



Rush matting and bucranium in an experimental house

experimental team members but rather two lambs that had died of natural causes, provided by local shepherds. The back-filled cut did not evidence any smell of decay initially, but after several days cracks appeared in the soil of the backfill and the smell of decay was noticeable but not strong. When the cuts were then plastered over as part of the floor replastering there was no smell. We also tried various fire experiments in the houses. Reeds, which do seem to have been a common element of fuel loads, as suspected, created very smoky fires, which made staying in the house unbearable; slow-burning embers, however, were much less problematic. Perhaps the reeds were used to start fires in the house hearths but not used constantly. In the external areas we created light structures and fire pits like those seen in the open spaces, and tried a number of cooking experiments to the considerable satisfaction of those members of the team with a penchant for barbecued animal head and marrow!

The Boncuklu visitor centre continued to welcome a steady stream of visitors. Among the visitors were more than 25 children at the Hayıroğlu village summer school, who were taken on a tour of the site and took part in art activities with the dig team. As the result of a successful AHRC grant application, Jessica Pearson is developing a new interpretation project to extend the existing education materials and displays in the visitor centre, focusing on the people of Boncuklu, including their diet and physical wellbeing. This project will also help to link Boncuklu to the story unfolding at Çatalhöyük.

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New discoveries and our interpretations of Çatalhöyük

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This has been a season of remarkable finds and new insights. The excavations took place between 25 June and 22 August with about 110 researchers and excavators on the site at any one time. Work continued in the South, North and TPC areas, and exceptional finds were made in all. For example, in the TPC area, in the rubble infill of a late building, a stone figurine was found that ranks with the best that have ever been found at the site. As in many examples, the head was removed at some time before deposition, but the body is well formed. The team has suggested for some time that the well-modelled figurines that occur throughout the occupation of the site, but especially in the later levels, tend to focus on bellies, buttocks and breasts of older or mature individuals. While the new figurine emphasises legs and buttocks, it also has a very marked pubic triangle although the central vertical line is less carefully executed than the rest of the figurine. The fact that such figurines tend to occur more commonly in the upper levels of the site fits in with other evidence of social changes that emphasises domestic production rather than rituals associated with wild animals.



Stone figurine found in the TPC area of excavations by the team led by Arek Marciniak (photo by Jason Quinlan)

A remarkable find was made in the North area too. In Building 132 a painted, modelled plaster head with inserted obsidian eyes was found. While a Neolithic statue with obsidian eyes has been found at Şanlıurfa, parallels for the Building 132 head are rare. Building 132 occurs probably in North F level, roughly comparable to James Mellaart's Level VII. The head had been replastered multiple times, and in



Plaster head with obsidian eyes and painted surface from Building 132 (photo by Jason Quinlan)

some of the replasterings the obsidian eyes were replaced with black paint. The head was originally attached to the wall of Building 132, above and looking into or watching over the entrance into the side storage room. It is tempting to interpret the head and its obsidian eyes as monitoring the movement of stores into and out of the side room. In the early and mid levels at Çatalhöyük there seem to have been strong constraints on the accumulation of stores and material wealth by individual houses and by individuals in those houses. It is not possible to determine easily whether the head represents a human or animal. When viewed face on, many observers see resemblances to a feline or bear, but when viewed from the side, the head has the type of nose and chin seen on anthropomorphic figurines.

In the South area, an in situ but badly damaged bucranium (plastered bull's cranium) was found in Building 89. This is of particular interest because it shows how the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük – as well as remembering past



Bucranium in Building 89 (photo by Jason Quinlan)

events by placing bucrania in houses – also at times put bucrania out of commission in a process of forgetting. In the 1960s, Mellaart found bucrania that had been allowed to sink into floors as plaster layers were added to them (in his 'Shrine 10' sequence). In Building 89 the bucranium had been defaced and then the floor had risen around it, completely burying it. So while the houses at Çatalhöyük have been described as 'history houses' in which histories were made by the accumulation of objects, they were also 'forgetting houses'.

As well as remarkable new finds, there were also important new insights as a result of the excavations in 2015. Two such insights resulted from the excavation of Building 132, mentioned above in relation to the discovery of the plastered head with obsidian eyes. The first insight resulted from the fact that the building had some unusual characteristics. For example, the building as excavated is very large; but it also extends to the west and east below as yet unexcavated buildings, making it by far the largest building yet excavated at Çatalhöyük. In addition, the walls are much thicker than other buildings of this time period (North F) and the building was abandoned in an unusual way, with 2.5m-high walls left standing.



View of the excavated floor of Building 132 (photo by Jason Quinlan)

All this suggests a building of special significance, an interpretation supported by the fact that the building above it, excavated over the last decade as Building 77, was very elaborate and had an unusually large amount of bodies buried beneath the floors. The main room in Building 132 was largely devoid of platforms in its latest phase before abandonment, but it did have ovens and hearths associated with in situ clay balls in its southern half. It is possible that this room acted as a food preparation and consumption area for a larger group than is normally seen at the site. Whether this is a special building for communal activity or just an unusually large building will have to await further excavation. But Building 132 does raise the issue of whether we have been entirely correct in saying that the society at Çatalhöyük was fully egalitarian.

Another insight deriving from the excavation of Building 132 concerns the large number of burials found in the northeastern corner of the main room. These, however, are all dated to the period after the abandonment of the building. There is much evidence of wall collapse, decay and rebuilding in the later phases of use of this building (again suggesting that a process of ‘forgetting’ was taking place). After a period of time in which the northeast of the abandoned building was used for refuse deposition, a series of burials was interred. The burials were placed before and during the foundation of Building 77 that was built above Building 132, and it was the northeastern corner that was to become the centre of burial and ritual elaboration in Building 77. It seems, then, that Building 77 was constructed over a cemetery located in the northeastern corner of the abandoned Building 132. A similar process has now been found in a number of cases, such as the plastered skull placed in a foundation burial in Building 53 and the cemetery found beneath the 65-56-44-10 sequence of buildings. Another possible example discovered in 2015 is the series of burials found beneath Building 17 in the South area. Although the floors of Building 17 remain to be fully excavated, there is much evidence that below this building there are midden layers into which elaborate burials were set. In one case, a thick layer of phytoliths seems to suggest a plank placed on or with the body. A very similar plank burial was found in the same building during excavations in the 1990s. Most commentators, including the present team, have interpreted Çatalhöyük as consisting of houses in which burials were placed. Perhaps we need to reformulate this perspective and see the burials as primary, with houses built up around them.

Another new emerging interpretation concerns the fact that in the North area we have now excavated four large and elaborate buildings in a row. In 2015 the metal bridge that allowed tourist viewing of Building 5 was removed so that we could excavate a large burned building. Building 131 was situated to the south of Building 5 (that had the burned Building 1 above it) and to the north of Building 132 (with burned Building 77 above it). We have thus now excavated four large buildings: from north to south, Building 5-1, Building 131, Building 132-77, Building 52. All these buildings are large, long-lasting, have many burials, are often very elaborate and ‘rich’, and have a final phase of burning. They are surrounded to the west and east by smaller buildings, less elaborate, often with fewer burials, often unburned, and by large areas of midden or open space. We have yet to understand fully what these linear arrangements of special buildings indicate, but we have seen similar arrangements in the South area – for example Mellaart’s ‘shrines’ 1, 8 and 10 form a similar row of elaborate buildings, often with many burials, that end in burning. Might these be spatial representations of lineages of related buildings?

Towards the end of the occupation of the Neolithic East Mound there were many changes in economic and social and ritual life at Çatalhöyük. We have come to understand these changes best in the TP, TPC and GDN areas of the site just to the east of the South Shelter. In 2015, excavation and research continued in the TPC and GDN areas where we discovered often very large buildings with thick walls and multiple rooms, and without burials beneath the floors. Another change that had been noted earlier is that wall decoration extends over the whole of the main room of houses in later levels rather than being confined to the walls near burials of adults in the northern parts of rooms. This observation was confirmed this year in the excavation of Space 462.

The walls of this room were richly decorated with geometric motifs, and the room had platforms, ovens, benches and bucrania, as well as two small painted pillars placed on a bench against the northern wall. In earlier levels of occupation at the site, the walls adjacent to storage rooms are not decorated. But in Space 462 the painted decoration extended over the eastern wall behind which was Space 493 containing five large storage bins for wheat and barley. So, while in earlier levels of occupation storage areas were not marked and were ‘watched over’ with obsidian eyes, in later phases there was more open recognition and even celebration of stored wealth. The accumulation of stored wealth seemingly became more acceptable in the later phases of occupation at Çatalhöyük.



Painted Space 462 in the TPC area of excavations found by the team led by Arek Marciniak (photo by Jason Quinlan)

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