

EXCAVATIONS AT ÇATAL HÖYÜK 1963

James MELLAART

A third season of excavations at Çatal Hüyük was carried out between 10th June and the end of August 1963. The necessary funds were provided by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, N. Y., the Bollingen Foundation, N. Y., the University of Edinburgh, the British Academy, the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, the Australian Institute of Archaeology, the Institute of Archaeology of the University of London, and an anonymous donation. Transport and survey equipment were provided by B. P. Aegean Ltd., Istanbul.

The three main objectives of the 1963 campaign were :

A) to link up the two areas of Level VI, found in 1962, establish the full plan of the area of the shrines and possible courtyards between them; B) to clear a fair area of earlier building levels and C) to try to establish the first appearance of pottery manufacture on the site and the end of the aceramic period.

Ten weeks' digging accomplished these tasks with spectacular success.

The two groups of burnt Level VI buildings (c. 6500 B. C.) were linked up and a number of courts and courtyards were established. The main function of the latter were as repositories of household rubbish, food remains, etc. They also served as lavatories, but were *not* apparently used as a means of communication, for keeping domestic animals as for domestic tasks. No single oven, bin or

storage space was found in them, nor do they communicate with each other or give access to a single building. All means of communication was clearly over the flat roofs.

In the process of linking up the two areas, two more shrines were found in this burnt level: a small one decorated with a fine textile pattern of intriguing intricacy, in black, red and white, a painted red goddess with uplifted arms and legs and a bench in which was set a single pair of auroch's horns. A second much larger building contained some stone figurines, again found among numerous stalactites and concretions, and a magnificent panel with two leopards, face to face in relief, above a plain red panel.

Pottery occurred, as last year, in minute quantities, even in the courtyards where one would normally expect it. This suggests that it came into general use only just before the great fire destroyed the settlement, i. e. perhaps about 6500 B. C.

In 1962 we had found indications that some of the great shrines stood through two successive building levels - which together may have lasted as much as 150 years or more. Extending the excavation, we found that this was general and we now have a later Level VIa - the burnt one - and an earlier Level VIb, unburnt for the greater part of the area. The plan of this VIb building-level proved to be quite different from its successor and under the

later courtyards we found numerous houses and no less than four new shrines, bringing the total number of shrines of this level up to twelve. During this phase, the leopards were painted with layer upon layer of rosettes and a shrine next door was ornamented with a large relief of a goddess, of which only the legs survive. Another had two bulls' heads and next to it an enormous shrine bore three panels with reliefs of goddesses, all slightly different. In the 65 rooms excavated in this building-level, *not a single potsherd* was found, which clearly shows that pottery was not yet in use here.

On the lower slope of the mound, a complex of about forty rooms, containing eight shrines, was cleared in building-level VII, which lay directly under VIb and was likewise unburnt. The buildings were fairly well preserved, but had evidently been lived-in for a very long time and walls were leaning at all angles. Up to 120 layers of plaster could be observed.

Both in VIb and in VII benches and platforms are sometimes painted red as in aceramic Hacilar (the middle layers of which were dated by radiocarbon method to c. 6750 B. C.) with which these levels are probably contemporary. These forty rooms produced exactly **one** pot and otherwise not a single potsherd... but there were plenty of other finds.

One of these shrines contained the large cutout figure of a bull, painted black and only the head and upper outline of the animal were missing. The building above had been decorated with a great cutout figure of a cow, alternately painted red and white, thus establishing a continuity between Levels VI and VII for which there is much evidence. A corner panel showed two rows of alternate black and red hands with geometric pattern in between and at a later stage the west wall had been ornamented with roughly cutout leopards (?) facing each

other. As in the level above, a bull's head was on the floor below.

The earliest decoration of this building however, covered by about a hundred layers of hard white plaster, consisted of seven vultures, painted in red and with a wingspread of nearly five feet, attacking small men, all of which are headless. This great painting covered the entire east and most of the north wall and obviously illustrated some lost myth. This gruesome scene is repeated with variations in another VII shrine, which is further decorated with a series of breasts, bull's and ram's heads and an enormous bull's head on the west wall, with horn cores each 1 m. in length. The tusks of a gigantic wild boar protrude from the breast which was modelled on a lower jaw. The association of life and death is heightened by the discovery of three adult and one child's skull on the floor of this building - the only case so far. Whether these were remains of human sacrifices or were used in a ritual of death, or are connected with ancestor worship, as perhaps the lowest ceramic level at Hacilar, is hard to decide. Evidently the figures of headless men attacked by vultures and the actual skulls found on the floor were connected. The same building contained two ornamental relief panels painted in red, black and white. The next door shrine had a relief of a pregnant goddess on the east wall, with extremely delicate painting on the body and the is hard to decide. Evidently the figure-background. As usual, head hands and feet had been demolished when the building was filled in.

The third shrine of this group had no paintings but several bulls' and rams' heads and two pairs of breasts, some modelled on small mammals' skulls.

On either side of the first vulture shrine there was another shrine. The westernmost had paintings reminiscent of

'kilims' on the east and north walls and enormous cutout figures of a bull and a cow on the west wall. Between them, part of a goddess remained and originally there probably were a pair of them above a bull's head at floor-level. This building lay directly below the shrine or house (probably the first) that in November 1961 produced the fine 'kilim' patterns and the architectural facade with the skulls below (see AS XIII, 1963).

The other (below Shrine E. VI.10 with the great Goddess resting on three superimposed bulls, heads) produced several reliefs: a great bull's head in profile; another seen *en face* with one large modelled horn; a cutout animal's head and in the corner a charming picture of a stag on a rock, head turned back, partly modelled, partly cutout in the plaster.

Between these two groups of three shrines each, there lay one, possibly two others. The first was decorated with two ram's or bull's heads superimposed - the heads themselves modelled on a decayed wooden post and to the right of it at least one large bull's head. Others were set on the opposite wall, horns and keying in the plaster surviving intact.

The second building, which underlay the VI shrine with the twingoddess relief, may or may not have been a shrine. On the north wall there was a vast painting of particular interest. Behind the stepped roof line of a town rises a double peaked mountain. A vertical dotted line rises from the right peak and above it are horizontal lines of dots. The surface of the mountain is covered with spots, but some are shown beyond it to the right. Incredible as it may seem, it looks remarkably as if we have here a record of a volcanic eruption seen from the roofs of the city of Çatal Hüyük. Certainly a subject worthy of being recorded in a shrine!

Earlier layers were tested only in a

small area below the courtyard of Level VII, where we found a large building decorated with patterns of concentric circles and rows of red and black triangles, belonging to Level VIII and below the two adjacent shrines VII, 1 and 8.

A panel of black vultures attacking red men armed with slings, decorated a building of Level VIII below the first vulture shrine (E. VII. 8). Below it, another building (Level IX) was decorated with cutout heads of a feline, probably a leopard and another animal, while below that there appeared a painting of a fragmentary black bull (?) on the north wall, establishing a pattern of continuity with other black bovinds above in Levels VII and VI. A polychrome 'Kilim' pattern appeared next to it on the east wall, poorly preserved. Other fragments of painting came from the next building - level X, directly below, but the shrine of this period lay to the west, under Shrine E. VII. 8. Once again we had niches, bulls' and rams' heads, partly painted.

The most remarkable feature of both buildings in Levels IX and X was the re-appearance of **pottery** in small quantities, it must be admitted, and in more primitive form. Nevertheless it is now clear that even if pottery was not introduced at Çatal Hüyük as a normal commodity until the end of Level VI, let us say c. 6500 B.C., experiments at pottery - making go back as far as Level X, which we may date to about 7000 B. C., (a date which, incidentally, may well be acceptable for the first appearance of pottery in the very top layers of the mesolithic rock shelter of Beldibi on the south coast near Antalya, called **Beldibian** by the excavator, Dr. Enver Bostancı).

Below these Levels X - VIII, tested so far at Çatal Hüyük only over an inadequate area, we made a small trench during the last days of the dig, to see whether

similar buildings continued even further down, having reached a level which corresponded to the present level of the plain.

Below the floors of building-level X, we came upon a strong turf-lime, indicative of plant-growth, on top of a foot sterile clay, which seems to indicate a **flood-deposit**. In a narrow trench, dug down to a depth of 3,5 m., or nearly 12 feet, below this deposit, we again encountered deposits of building rubbish, broken bricks, plaster floors, ovens, burials below floors and the usual remains of animal bones, clay missiles, flint and obsidian. Excavations were interrupted by the end of the dig at a point some 5 m. below the actual level of the plain - ground water had not yet been reached but water was seeping in from the irrigation ditches. There was still no trace of virgin soil. All one can say at the moment is that the mound is evidently much higher than suspected and that at least five metres of deposit descend below present plain level. If the slope of the buildings towards the top of the mound is gradual, one can safely assume that at least eleven metres of deposit lay below the Level X floor at the top of the mound, which is a most attractive prospect for future seasons' work.

This, however, is not the whole story, for in removing building-level after building-level, we recovered the graves of their inhabitants, properly stratified, below the platforms in their houses and shrines.

In Level IV, two houses produced bone-heaps with 14 and 15 individuals each, some properly buried, others inarticulate, but when we came to examine the burial Customs of Level VI, it appeared that primary (not secondary) burial was the rule. Not less than 230 individuals were drawn, photographed and recorded in Level VI. Numbers of individuals buried in

houses or shrines vary from 8 to 32, the majority being women and children. Funeral gifts vary from individual to individual: about necklaces, bracelets and anklets of beads of various stones, shell, copper and lead (these metals occur as early as Level IX) were found with females and children. Males may have a few beads but are usually accompanied by flint daggers, flint fabricators, blades in flint or obsidian, stone maceheads and - only with males - bone hooks - and - eyes, sown onto belts. Obsidian mirrors, rouge in baskets, spatulae, pins, marble bracelets, small greenstone axes, occur only with females. Burials painted with red ochre, with cinnabar, or green paint on the eye-brows appear to be female, whereas a blue cobalt blue is found with both males and females. Textiles and baskets were more common than before, and basket burials foreshadow pot burials of later periods. Not less than thirty wooden vessels were found and recorded - any many saved - to show an extraordinary rich repertoire of elegant wooden vessels ancestral to and technically far superior to the first pottery vessels on the site.

In fact, it is now clear that the pottery of Çatal Hüyük was, for its shapes, wholly dependant on wooden vessels and baskets (and not on stone vessels, which are a rarity in this alluvial plain) and this explains the multitude of ovals, boxes and other non-pottery shapes in the pottery not only of Çatal Hüyük but in the pottery of its successor, the Hacilar culture, as well.

Summing up then, one can now visualise the development of the Çatal Hüyük culture through a dozen successive building-levels (X-VIb, VIa-O) which in all probability occupied the seventh millennium B. C. Continuity of culture is marked throughout and no destruction brought about by enemy action mars its steady and peaceful development. There

is no evidence for city - walls at Çatal Hüyük, nor were they needed, for the peculiar construction of the city turned it into a natural fortress. Some curvilinear walls at the bottom of the slope near the old river - bed may represent the walls of cattle enclosures, for animals were obviously not kept inside the settlement. Armed with the bow and arrow and the ubiquitous clay missiles of baked clay measuring from two to four inches in diameter, the people of Çatal Hüyük were evidently quite able to keep any enemy at bay.

Although we have been able to trace the culture down to Level X, it is extremely likely that further inside the mound similar and earlier building - levels will continue to be found. Soundings on edges of mounds are notoriously unsatisfactory and so are test - pits in the middle of a mound. To obtain reliable and satisfactory results, a gradual stripping

of the successive building - levels is necessary. This then is the task of future seasons, but meanwhile the mysterious deposits below the flood - level offer tantalising prospects of early settlement. At the moment they cannot be dated with any precision and all one can say is that they fall somewhere in the 8 th millennium B. C., a period usually thought of as «mesolithic», but the characteristic products of this period - the microliths - have not yet appeared, nor have we any information of how much further down occupation levels extend. There is work for many years to come at Çatal Hüyük and we can confidently look forward to further surprises.

Once again we record our gratitude to the Eski Eserler ve Müzeler Umum Müdürlüğü, to the Vali of Konya, the Director and staff of the Konya Museum and the authorities at Çumra for their continuous assistance and hospitality.

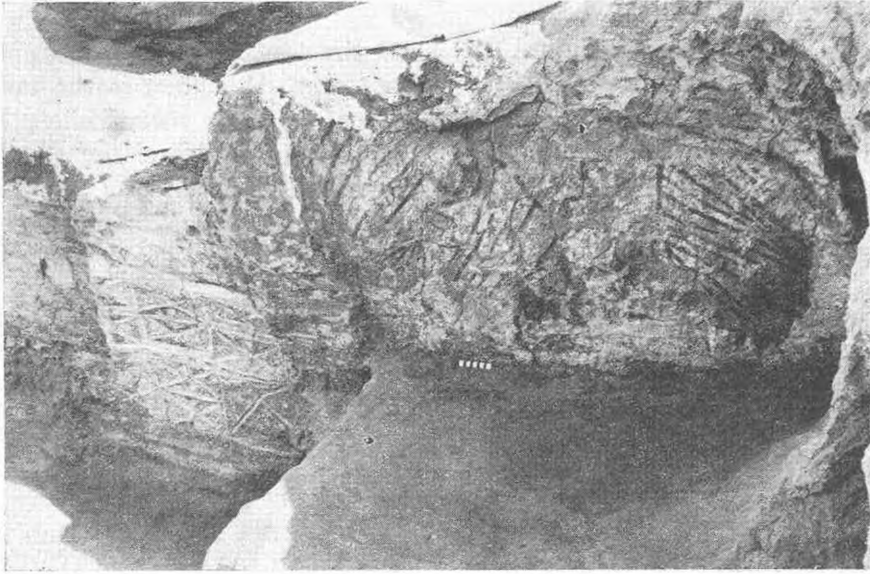


Fig. 1 — Shrine E.VII.23. Level VII. North wall showing incised and painted panel on left and wall-painting of two vultures attacking headless man on right.

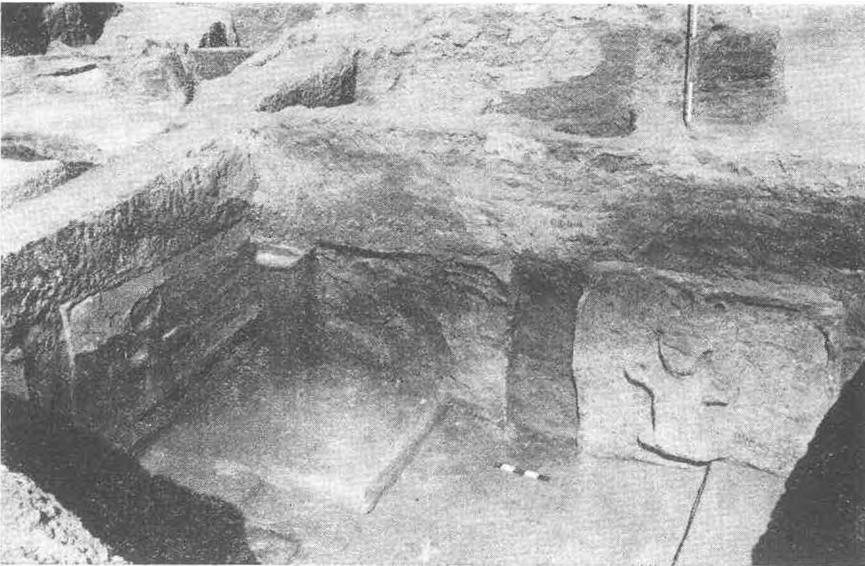


Fig. 2 — View of Shrine E.VI.31, Lower Level VI. South and west wall with plaster reliefs of deities.

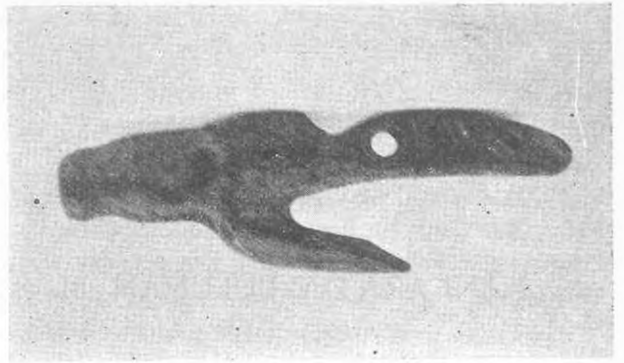


Fig. 4 — Belt-hook in the form of an asses head from a burial in Level VI.

Fig. 3 — Figurine in black stone, Level VI.



Fig. 5 — Typical group of contracted burials found below the floor of a Level VI house.