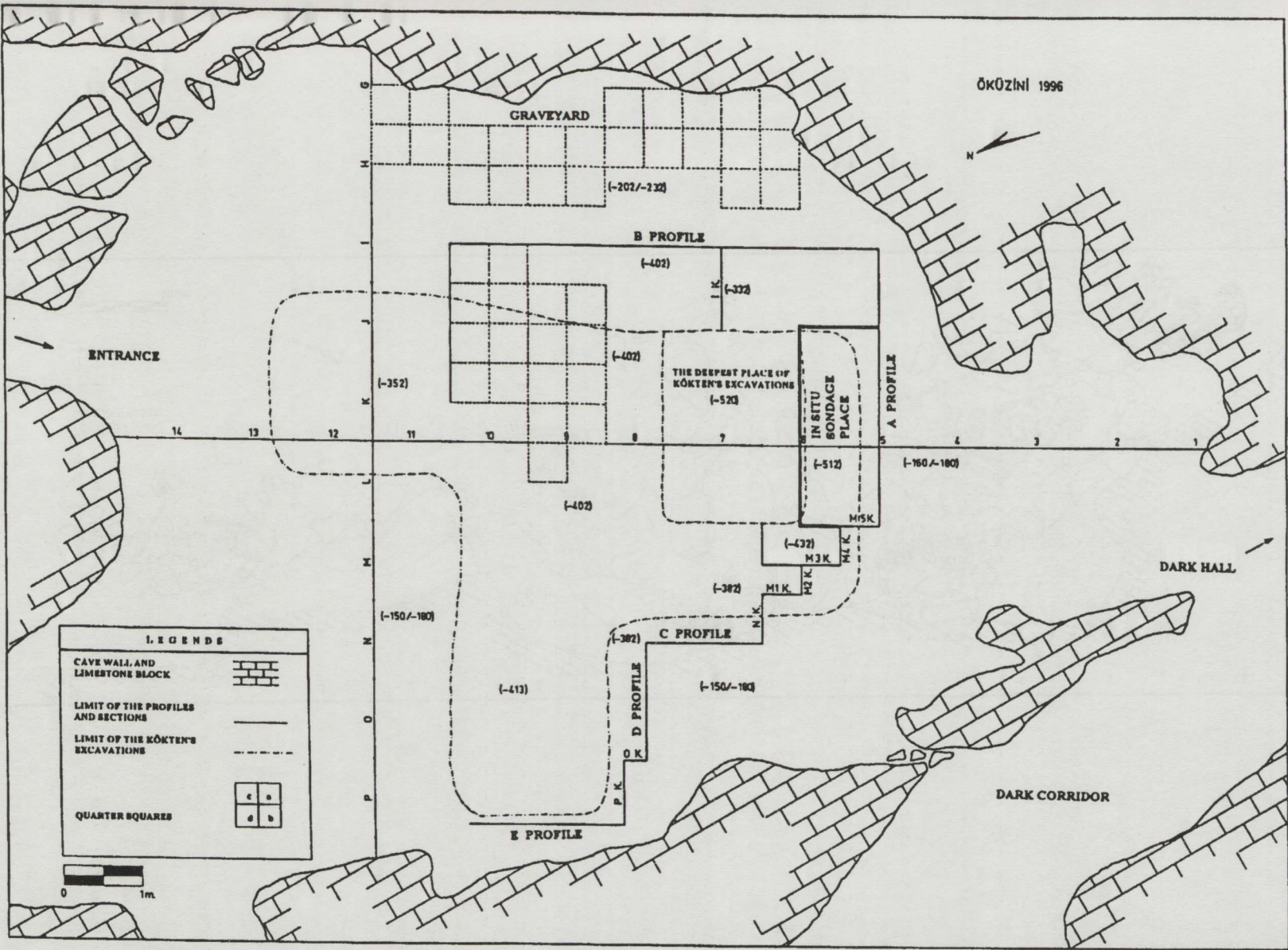


Fig. 1. The recent plan of Öküzini Cave; numbers (e.g., -402) show centimeters below datum.

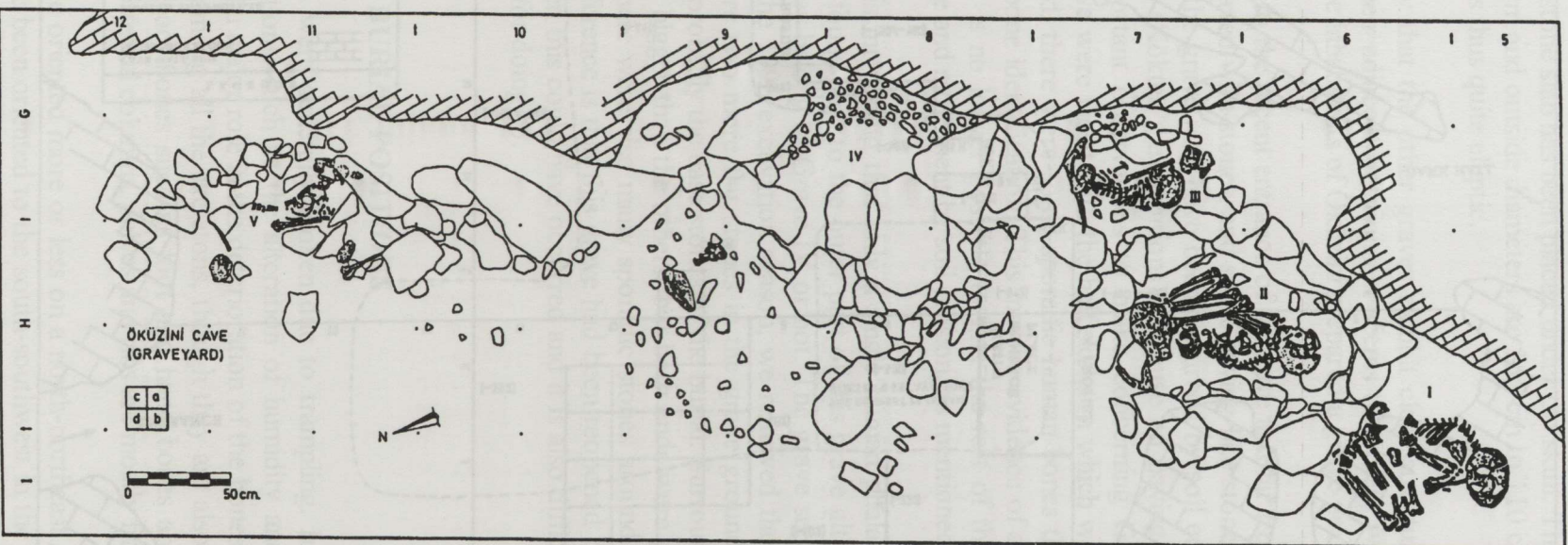


Fig. 2. The graveyard in Öküzini Cave, showing burials, grave gifts, and grave structures.

Graves I and II were clearly buried in hocker position. For Grave III, its back bones were in curved position, which we consider could be evidence for hocker position as well. As far as we know, the hocker position is one of the common burial customs in Anatolia during Protohistoric times. However, the limb bones of Grave III were moved for unknown reason while in the grave, and it is better not to make unfounded inferences about its original position.

The position of the skeleton in Grave V is dorsal (Fig. 2). Its arm bones were lying on the both sides of the individual, but as we mentioned above, it was not a complete skeleton. Its pelvis, leg bones and foot bones were not found in the grave. We should note that there is no evidence of any other pit-like structure around the grave. Its anthropological study is not yet finished and we prefer to make no further comment on it at this point.

In addition to these recent excavated graves, Kökten discovered a human skeleton in the underlying layers of the Chalcolithic stratum in the cave (Kökten 1959:13). According to him, this was a Neolithic burial. As he described in his publication, the skeleton is oriented east-west, the position of the skeleton is hocker, and only the skull was paved with stones. Despite these data, we have little information about the exact location of this burial within the cave. This skeleton was studied by Ord. Prof. Dr. Muzaffer Şenyürek. According to him, the morphological features of this skeleton show that it was a female and age at death was about 22-25 years (Şenyürek, 1958: 492).

Burial	Orientation	Paved	Position	Face Direction	Findings	Covered by
I	N-NE/S-SW	R +	Hocker	To the cave's hall	P, B	S
II	N-NE/S-SW	+	Hocker	To the cave's wall	P, B, A	S
III	N-NE/S-SW	+	Hocker (?)	To the cave's wall	P, B, Q	S
IV	?	+	?	?	B	S, FS
V	N/S	+ (?)	Dorsal	To the cave's roof	P, B, A	S

Paved: + Paved with stone; R Rarely  
 Findings: P Pottery; B Bead; A Acorn; Q Quern  
 Covered by: S Soil; FS Flat stone

Table 1. The burials of Öküzini Cave.

### 3. FINDINGS

These are generally pottery findings (all of them fragmented), polished axes and their fragments, simple quern fragments, bone awls, grinding stones, beads and some chipped radiolarite pieces. Most of these findings were obtained from the uppermost sediments, but some were found in the graves as well (Table 1).

### 3.1. POTTERY

We have not yet found any whole pottery from the cave. We found very similar pots in Graves I and V; these are also the least damaged. These pots are small and light brown in color. Their sections are thinner than 1 cm and approximate diameters are 10 cm. Height is approximately 8 cm. Their surfaces are lightly curved (convex) in shape and the bases are flat. It is possible to see a few very small limestone fragments and also straw traces used as temper in the clay. We may say that these pots were made by hand. The other pottery pieces are very fragmented and we would prefer not to draw conclusions about their forms yet. These findings relatively show features of Late Neolithic and/or Early Chalcolithic periods. According to James Mellaart, the pots of Öküzini Cave resembling those of the Kızılkaya Neolithic (south-western Anatolia). The distribution of the Kızılkaya Neolithic includes a number of sites on either side of the Taurus Mountains north and west of classical Pamphylia (Mellaart 1961:166, 169).

We should also note that we found some pottery and brick fragments of the Early Roman period from the uppermost levels which were overlying the Protohistoric grave sediments.

### 3.2. QUERNS

All the quern findings were fragmentary. They were found in the uppermost sediments, but one was found with the pottery gift in Grave III (Table 1). They were generally made out of sandstone. Upper faces are concave, but bases are generally flat and/or convex.

### 3.3. OTHER FINDINGS

We may note that beads and bone awls are other essential finding elements in the graves. Beads particularly were sporadically found in all of the graves. They were made on radiolarite or sea shells and land snails. It is also remarkable that the findings from Grave II exhibit an interesting burial custom. Here we found carbonized acorn pieces which were covered by broken pottery fragments (Table 1). These conjoining pottery fragments might have been broken by pressure in the grave.

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