

### **Çatalhöyük Excavations (1961-1965)**

In 1958, the Konya Plain was surveyed by Alan Hall, David French, and James Mellaart. When surface finds from the area around Çatalhöyük were analysed, it was with great surprise that they realised they dated back at least as far as items found at J. Garstang's Mersin excavations. Yet it was not until 1961, after work had been completed at Hacilar, that the resources were made available to excavate at Çatalhöyük. Archaeologists were, however, very eager to see whether work at this site could fill a crucial gap in the occupation sequence, as surface finds pointed to Early Neolithic occupation.

The first season was carried out between 17 May and 29 June 1961. Çatalhöyük proved to be the largest Neolithic site known in the Near East, at 32 acres, with an eastern and western mound. Work in 1961 focused on the eastern (Neolithic) mound, though two soundings were undertaken on the western mound. On the eastern mound, ten levels and approximately forty houses were uncovered. The rectilinear houses were constructed of mudbrick, made from clay and straw, and featured flat roofs. Architectural ornament was very common, as were red-painted posts within the houses. The dead were found buried beneath the floors, with no trend in where children were located, but with adults found systematically beneath the northeast corner of the house. The chipped and ground stone industries at Çatalhöyük impressed the team, as did the wall-paintings. The high level of cultural achievement that seemed evident during the Early Neolithic period surprised the team members, particularly as it appeared to be more developed than at the contemporary site at Mersin.

The second season was undertaken between 7 June and 14 August 1962, and excavation continued on the two areas explored the previous season. Beyond uncovering more wall-paintings and sculptures, the team also found evidence for the use of copper, textiles, and obsidian mirrors, and for a sophistication in weaving and other technical skills. There were also items (such as Mediterranean shells, leopard skins, flint, coal, and alabaster) that could only have been obtained from far-away locations.

In 1963 work continued between 10 June and 30 August. This season was preoccupied with investigating the transition from an aceramic culture to a ceramic one and exploring burial habits more closely. It was found that, unlike at other sites, the transition to pottery didn't occur at a point when the culture changed, but appeared simply as a technological development in its own right. Çatalhöyük's heavy employment of black obsidian for weapons and tools was also noted this season.

In 1964, the application to excavate at Çatalhöyük was refused by the Turkish Department of Antiquities. A full account of the circumstances surrounding the Turkish decision is given by Balter (2005, 43).

The final season of the early excavation occurred in 1965, between 19 July to 25 September, with Gurney replacing Mellaart as director. Though the excavated areas had been weathered during the year of inactivity, work continued and a large sounding was conducted. A room decorated with leopards was discovered. 80 burials were found, one of which was seated, and one of which displayed cowries in the eye-sockets. A courtyard and what was interpreted to be a residential area was found on the mound's south sides. Thirty new wall-paintings were uncovered, many depicting hunting or fishing scenes, and appeared to be more frequent in the site's lower levels. An issue arose with some of the workmen, who had been dealing in antiques, which terminated with the accused men and their friends voluntarily leaving the excavation.