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Gone with the wind? Research on abandonment processes as part of Neolithic ways of life in Göbekli Tepe

While most archaeological research is focused on the reasons for starting cultural activities (such as building a house, setting up a settlement, starting to produce a groundstone), my PhD project “Neolithic ways of life” is concerned with the end of settlements. Within the framework of the study fields Landscape Archaeology and Archaeology of Abandonment, I analyse the processes of abandonment at the PPN A+B hill site Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Anatolia. With the slow advent of agriculture and animal husbandry during the Neolithization, the site was abandoned at the end of the 9th millennium BCE.

The site is famous for its large circular structures which are equipped with monolithic T-shaped pillars that were built by groups who lived from foraging. Far less is known about Göbekli Tepe as a settlement, nine hectares densely covered with round and rectangular buildings with sets of domestic activities of daily life.

My research focuses on architectural analysis such as re-modelling and re-use of buildings, a detailed study of the room fills in combination with the development of a systematic sampling strategy, to examine continuities and discontinuities of abandonment practices in Göbekli Tepe.

In my presentation, I will stress the importance of abandonment studies in archaeology and give methodological examples for how I identify abandonment in the archaeological record. The importance of small-scale excavations cannot be overestimated in this context. Furthermore, I will provide insights into my dissertation project, my fieldwork at Göbekli Tepe and first preliminary results.

The talk has the aim to discuss the potential of small-scale or micro-archaeology and its contribution to questions concerning the end of habitations and whole settlements. By examining these processes in detail, the diversity of and the (in-)stability in settlement practices can be reconstructed, refining our understanding of past societies.