

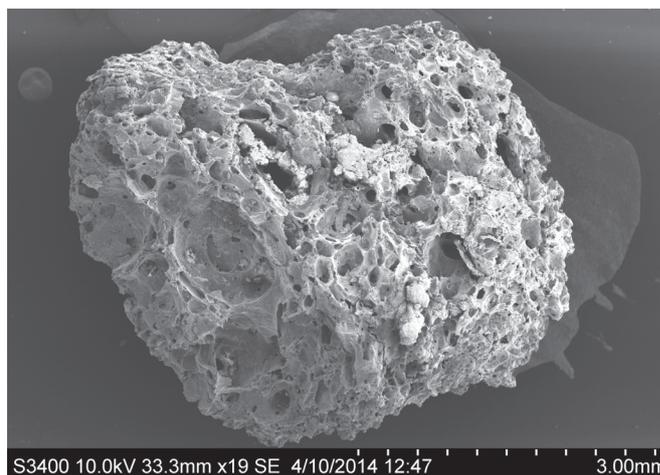
The genesis of bread cultures at Çatalhöyük: an archaeobotanical perspective on changing cuisine

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My archaeobotanical research traces the origins of bread cultures in the Near East and Europe, focusing on Neolithic Çatalhöyük (Turkey). The importance of bread and its symbolism in the culture of Turkey is striking. Bread and other ‘cracked’ cereal preparations, such as *bulgur* or *tarhana*, constitute the bulk of both the modern and ancient Turkish diets. Their intrinsic cultural significance is made clear by the use of the Turkish term *ekmek* (bread) as a generic term meaning any kind of ‘food’.

The Neolithic East Mound at Çatalhöyük is a 9,000-year-old tell site located in central Turkey on the Konya plain. Following an initial project directed by James Mellaart in the 1960s, a second, ongoing, research project began in 1993 under the supervision of Ian Hodder. As part of this project, my archaeobotanical research focuses on the analysis of food preparation and cooking practices during the extensive occupation of the East Mound between 7100 and 6000 BC. Çatalhöyük provides the most complete and detailed record of Neolithic households in the Near East, based on over 20 years of excavation and research. Çatalhöyük has been considered to represent a house-based egalitarian society and, to date, every house at Neolithic Çatalhöyük is believed to have had a similar role and functionality in relation to daily activities such as food processing and food preparation (but see Ian Hodder’s article in this volume). Evident differences have not been found among houses in terms of food preparation and cooking during the Neolithic period at Çatalhöyük. Each of the houses contained its own oven, hearth and fire spots; different types of ovens have been identified at Çatalhöyük and the *tandır* oven was the most common type used across all the houses. A wide range of cereal preparations, such as bread-type foods and porridge-like mixtures, were probably cooked in the interior of their domed structures and then stored for future consumption. Following on from these ideas, the overall aims of my research, which has been sponsored by UCL and the BIAA, are to provide substantial new knowledge about unstudied amorphous plant remains, such as lumps of ‘cooked’ cereal preparations, shifts in cooking practices with the advent of ceramic vessels being used as cooking pots and the use of wild plant species, with special attention given to species of wild mustard like *Descurainia sophia*, an oily seed and a possible food condiment at Neolithic Çatalhöyük.

During the 2013 season at Çatalhöyük, around 15 archaeobotanical samples were selected for preliminary study of possible charred food fragments. Having carried out scanning electron microscope analyses on them and having successfully identified charred food matter, during the 2014 season a further 150 archaeobotanical samples, spanning the major phases of Çatalhöyük (pre-ceramic, cooking ceramic



Scanning electron microscope image of a charred lump of processed grain from Çatalhöyük.

and post-cattle periods), were collected from the North, South and TPC Areas of the site for export and analysis. After initial scanning, these samples are thought to be representative primarily of food-processing contexts (rather than dung-burning), such as ovens, hearths, fire spots and storage deposits; they are also believed to represent aspects of ‘Neolithic recipes’ before, during and after cooking.

Very little has been said about the use of non-staple foods (wild species) and how the ingredients and the way these were cooked may have changed through time at Çatalhöyük. For the first time in the archaeobotany of Çatalhöyük, my project integrates unstudied plant evidence, such as cereal lumps originally identified as ‘bread’, with the study of artefact assemblages (clay balls, pots, ground stones, etc.) and experimental food preparation. Following up on Sultana-Maria Valamoti’s work on prehistoric processed cereal preparations in Greece, this project aims to compare the characteristics of Neolithic cereal food preparations retrieved from Neolithic Çatalhöyük with modern experimental cereal preparations cooked under similar controlled circumstances. These comparative analyses of Neolithic and experimental food preparations, involving macroscopic and scanning electron microscope examination, will shed light on cultural changes in cooking practices and possible ingredients used for the preparation of food among the Neolithic community at Çatalhöyük.

The study of the preparation of bread-type cereal foods together with the analysis of the different plant ingredients added during the preparation of meals and cooking practices can help to improve our knowledge and understanding of the Neolithic in Turkey. Not only will this project contribute to our knowledge about cooking traditions, it will also contribute to the study of social organisation and cultural entanglement at Çatalhöyük. Food at Çatalhöyük, with bread as the principal component of meals, will be studied as an origin of European bread cultures and as an example of social and cultural cohesion in the prehistoric Near East.