

## Introducing the new Çatalhöyük Project

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The year 2018 marks the beginning of a new project at Çatalhöyük. After 25 years Ian Hodder finished his long-term research at the site (Hodder 2017). The management of Çatalhöyük, an UNESCO-inscribed site, was then transferred to the local Konya Museum with Ege University Protohistory and Near Eastern Archaeology Department in Izmir taking responsibility of the scientific supervision. The transition of the project from Stanford to Ege University was an intense, laborious, yet a smooth process. I would like to acknowledge Ian Hodder and his team, especially Bilge Küçükdoğan and Dominik Lukas, for this achievement. Following the official handing over of the project, we began concentrating our efforts on three major issues: The future direction of research at the site, the protection and conservation of the old excavation areas and an improved presentation of Çatalhöyük to the public. Project co-director Arkadiusz Marciniak and his team from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland) were very supportive in training the new team members and excavators on the Çatalhöyük documentation procedures and protocols while at the same time digging a new excavation area on the East Mound. This ensured that the documentation at the site continued with the old protocols based on “single context recording”. The collected data will thus be compatible with the old data and the new members found the chance to work alongside experienced archaeologists and anthropologists. After two seasons of fieldwork, I am happy to report that our team has been making progress on all these fronts. I would like

to refer readers to the new website of the Çatalhöyük Project for the upcoming 2018-2019 Research Reports ([www.catalhoyuk.ege.edu.tr](http://www.catalhoyuk.ege.edu.tr)).

This contribution tries to provide information on the future directions of the research at the site. Thanks to a generous support from the German Archaeological Institute’s Eurasian Section, the new team (Fig. 1) was able to assemble for a kick-off meeting, where future team leaders discussed ideas and prospects for the short and mid-term research at the site. During the meeting, the lab leaders and project directors agreed to focus on unsolved problems and inadequately researched areas or sequences on the mound as a common meta-goal. In this respect, the project will embrace a problem-oriented approach incorporating methods of archaeological science informed by the old and new data from the site. More specifically, the new project will concentrate on the following research aims and problems:

- To contextualize Çatalhöyük within its southwest Asian and Anatolian cultural landscape by implementing mobility and network studies,
- Embracing a diachronic and long-term perspective of Neolithization in Central Anatolia from the Epipalaeolithic to the Early Chalcolithic,
- Focussing on Early Çatalhöyük occupations to understand the idiosyncrasies of the daily life of the first inhabitants in terms of settlement and house organization, subsistence, technology and ideology,
- Continuous focus on Late Çatalhöyük East occupations to explore the cultural-economic changes and abandonment processes of the East Mound,
- Exploring the emergence and development of occupations on the West Mound and the possibility of co-existence of Çatalhöyük East and West communities,
- Researching post-Neolithic communities and activities at Çatalhöyük.

These are some of the broader questions our team would like to tackle, I now report briefly on the fieldwork that has already been completed at the site (Çilingiroğlu *et al.* in press).

The 2018–2019 fieldwork seasons during the summer months lasted for 14 weeks in total. The team comprised mostly Ege and Poznań students alongside students, interns and researchers from multiple countries and



Fig. 1 Group photo from the kick-off meeting “Çatalhöyük in Context: Current Perspectives in Eurasian Neolithic Research”, 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> May 2019, Berlin. (Photo: Hannah Gilb)





Fig. 2 The East Area at the end of the 2019 excavation season. (Photo: E. Sözel)

institutions. As mentioned above, a new excavation area has been opened on the East Mound where our work already produced interesting and exciting new data (Fig. 2). This area, which we now officially call the “East Area” has never been subject to excavations before. Excavating in this part of the mound has several objectives. First of all, it allows us to understand the occupational history of the East Area and its temporal relation to the South and North Areas as well as to the West Mound. It provides evidence of the density of occupation in relation to recent discussions on the population size at Neolithic Çatalhöyük. It also gives us the chance to compare and to contrast socio-economic parameters of the East Area with other areas on the mound to infer co-existence of different communities at Çatalhöyük. Finally, the East Area excavations also offer insights into the regional contacts and influences as well as on exchange and transfer of raw materials, technologies and cultural trends.

After laying out a 50x10m trench with an East-West orientation on the East Eminence of the East Mound, team members began to remove the topsoil which included Neolithic and post-Neolithic materials in mixed deposits.

Already in our first season it became clear that the East Area contains burials of Late Antiquity. It turns out that this part of the mound was used as a cemetery long after Neolithic occupation ended. In both seasons, 21 burial features were excavated under the supervision of biological anthropologists. These burials contained single inhumations in flexed position, some with superstructures of stones and tiles. In all cases, the burial pits cut through the Late Neolithic deposits.

One of the achievements of the 2019 season was to fully excavate a Neolithic building. It is a rectilinear building with three rooms. As typical for Çatalhöyük,

the walls were made of mudbricks and both, walls and floors, were plastered. The rooms had crawl holes in between them to allow access. One of the more interesting features that we encountered were horns embedded into the opposite walls of the building (Fig. 3). Although these immediately remind one of the horn installations from the Classic Çatalhöyük buildings, which are found along the northern walls, we can emphasise that the East Area installation is less elaborate, less monumental and contains sheep horns instead of aurochs horns. Still, one can talk about a continuation of a long-term practice in a new form.

An initial assessment indicates that the settlement organization of the East Area repeats some of the well-known features of Late Neolithic Çatalhöyük houses and material culture. Radiocarbon dates from these deposits range between *c.* 6200/ 6100 and 6000/ 5900 cal BCE. The houses appear to be packed, adjacent to each other and do not share walls. They are surrounded



Fig. 3 One of the sheep horn cores protruding from the mudbrick wall in Building 175. (Photo: M. Dembowski)

by large open areas designated as “middens”. The plan, size and internal organization of buildings with separate rooms, crawl holes and horn installations also resemble in some respects Late Neolithic houses. Therefore, the East Area offers a potential to investigate the Late Neolithic occupation and culture history at Çatalhöyük. The bone industry, pottery and lithics indicate wider regional networks, emphasising Çatalhöyük’s involvement with contemporary communities in Cappadocia.

The new team looks forward to upcoming seasons of work at Çatalhöyük to keep producing new knowledge and insights on this unique Neolithic site of southwest Asia.

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