

# **Idols of Clay? Early Chalcolithic production area of clay figurines in Southern Turkmenistan**

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## **Abstract**

The chalcolithic site of Yilginli-depe is located on the Kopet Dag piedmont in South Eastern Turkmenistan. Over the last 30 years of research it has yielded major discoveries providing valuable archaeological sources for the exploration of domestic and ritual space organisation of Early Village communities of Central Asia. To name a few: a stratigraphic sequence of six consecutively overlaying big shrines with painted floors (called “main rooms” by the researchers), wall-paintings, a big collection of chalcolithic anthropomorphic figurines, rich contexts with archaeological traces of ritual actions etc. During the last 4 field seasons (2014, 2015, 2018 and 2019) in the stratigraphic trench №3 was discovered a complex production area used for fabrication, drying and backing small clay figurines. It consists of spaces specifically intended for the modelling of raw clay artefacts, drying facilities involving usage of hot ashes and unique two-partite backing ovens with distinctive decorations of the façade (one of the ovens being preserved almost intact to the height of 1,0 m). In this paper the authors present the discovery over a vast background of small clay artefacts production techniques used in the region, including the neighboring Northern Iran and applying analogies from the Near East, looking for common cultural traits in the usage and production of clay figurines in the Early Villagers time.