

Catalhöyük Village Ethnoarchaeology Project

A unique programme of research was initiated in 1995: an attempt to conduct an ethno-archaeological study, or an anthropology of archaeology. Permission was received to take Çatalhöyük and the nearby village of Küçükköy as a point of focus during August 1996. Anthropological study was undertaken on two levels: first, looking at ways that contemporary village studies could help shed light on the ancient communities belonging to excavated sites (an exercise formerly undertaken quite frequently, but largely abandoned in contemporary archaeological practice); and second, understanding the effect archaeology could have on a local community, introducing as it often does foreign ideas and customs, or new forms of employment and revenue. Within the first category, researchers tried to understand general patterns in the ways labour was divided across gender and age, the way that animal products were used, and how animals played into village folklore or cosmology. A direct comparison between village life and evidence of society at Çatalhöyük would not be undertaken, though they hoped that findings in either field could inform the other. As far as an anthropological study of the excavation at Küçükköy was concerned, they found that it had an economic impact, as well as an environmental one, but that the ideological impact was the most significant and interesting: villagers believed themselves to be descended from the nearby mound settlements, but interpreted them to have been Islamic chiefdoms, rather than Byzantine or other communities. Research noted the widely differing worldviews between the villagers, who largely lacked formal education, and the archaeologists, and the interaction between the two groups. It was noted that the villagers tended to be open to the academics' opinions regarding the site and its history, as well as to the nationalist politicians' views on their heritage.

The project continued in August 1996 with the aim of merging the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology in a way beneficial to the practice of both, and also exploring how archaeological finds were put to service in local and national politics or culture. A map of the villagers' 'sacred geography' was produced, which showed that beyond the mosques and religious shrines, seven nearby mounds were seen as being connected to spirits and bad luck. The villagers' belief that the bones' owners could return to haunt anyone who disturbed their resting place helped to explain why many prehistoric mounds in Konya had not been built on. It was also found that the excavations at Çatalhöyük had a surprisingly minimal economic and social effect on the lives of the residents at Küçükköy; most denied its significance in their lives, and whilst it had generated economic benefits for some families, the region's agricultural abundance meant the community as a whole had no need to depend on the jobs generated by the excavation. A final interesting find was the conclusion that, though some people were aware of the new historical conclusions reached about the periodisation of history, few saw it as threatening their Islamic cosmology or believed the two to be incompatible.

A short season was undertaken in 1999, focusing particularly on the question of how the locals conceived of the mounds and the past. Their belief in the souls of the dead protecting the site seemed not to depend on the religion or heritage of the site inhabitants, and indeed they did not appear to wonder about the mounds' historical periods. The belief in (and witness accounts of) small lights at night travelling around the mound representing the souls of holy men was not only widely held at Küçükköy, but also in villages as far away as İceri Çumra. This interpretation represented the tolerant model upheld by many villagers.

In 2000 ethnoarchaeological work continued, and working theories were further developed and added to. The drastic difference between the villagers' approach to mounds (largely having to do with functional or supernatural properties) and the researchers' periodicised historical one was again apparent. It also looked as though the villagers' sense of holiness was not linked exclusively to being Muslim; a concept of sanctity and evil crossed the division between civilisations. The project

was overall significant for the way it was able to combine two disciplines and approaches that typically remain very far from each other.