



*Fig. 22. Bone fishhook (RN 160365), phase 4, Wadi Hammeh 27.*

The third of three planned fieldwork seasons for La Trobe University's "Ice Age Villagers of the Levant: sedentism and social connections in the Natufian period" project took place in November and December 2016. The research involved renewed excavations at the Early Natufian site of Wadi Hammeh 27 (Edwards 2013), dated to ca. 12,000–12,500 calBC, together with an associated program of scientific survey and sampling along the Jordan Valley. Reasoning that the accessible lower deposits of Wadi Hammeh 27 constitute one of the most important resources at our disposal for evaluating the establishment of settled village life in the southern Levant, the current project has aimed to expose significantly more expanses of the site's basal deposits than had the original 1980s investigations.

The site comprises four constructional phases, of which the upper phase 1 was the only one originally to undergo broad clearance. The new operations were positioned under the part of Structure 1 (phase 1) located in "plot XX F". In 2014 (the first season), excavations reached the phase 2 floor, revealing a series of circles, platforms and other constructed stone features. In 2015 (the second season), a new house was discovered in the underlying phase 3 (upper). This ran inside the line of the overlying Structure 1 but was about half its size and was oriented with a northward facing entrance rather than the westward-facing one of Structure 1. In 2016 (the third season), the basal floor of Structure 3 was revealed (lower phase 3).

Proceeding deeper again, the phase 4 deposits were cleared to the natural limestone substrate. It emerged that the area inside the arc of Structure 3's wall was studded with burial pits, so that it appears that the house was founded to commemorate these foundational burials. Outside (to the north) of the Structure 3 perimeter wall, a complex stone feature (feature 20 = F.20) appeared to mark the internal burials inside the house, reminiscent of the way that the stone-covered pit, F.16, was

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found to mark the adjacent F.8 burial in the 1980s excavation of the 'XX F sondage'. Feature 20 was the fourth of a series of superimposed platforms which, along with a number of stone circles and other features on the exterior surface, were rebuilt through the entire lifetime of the settlement across some 500 years. Feature 20 had a large posthole in its center, and its capstones covered a deep pit filled with material (also like F.16). Three pits under Structure 3 yielded evidence of human inhumations. The major find was a burial (feature 29) containing two primary child inhumations: Homo 9, found overlying Homo 10. Human remains were also discovered in two other pits (F.32 and F. 35). The individual in feature 32 was laid to rest with a remarkable cache of long, gracile bone points, of a type not previously found at the site (Fig. 23).

Two other finds from the 2016 season stand out for their exclusivity. The first is a bone fishhook (RN 160278; Fig. 22) from phase 4. It is the first one found at Wadi Hammeh 27, in a bone artifact assemblage numbering over 550 specimens, and where fish remains do not occur. The second piece (RN 160420), an unfinished basaltic vessel, is interesting from a technological point of view. Amongst an assemblage of over 300 basaltic artifacts, it has provided the first sign that basaltic artifacts were made on-site at Wadi Hammeh 27 and not always imported as finished pieces.

#### REFERENCE:

Edwards, P.C. (ed.). 2013. *Wadi Hammeh 27: an Early Natufian settlement at Pella in Jordan*. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East, Vol. 59. Leiden: Brill.

Fig. 23. Elongate bone point (RN 160365) from the Feature 32 burial pit (Phase 4, Wadi Hammeh 27)

