

Public archaeology workshop

The last, but not least, element of the BIAA's project on cultural heritage management is its public archaeology workshop. The workshop, titled 'Public archaeology: theoretical considerations and current practice in Turkey', was organised by the BIAA in partnership with Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations and was sponsored by the Headley Trust. The workshop took place in late October 2014 at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, Istanbul. It was triggered by questions about the relationship of archaeology with contemporary society. The workshop dealt with current issues in public archaeology and cultural heritage management from two perspectives: the changing people-based perception and understanding of archaeological heritage; and the new context created by the rapid growth of the tourism industry.

The workshop brought together international scholars in order to exchange ideas on the theoretical and practical aspects of public archaeology. The organisers placed particular emphasis on ensuring the participation of a full range of practitioners, such as Turkish museum workers, representatives from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, site managers and archaeologists. Participation from the UK, which has a longstanding tradition of cultural heritage management (institutionalised in such organisations as English Heritage and the National Trust), was ensured in order to enhance the intellectual exchange about the ways in which Turkey's rich archaeological heritage can be presented to the wider public.



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Prototyping new technologies for public presentation at Çatalhöyük

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The Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük has long been used innovatively to interpret the archaeological record for public audiences. The site has a 50+ year history of producing a range of creative outputs for local and international dissemination, including everything from illustration, photography, film, comics and fine art interventions, to museum displays and other temporary exhibitions. The exceptional nature of Çatalhöyük's stratigraphy, its remarkable wall paintings and sculptural art, its egalitarian social organisation and urbanised terrain (characterised by continuous house clusters in streetless neighbourhoods) make it the perfect fodder for public presentation.

In recognition of its one-of-a-kind stature, Çatalhöyük was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012. This led to a swell of demands upon the site, including an increase in expectant tourists seeking resonant experiences both before, during and after their visits. Between 2010 and 2013, visitor numbers rose from 15,000 to over 20,000 at Çatalhöyük. Although such an increase is not inconsistent with larger tourism trends since 2002, it has been accompanied by a profound change in visitor demographic. Internationals are now coming to the site in increasingly equal numbers to locals. Whole new audiences have begun to present themselves, with a massive increase in Japanese tourists: from just 26 in 2011 to nearly 3,000 in 2013. And other groups are arriving in higher numbers too (for example a near 70% increase in Americans between 2011 and 2013).

These shifts offer an important opportunity to engage new and larger groups of people through meaningful forms of site interpretation. Çatalhöyük, however, is a difficult site to explain to visitors. To the untrained eye, the archaeology here is partial, seemingly poorly-preserved, fairly uniform in colour, with features that can be hard to differentiate. Visitors must stay on a fixed path, cannot venture inside excavated buildings and cannot look at authentic artefactual assemblages (because they are usually immediately removed for processing and conservation, and then transferred to the Konya Archaeological Museum). This means the most distinguishable aspects of the site are inaccessible to visitors, sometimes leaving them confused, disoriented or otherwise uninformed.

For the past three years, Angeliki Chrysanthi (University of Southampton) and students from the University of York and Ege University have been studying visitor flow, dwelling time and viewing patterns as they tour Çatalhöyük. By providing consenting visitors with digital point-and-shoot cameras and portable GPS units, and comparing the resulting data with observational records that we have been collecting since 2009, we have been able to confirm several tourist trends.

Among these, it's clear that visitors tend to focus more on on-going excavation/conservation practice while touring the site – meaning they prefer to look at experts at work rather than the actual material culture itself. Given that such experts only tend to be on site for a maximum of two months per year (during the low season in terms of tourist numbers), this pattern is troublesome. There is also evidence that some visitors seem to be walking through Çatalhöyük faster than previously, with fewer stops and with even less engagement with the site's already modest interpretative resources and tourist trail.

To circumvent these trends, different tools that provide richer, more personalised and interactive experiences to visitors deserve consideration. Much work has been invested internationally in enhancing tourist experiences via use of personal mobile devices at heritage destinations. However, their application to outdoor prehistoric sites like Çatalhöyük, where the archaeology is exposed, fragmented and geographically-isolated, is far less common. Mudbrick sites of this nature are ubiquitous in western Asia, so Çatalhöyük arguably offers an ideal testing ground for research and development of digital storytelling in such contexts.

With support from the British Institute at Ankara and the CHESSEX Project (www.chessexperience.eu), we have begun to experiment with personalised experiences and mixed-reality modes of engagement via mobile media (phone- and tablet-based), testing out the capacities of these media to: (1) be generated in a theoretically-informed, reflexive fashion, true to the nature of the research programme at Çatalhöyük and (2) innovate with storytelling and, in so doing, nurture care for prehistory, the material world and our human connections to the past, present and future.

In August this year, Akrivi Katifori, Vassilis Kourtis and Laia Pujol-Tost of CHESSEX joined us on site to prototype the first iteration of such mobile storytelling. Prior to their arrival, Angeliki convened a story-crafting night during which 17 members of Çatalhöyük's various specialist teams (spanning excavators to finds and regional specialists to visualisers) gathered for two hours following their normal fieldwork day to script stories around the long-excavated Building 52. Using prompt cards containing data and interpretations compiled from site reports, diaries and associated publications about Building 52, three groups prepared three separate narratives. The most complete of these narratives was selected for integration into our mobile prototype. The tale, written by Åsa Berggren, Allison Mickel, Sophie Moore, Lucy Wheeler and Paul Pettersson, told the history of Building 52 through the entwined perspectives of a modern-day archaeologist, Archie, and a Neolithic woman, Abla, who lived on site at the time of the building's burning.

We transcribed the written script, and prepared an audio recording of it, two avatars of Abla and Archie and a variety of specialist field imagery from Building 52, all of which we supplied to the CHESSEX team. They combined these assets into the CHESSEX Project's authoring platform, resulting in an interactive narrative that was accessible via tablets on site, connected to the CHESSEX server. We conducted nine video-recorded test-runs of the technology with members of the site team and visitors, followed by audio-recorded evaluative interviews with participants. Their feedback reinforced the promise of such digital

stories: they sought to elaborate the stories with more movement, more interactivity between the user and the archaeological site via narrative prompts, more multi-sensory stimuli and more opportunities to explore notions of time and space via animation.

Taken together, our experience suggests that interpretation at Çatalhöyük is best led by the visitors themselves, enabled with resources that can be personalised according to language, intellectual need and time available, and which can be accessed anywhere, free from the bounds of the site itself. These prototyping experiments demonstrate the potential to rethink and deepen interpretative understanding in complex environments like Çatalhöyük. Indeed, not only did the prototype have meaningful effects on users, but the initial story-writing process actually stimulated unanticipated intellectual debate and conceptual collaboration amongst the site's specialists. Their reactions suggest a possible impact on professional knowledge-making itself.

A conspicuous opportunity exists here, then, for archaeologists to push the boundaries on user-driven, mobile-based, interactive experiences at outdoor prehistoric sites in Turkey and beyond. In so doing, our understanding of the archaeological record – both as visitors and as specialists – has the potential to be transformed.



Abla and Archie, the characters animating Çatalhöyük's Building 52 digital story. Avatars by Kerrie Hoffman.

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