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Nahal Ein Gev II, Israel

Post Sockets – Investigating an Architectural Feature in Time and Space

Research Conducted 2020 to 2023

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to outline an innovation in roofing techniques, which sees its origin in the Late Natufian culture of the southern Levant. We highlight the architectural element, post-sockets, and trace their development throughout the Pre-Pottery Neolithic.

KEYWORDS

Neolithization, Natufian architecture, roofing technologies

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Beitrag wird eine Innovation in der Dachbautechnik vorgestellt, die ihren Ursprung in der spätnatufischen Kultur der südlichen Levante hat. Im Mittelpunkt steht hierbei der Pfostensockel als architektonisches Element, dessen Entwicklung während des gesamten präkeramischen Neolithikums nachgezeichnet wird.

SCHLAGWÖRTER

Neolithisierung, Natufische Architektur, Dachbautechniken

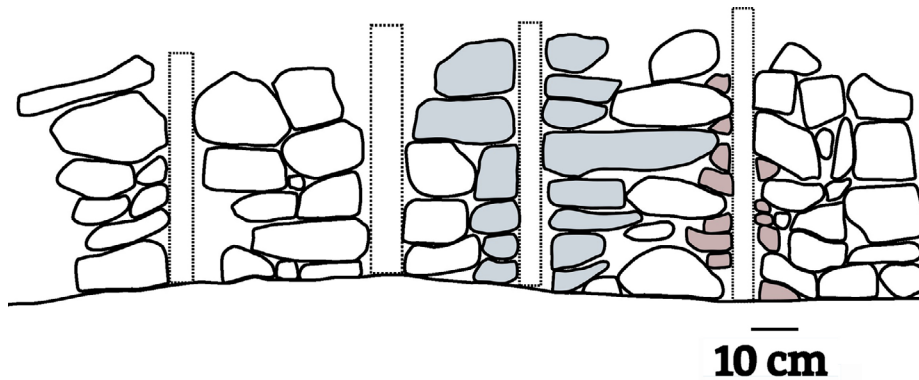


Fig. 1: Schematic illustrations of post sockets; in blue, building the features with large stones, in pink, building and maintaining the gaps with small stones

Introduction

1 The transformative period of the Natufian culture throughout the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN) is termed as ›Neolithization processes‹ and sees gradual yet drastic changes in all aspects of life. One of the major changes throughout this time frame is the emergence and elaboration of stone-built architecture, first seen in the early Natufian, with large curvilinear structures¹. These structures diminish in size in the late Natufian in the Mediterranean zone², while the Jordan valley sites show a different trajectory³. By the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB), large villages with complex rectilinear constructions appear well-established⁴. Alongside general changes in form and size, one can also observe changes in specific architectural elements and innovations in architectural knowledge and capabilities. Here we aim to spotlight and define one such architectural innovation – post-sockets – a structural feature which became widespread in the PPN in the [Levant](#). We report an early appearance of post-sockets in the later phases of the Natufian culture in the Jordan Valley. We compare this early architectural feature to similar features in the PPN and discuss its function and meaning.

2 Post-sockets are gaps or troughs created in stone walls, often constructed in regular intervals along the circumference of the wall. They are constructed with medium-to-large stones, the edges of which are aligned to form a straight line, or with smaller stones and wedges used to create a uniform edge (Fig. 1). They most likely held organic elements such as wooden posts, which supported the walls and likely played a role in the erection and stability of the roofing system. In isolated cases, collapsed and burnt wooden beams were recovered within the structures, demonstrating their function as placements for posts made of organic materials⁵.

3 Post-sockets as regular architectural features in construction are observed in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) of the [northern Levant](#), and in the PPNB of [Jordan](#) (see below). They have been referred to in the literature mostly descrip-

1 Edwards 2013; Weinstein-Evron 2013.

2 Henry – Leroi-Gourhan 1976; Valla et al., 2017.

3 Grosman et al. 2016, 28.

4 Banning – Byrd 1987; Gebel et al. 2006.

5 Stordeur 2015, 96.

Name	Building	Wall	Grid location	Width	Height	Figure
Post-Socket 1	Building 5	Wall 21	RR40a,c	20 cm	ca. 25 cm	Fig. 3
Post-Socket 2	Building 5	Wall 21	RP40c, RQ40a	20 cm	ca. 55 cm	Fig. 3
Post-Socket 3	Building 7	Wall 36	RC45	10 cm	ca. 30 cm	Fig. 4

Fig. 2: List of post-sockets found at NEG II and their contexts

tively, as »a circle of posts, supporting the wall«⁶, as regularly placed supports or reinforcements for stone walls⁷. They have been referred to as »wall channels«⁸ and »post-sockets«⁹. The latter terminology seems to be most appropriate, as it is in line with the commonly used »post-holes«, and thus we choose to use it for the remainder of this study.

Nahal Ein Gev II

4 Post-sockets have been recently identified at the Late Natufian site of Nahal Ein Gev II (NEG II, ca. 12,000 cal BP¹⁰), and currently constitute the earliest known example of this architectural feature. NEG II is situated in the upper Jordan Valley. The site is set on a large terrace, ca. 2 km to the east of the [Sea of Galilee](#), at the foothills of the Golan Heights. The size of the settlement and the depth of the archaeological deposits are currently unprecedented in Natufian research, with more than 1,5 m of accumulation, all belonging to the same cultural entity. Some ten structures were recognised and excavated at the site, with several more detected with ground penetrating surveys.

5 Three post-sockets have been identified in two structures (Fig. 2): Building 5 and Building 7. These, so far, are the deepest and most extensive excavation areas achieved at the site, which may explain the identification of the post-sockets in these particular structures.

6 Both post-sockets in Building 5 are located in the northern segment of Wall 21, a monumental, highly invested construction (see below). Building 5 is thus far the larger known construction at NEG II, measuring over 8 m in diameter. It is an open structure, set on a steep slope and facing the wadi below. The masonry of the structure is built of a mixture of limestone and basalt blocks of large and medium size, with smaller wedge stones inset between¹¹. The structure consists of

6 Hermansen et al. 2006, 5.
7 Stordeur et al. 2000, 33. 37; Yartah 2004, 144.
8 Kinzel 2004, 30.
9 Makarewicz – Finlayson 2018, 8.
10 Grosman et al. 2016.
11 Shor – Grosman 2020, 83.



Fig. 3: Post-socket 1 (right), post-socket 2 (left) in Building 5



Fig. 4: Post-socket 3 and its location in Wall 34

an inner and outer wall: The outer wall (W22) is made of rough, undressed stones, set in a disorderly manner, and likely functioned as a retaining wall, stabilising the slope (Fig. 3). The interior wall (W21) is built of mostly large limestone blocks, likely shaped, with medium and small stones which fill in the gaps. The careful selection and manipulation of limestone blocks and their neat, aesthetic layout strongly suggest that the face of the wall was visible during the use of the structure.

7 Post-socket 1 is located at the very edge of the structure, and as such, suffered post-depositional damage from collapses. Thus, the shaping or maintenance of the straight line of the wall bordering the post socket is not too well defined. Nevertheless, on the western side, two courses with stone blocks that create a straight edge are preserved, but the upper stone seems to have been displaced due to pressure from the collapse of the upper courses or the wall behind. On the eastern face, two medium and small stones are stacked against a large basalt boulder, creating a semi-straight edge (see Fig. 3).

8 Post-socket 2 is placed further within the wall, ca. 1 m away from post-socket 1, and as such is better preserved. On the eastern side, three large limestone blocks are placed so that they create a straight vertical line facing the gap. Some smaller stones are wedged in between to maintain the shape of the boundary and strengthen the masonry structure (see Fig. 3). On the western side, smaller stones were pushed alongside a large flat limestone block to create a straight line. The upper courses are not preserved due to collapses.

9 The two post-sockets described above, at the edge of the structure, are the only such features known in the structure. Unfortunately, the wall at the opposite side of the structure, to the south, was not preserved due to post-depositional erosion of the slope.

10 Post-socket 3 is embedded in the northern wall (Wall 34) of Building 7. Building 7 is a large ›bottle-shaped‹ structure (Fig. 4), built of rubblestone masonry, with a mixture of limestone and basalt blocks of large and medium sizes, with earth base fill in between the stones, and wedge stones inset within¹². The structure is located on the terrace adjacent to the slope and is dug ca. 1.30 m into the sub-surface. Like Building 5 and many other structures at the site, Building 7 also

12 Shor – Grosman 2020, Fig. 4.



Fig. 5: Post-sockets from the PPNA. Wadi Faynan 16, O75

features double walls, though due to the depth of the structure, the outer wall has only been defined in a limited segment. The inner walls of Building 7 (Wall 20 in the south and east, Wall 34 in the north) have straight, flat surfaces, similar to the observation made in Building 5 and other structures at the site¹³. The post-socket is located in the northwestern area of the structure, on the boundary of what is currently understood as the entrance to the building. The feature is comprised of medium stones measuring under 15 cm, and small stones, which are easily differentiated from the larger stones of the wall. The feature is currently exposed to a height of ca. 30 cm, and each side of the feature has 5–6 stones which line up to create a straight line. The stones on the eastern side are smaller, more uniform in size and placed closer together, while on the western side, the stones are larger and less dense in arrangement (see Fig. 4).

Parallels for Post-sockets

¹¹ The post-sockets in NEG II are a unique architectural feature for which there are currently no known parallels within the Natufian culture. A similarity in concept might be seen in Structure 131 at the early Natufian in Eynan. Here, a series of post-holes are seen lined up at a short distance from the wall of the structure, though not embedded within. While interpretations of this structure are complex and debated¹⁴, the line of post-holes may show a movement of roof supports nearer to the walls and not centred in the structure.

¹² Another parallel in concept, but built in different building materials, is found in Structure O75 at [Wadi Faynan 16](#) in Jordan, which shows some of the earliest (ca. 11,800–10,200 cal BP¹⁵) evidence for wooden posts incorporated into the fabric of the structure (Fig. 5). Structure O75 is built of pisé, compacted or rammed earth, unlike the use of stone for construction, as in NEG II and the other PPN examples described below. Thus, these pisé walls do not feature the carefully built post sockets; instead, the massive posts are ›molded‹ into the fabric of the

¹³ Grosman et al. 2016, 5–11.

¹⁴ Haklay – Gopher 2015; Valla 1988.

¹⁵ Mithen et al. 2018.



Fig. 6: Post-sockets from the PPNA. Jerf el-Ahmar, EA30



Fig. 7: Post-sockets from the PPNA. Jerf el-Ahmar, EA53

walls. Additionally, there are multiple shallow post-holes in specific areas of the structure's interior, which are seen as additional supports for an elaborate roofing system¹⁶.

13 The earliest evidence of post-sockets as built architectural features, which we can compare to NEG II features, are found at the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) site of [Jerf el-Ahmar](#) (ca. 11,500–10,700 cal BP¹⁷) in the Euphrates Valley. Structures EA7, EA30 and EA53 of the early and late PPNA, respectively, both have deep retaining stone walls, reinforced with wooden posts, set very close together and at regular intervals¹⁸. In EA30, the interior space of the structure is subdivided by radiating cells built of stone and two elevated benches (Fig. 6)¹⁹. The structures are interpreted as communal in character, and probably multi-functional, including collective storage, meetings and perhaps rituals. In the later structure EA53, the interior space is not subdivided, and a meter-wide bench adjacent to the wall surrounds the entire interior of the structure, forming an equilateral hexagon (Fig. 7). At each angle of the hexagon, there is a post-socket to set a wooden post. Within the deep retaining wall, there are some 30 elongated post-sockets for wooden posts, which are more numerous and spaced closer together than EA30, and cover the entire circumference of the structure²⁰. This structure is also understood as having a communal function, possibly serving as a place for meetings and/or rituals. The long post sockets at the Jerf el-Ahmar communal structures are understood as places for wooden posts for carrying the roof, some of which were preserved *in situ* due to intense burning. Structures following near-identical plans are found in Structure 47 at [Mureybet](#)²¹, and in Structure B2 in Tel 'Abr 3²². While these structures are not as well preserved as their counterparts in Jerf el-Ahmar, it is evident that similar post sockets are placed within the deep retaining walls in Mureybet. Additionally, in Structure B2 in Tel 'Abr 3, there are wooden posts in the

16 Mithen, 2020, 6.

17 Stordeur et al. 2015.

18 Stordeur et al. 2000, 32, 37.

19 Stordeur et al. 2000, 32.

20 Stordeur 2015, 82; Stordeur 2000, 3.

21 Cauvin 1979, 28–30; Ibáñez 2008, 66; Stordeur et al. 2000, 36.

22 Yartah 2013, 122–133; Yartah 2004, 144.



Fig. 8: Post-sockets from the PPNA. Göbekli Tepe, Enclosure D in the foreground

bench that surrounds the structure, yet due to preservation and the extent of the excavations, it is unclear if there are post-sockets embedded within the walls²³.

14 In the northern Levantine PPNA, it is also worth mentioning the T-shaped pillar phenomenon, which is most well-known from [Göbekli Tepe](#) (Fig. 8)²⁴, but certainly not restricted there. These pillars, dated to the PPNA and early and middle PPNB, are embedded in the walls of the large enclosures and are also understood as having a structural purpose for supporting the roofs²⁵, as well as a symbolic one. The T-shaped pillars of Göbekli Tepe are set within the thick walls of the structures, relatively evenly spaced, alongside two larger central pillars in the centre of the structures. Some of the structures have two sets of walls, which are understood by the excavators as renovations in different phases, and in several of these cases, both inner and outer walls have T-shaped pillars embedded within. At least two rectilinear structures outside of the central area of the ›special‹ buildings have at least one T-shaped pillar.

15 Post-sockets are also found in structures belonging to the Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (MPPNB) in southern Jordan, where this architectural feature becomes a more frequent phenomenon, appearing in both ›domestic‹ structures as well as in ›special‹ and communal structures. In the early MPPNB levels in [Beidha](#), at least eleven of the curvilinear ›domestic‹ structures exhibit post-sockets for timber supports set within the stone walls, surrounding the interior circumference of the structures, and less than half of the structures with post-sockets also have a central post-hole (Fig. 9 and 10)²⁶. No post-sockets are found in the later, more rectilinear structures, and only isolated cases present a central post-hole. The number of recovered post-sockets varies greatly (2–34 socket features per structure), likely due to differing levels of preservation. Building 37 (see Fig. 9), a large, well-built, communal structure uncovered in the early MPPNB layers in Beidha, features thirty-four post sockets set at ca. 50–100 cm apart, surrounding the structure. Two substantial post-holes were also found in the centre of the structure²⁷.

23 Yartah 2004, 144–145. Fig. 9.

24 Caletti 2020, 103. 123; Çelik 2015; Schmidt 2011, 41–42.

25 Kurapkat 2012, 162.

26 Byrd 2005, 43–51; Kirkbride 1966, 21.

27 Makarewicz – Finlayson 2018, 10.



Fig. 9: Post-sockets from the MPPNB in the southern Levant. Beidha, Building 37



Fig. 10: Post-sockets from the MPPNB in the southern Levant. Beidha, Building 18 and 48

16 Similar patterns of walls with multiple post-sockets for timber posts appear in fourteen of the MPPNB structures at Shkārat Msaied (ca. 10,250–9,950 cal BP) (Fig. 11 and 12). The structures have between 6–20 post-sockets, depending on the size of the structure, its preservation and subsequent modifications during later building activities. The spacing between the sockets is relatively regular in each individual structure, and does not seem to exceed 1 m. In many of the structures at Shkārat Msaied, post-sockets circle the interior circumference, with a central post hole in the middle of the structures. The post-sockets appear in what are termed ›domestic‹ structures, as well as in several structures designated as ›special‹ buildings, or buildings with some architectural features which differ from the others, including a building used as a cemetery²⁸.

Discussion

17 After surveying parallel post-socket features throughout the Neolithic, we may observe that post-sockets become a more widespread method of roofing, and appear mostly, though not exclusively, in large curvilinear structures. These post-sockets act as reinforcements for sizable stone walls and likely aided in the erection and sturdiness of the roofing systems. Large structures, measuring over ca. 7 m in diameter, first appear in the Early Natufian²⁹, and become more prevalent throughout the ensuing Neolithic. The large, highly invested structures at NEG II are unique in the Late Natufian, which is usually characterized by smaller, more ephemeral structures³⁰. The emergence of large construction endeavours would have required many technological innovations, including new solutions for roofing their immense aperture.

18 We suggest that the post-sockets found at NEG II (Building 5, ca. 8 m and Building 7, ca. 7 m) are innovative precursors to the post-sockets of the Neolithic and, like them, served a functional purpose in supporting the roofing of these structures. The initiation of post-sockets in the Late Natufian and proliferation in

28 Hermansen et al. 2006, 5–6; Kinzel 2019.

29 Edwards 1991, 127.

30 Valla et al. 2010, 143.



Fig. 11: Post-sockets from the MPPNB in the southern Levant. Shkārat Msaied, Unit K



Fig. 12: Post-sockets from the MPPNB in the southern Levant. Shkārat Msaied, Unit J

the Neolithic is an intentional way to create more space within the structures. As mentioned above, the post-sockets appear almost exclusively in large, curvilinear structures. The presence of post-sockets, with an infrequency of postholes, or other kinds of intermediate supports within the structures, possibly reflects changes in the internal organisation of the structures and can be seen as a deliberate act of ›clearing up‹ space in the interior. At NEG II, this is particularly pertinent to Building 5 and the burial ground, which dominates the interior space of the structure. No post-holes were found in any part, and its interior is entirely made up of a highly invested burial ground. Wall 21 is directly related to the lime-plaster cover of the burials and is contemporaneous with it. Thus, we suggest that, rather than having postholes within the interior of the structure, the structural supports were placed within the walls, as a way to maximise space and not to interfere with or interrupt the extensive funerary activities. On the other hand, the post-socket in Building 7 is located near the entrance of the bottleneck structure and may have served as a means for connecting the narrow entrance to the main curvilinear roofing. In both structures, the post-sockets are integrated in the walls, and are a novel technological innovation, to create more space and to provide a solution for complex roofing.

19 Thus, we observe the earliest post-sockets at the 12,000-year-old village of NEG II, related to two large, complex structures, and follow similar architectural elements throughout the Levant in the ensuing Pre-Pottery Neolithic. The appearance of these innovative architectural elements at NEG II ties into many other aspects of material culture at the site, which seems to be »on the verge« of the Neolithic, in architecture, artistic manifestations, lithic technologies and more³¹.

31 Grosman et al. 2016, 25; Shaham – Grosman 2019, 138; Yashuv – Grosman 2022, 27.

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