

Catalhöyük Excavations

Between 1961 and 1965, the BIAA initiated work at what proved to be the unique site of Çatalhöyük. After nearly three decades of no work at all, excavation and survey work was resumed on a large scale in 1993 under the direction of Ian Hodder.

In 1993 the aim was to discover as much as possible about the Çatalhöyük site as a whole. Because work during the 1960s had only focused on about 4% of the site (a region on the east mound) not much had been learnt about other areas of the site, or the overall site plan. Between 1 and 30 September, a detailed topographic survey was undertaken, which showed the site to be made up of three mounds: a south, north, and east one. The east mound was surveyed and found to be smaller than originally claimed by Mellaart. Surface collection of artefacts was also undertaken, which involved first clearing vegetation from the selected areas, then sieving the soil; more historic sherds were found than had been expected, particularly towards the top of the south mound. Another initiative was undertaken in 1993: surface scraping of the mounds, by 10x10m grid squares. In this way, building plans quickly became clear, and two plans of Neolithic houses were discerned and planned. A magnetometer survey undertaken that season was helpful in showing the plans of burnt historic buildings on the south mound, and confirmed that this could be a helpful tool in the future. Some of the damaged excavation areas from the 1960s were cleaned and drawn. Finally, preliminary palaeoecological work was undertaken by a team who cored below the mound, showing it to be 20m high. They also identified sites where sedimentological work could be undertaken and pollen cores gathered in future seasons, in order to reconstruct environmental sequences from the early Holocene.

From 20 August to 20 September 1994 work recommenced at the site, with 40 people involved, including seven Turkish students. The aim was to employ a variety of methods to discover as much as possible before excavating. Surface contouring and grid laying, magnetometer surveillance, surface collection, surface scraping, and section cleaning were all effective in obtaining more information. Fieldwalking was undertaken, as was further palaeoecological work, which revealed a further 4m of occupation. Team members also visited Konya Museum and studied items there as a way of acquiring comparative information (for dating purposes, etc).

Similar activities continued in 1995. Both mounds were surveyed: a topographic survey was conducted on the west mound using GPS technology, and a magnetometer survey was carried out on the east mound. Surface scrapings revealed further buildings, graves, and even an oven inside one of the buildings. Two homes were selected for excavation, and some interesting finds were made – including a concentration of fish vertebrae, and a hearth. Samples were collected for chemical, lipid, and other types of analysis. Trenches from the 1960s were cleaned, with all walls drawn and photographed. Other projects undertaken in 1995 included conservation, video documentation, ethnoarchaeology in nearby villages, and a display for visitors.

1996 marked the first full season of excavation since the 1960s. Three main areas were opened. The first was a building on the east mound that featured a so-called 'shrine' building; its distance from the 'shrines' originally found in the 1960s points to a continuity in ritual, burial, and domestic functions across phases. The top part of the southern area of the east mound was also excavated, where the plan of the buildings appeared to match those found by Mellaart. The team also returned to the lower levels first excavated in the 1960s in an attempt to reach the lowest levels sampled. Other projects around the site included geomorphology, a regional survey, conservation work on preserving wall plasters and paintings, video documentation, ethnoarchaeology as related to

building construction, evaluation of human remains, soil chemistry and micromorphology, and geophysical prospection.

Excavation work at these sites was continued with the initiation of a two-month season on 1 August 1997. Over 100 people were involved in labour, excavation, analysis, and other projects. The building on the east mound was nearly entirely excavated, and over 50 burials were found beneath the platform. In the 'Mellaart area', a new building with plastered-over paintings was uncovered. Elsewhere, one of the teams began to excavate a large building with bull horns and red and black painted walls. A study focusing on the site's formation was also initiated.

In 1998 improvements were made to the site with the addition of more living accommodation space and a visitor centre. Excavations continued, with the discoveries of some ovens in the 'Mellaart area'. The west mound was excavated, and a collection of horned pot-stands was found in one of the buildings. The floors continued to be sampled, and patterns of variation and zones of household activity began to emerge as they did. Evidence in various parts of the building continued to confirm that many buildings within the site had been abandoned carefully.

The main focus in the 1999 season was influenced by a previous discovery by the palaeoenvironmental team: the local lakes were drying out. Six months were then dedicated to digging a sounding that reached the base of the mound and evaluated the waterlogging. The expert team of archaeologists finished this in good time, despite finding interesting burials along the way (a baby skeleton with bracelets and anklets, and adult burial covered in owl droppings, and a headless male skeleton with cuts on the neck bones) and recording them carefully.

Most of the 2000 season was dedicated to the study and analysis of finds from previous campaigns, and to preparing publications on the fauna, lithics, ground stone, obsidian, and bone from the site. Some teams continued excavation work during July and August; the later Chalcolithic West Mound had some particularly spectacular finds. Other activities conducted around the site included a reconstruction in mud-brick of a Neolithic Çatalhöyük-style house, intended for visitors, and some geophysical investigations. A seminar was also held, as well as outreach activities with local schools in Konya Province.

Only the team of archaeologists from Berkeley conducted excavation work in 2001; most of the researchers focused on analysing findings and writing reports. They continued to dig on the west mound, where more walls of a Chalcolithic building were uncovered. Those involved in the study season took part in regular seminars designed to integrate widely differing data: one type examined the data by context, and the other took a thematic approach, wherein all project members with something to say about a certain topic (for example, feasting, landscape, discard, etc) discussed these things together from different points of view.

Not much digging happened in 2002 either, as only the Polish and Berkeley teams excavated. However, four new volumes documenting the excavation work were prepared. A trench on the east mound was excavated, as was the Berkeley team's area, where a building was found with interesting items like a hook and buckle made from bone, and animal bones decorated with shell beads. This year Çatalhöyük was awarded a distinction from the Turkish Ministry of Culture.

In 2003 full-time excavation work was begun again. Whereas before, specific houses and details were focused on, this time there was an emphasis on understanding how the entire site was organised. To accomplish this economically, the team returned to surface scraping as the primary method, and in this way recovered the overall plan for about 40 houses. This plan seemed to show

that there were no public spaces or buildings in this town, only houses and middens. A laser scanner was also used during this season.

The 2004 season saw the arrival of about 100 researchers, which meant that excavation happened on a very large scale, resulting in more finds than ever before. New sampling techniques and methods were put into place, and among the many interesting finds was a so-called 'goddess' figurine – the first to be found since Mellaart. The educational programme for local school children continued, with some 500 children visiting in total, and learning more about archaeology generally and Çatalhöyük specifically.

120 international archaeologists came to Çatalhöyük in 2005 and much work was accomplished, with seven buildings excavated on the north hill. Many of these showed evidence of having been abandoned carefully, which meant the insides were quite well-preserved. Interesting new discoveries included some artefacts that pointed to a reinterpretation of Mellaart's so-called 'mother goddesses' as not women but bears. An in-situ discovery of a bull's head and horns was also found this season. The educational programme hosted 600 children at the site this year.

The many international teams continued work in 2006, focusing on various areas of the site. The larger picture of continuity and variation began to emerge; in the south area, archaeologists found some building plans that matched previously discovered plans near identically, with ovens, hearths, and benches in virtually the same positions. A press day was held at the site, and a gallery was exhibited on Istanbul. The educational programme continued, and a group including anthropologists, philosophers, and theologians also came to the site to for a project.

In 2007, excavation continued with nearly 150 researchers and labourers on site. A frieze was found, as well as some walls plastered in a spiral design – presenting a type of decoration that had never been found at the site before. The base of what was probably a rather remarkable bear relief was also found in one of the rooms. Specialists also managed to recreate an unusual pot featuring human and bull faces. One particularly large building, featuring many examples of symbolic and ritual elaboration, was also found, and looked as though it presented a link between building size and building status or function. A new exhibit on Çatalhöyük opened at Ankara Museum.

A number of dramatic finds were discovered in the 2008 season by the 190 people involved in excavation. A burned 'shrine' building featured bull horns, paintings, raptor claws, and a burial area surrounded by wild bull horn displays. Further investigation was made into understanding how the buildings related to each other stratigraphically. Beyond continuing the educational programme, an active community outreach programme was also initiated, with a feast held at Çatalhöyük for local residents and forums to get their input on the future development of the site.

The 2009 season saw Çatalhöyük placed on UNESCO's tentative list of heritage sites, which was an exciting development. Before beginning excavation, international scholars from a variety of disciplines gathered at the site to contribute to conduct post-excavation analyses. Following this, they prepared for the publication of four volumes detailing the work done between 2000 and 2008. After this, excavation continued during which evidence was discovered for the existence of multiple-storied buildings in areas of the site. More well-preserved burnt buildings were uncovered in the southern area of the site, and a stone figurine of a man with a bear was discovered.

The 2010 season focused primarily on post-excavation work and analysis for the volumes due to be published. Daily seminars for collaboration and discussion were held. Interesting results and patterns emerged, particularly with regards to Çatalhöyük's social organisation, health, and the local surroundings. A small amount of excavation was conducted, and the buildings excavated displayed

stratigraphic information, adding to the known sequence but also to the complexity. A conference with 100 participants was also hosted at the site.

In 2011 the international group of about 160 researchers carried on with work, focusing particularly on one of their main aims of seeing Çatalhöyük's art in its social, environmental, and economic context, as well as understanding in a more holistic way the social geography and organisation of the site. Some paintings and a painted calf head that appeared to be concentrated around burial areas were investigated during this season. Serap Özdol was appointed assistant director.

On 1 July 2012 Çatalhöyük was officially named as a UNESCO World Heritage site. As one of the only Middle Eastern Neolithic tell sites to make the list, it was a high distinction, and it prompted a major press day attended by the Minister and other dignitaries. Excavation work resumed with some 160 people involved in a season that focused primarily on excavating structures in the lower levels of the south area, to get an idea of what older houses looked like. In the north area they also conducted excavation with the purpose of getting a better picture of the full plan; many Byzantine and Neolithic burials were unearthed. Geophysical survey and conservation and preservation projects were continued.