

Çatalhöyük Uluslararası Turizm ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi Catalhöyük International Journal of Tourism and Social Research

Çatalhöyük Gastronomy Culture: The First Known Culinary
Practices in Anatolia (Türkiye) and World History

Çatalhöyük Gastronomi Kültürü: Anadolu (Türkiye)'da ve
Dünya Tarihinde Bilinen İlk Mutfak Uygulamaları

*Ali Batu
Heysem Suat Batu

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/cutsad>

Atıf / Citation

Batu, A., & Batu, H.S. (2024). Çatalhöyük Gastronomy Culture: The First Known Culinary Practices in Anatolia (Türkiye) and World History. *Çatalhöyük Uluslararası Turizm ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi (CUTSAD)*, 12, 61-69. DOI: [10.58455/cutsad.1472506](https://doi.org/10.58455/cutsad.1472506)

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*Sorumlu Yazar, Prof. Dr., Emekli Öğretim Üyesi, Gastro Food Academy Company, Antalya, Türkiye / *Corresponding Author, Prof. Dr., Retired Faculty Member, Gastro Food Academy Company, Antalya, Türkiye. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3628-7747>, E-posta: Alibatu42@gmail.com

Dr., Istanbul Kent University, Faculty of Art and Design, Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, İstanbul, Türkiye / Dr., Istanbul Kent University, Faculty of Art and Design, Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, İstanbul, Türkiye. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7743-4638>, E-posta: h.s.batu@gmail.com



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Ali BATU & Heysem SUAT BATU

Article Information

Review Article

Submitted: 23.04.2024

Accepted: 01.06.2024

Published: 29.06.2024

DOI: [10.58455/cutsad.1472506](https://doi.org/10.58455/cutsad.1472506)

June, 2024

No: 12

Pages: 61-69

Keywords:

Çatalhöyük, Gastronomy,
Culinary Culture, Anatolia,
Türkiye

Makale Bilgisi

Derleme Makalesi

Geliş: 23.04.2024

Kabul: 01.06.2024

Yayın: 29.06.2024

DOI: [10.58455/cutsad.1472506](https://doi.org/10.58455/cutsad.1472506)

Haziran, 2024

Sayı: 12

Sayfalar: 61-69

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Çatalhöyük, Gastronomi, Mutfak
Kültürü, Anadolu, Türkiye

Abstract

Çatalhöyük is an archaeological site located in the Çumra district of Konya, Türkiye, with a deep-rooted history dating back to around 7500 BCE and still not fully explored. In this article, the eating habits and gastronomy culture of Çatalhöyük are examined, focusing on its history and culture. Remarkable findings in terms of dietary culture include the discovery of fossils of charcoal, grains, seeds, wild fruits, and plant bulbs. Additionally, the presence of hearths, storage containers, food processing tools, and grain storages within adjacent houses demonstrates how dietary activities were conducted. The abundance of wooden bowls, clay pots, and items made from plants such as baskets, crates, and mats as kitchen utensils indicates the processing, consumption, long-term storage, and potential for future production of these products. According to research, it can be said that herbs such as rye, chickpeas, lentils, figs, plums, sumac, blackberries, mallow, purslane, clover, and bird's foot trefoil were used during that period. Moreover, it is known that crops such as barley, wheat, millet, peas, chickpeas, lentils, almonds, and gum trees were also utilized. However, some wall paintings and decorations on utensils do not fully explain the types of meals prepared during that time. Therefore, further research is needed to fully understand the dietary culture at Çatalhöyük. This article aims to shed more light on the culinary culture of Çatalhöyük by conducting an in-depth literature review online, thereby contributing new insights to both Turkish and global gastronomy literature.

Özet

Çatalhöyük, M.Ö. 7500'lere kadar uzanan köklü bir geçmişe sahip olan ve hala tam olarak keşfedilmemiş bir arkeolojik alan olarak Konya'nın Çumra ilçesinde bulunmaktadır. Burada, Çatalhöyük'ün tarih ve kültürü üzerine odaklanılarak beslenme alışkanlıkları ve gastronomi kültürü incelenmektedir. Beslenme kültürü açısından, odun kömürü, tahıl, tohum, yabani meyve ve bitki yumrularının fosillerinin bulunması dikkat çekicidir. Ayrıca, yan yana konumlandırılmış evlerin içinde ocaklar, saklama kapları, besin işleme aletleri ve buğday depolarının bulunması, beslenmeyle ilgili faaliyetlerin nasıl gerçekleştirildiğini göstermektedir. Mutfak araç ve gereçleri olarak çok sayıda ahşap kase, toprak kap ve bitkilerden yapılan sepetler, küfeler, hasırlar gibi eşyaların bulunması, bu ürünlerin işlendiğini, tüketildiğini, uzun süre muhafaza edildiğini ve gelecek yıl üretilebileceklerini göstermektedir. Yapılan araştırmalara göre, çavdar, nohut, mercimek, incir, erik, sumak, böğürtlen, ebegümece, labada, geven, hasırotu, kuşotugibi otların o dönemlerde kullanıldığı söylenebilir. Ayrıca, arpa, buğday, burçak, bezelye, nohut, mercimek, badem, sakız ağacı gibi bitkilerin de kullanıldığı bilinmektedir. Ancak, bazı duvar resimleri ve araç-gereç süslemeleri o dönemde yapılan yemeklerin türlerini tam olarak açıklamaya yetmemektedir. Bu nedenle, Çatalhöyük'teki beslenme kültürünü tam olarak anlamak için daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır. Bu makale, Çatalhöyük'ün mutfak kültürünü daha çok açığa çıkarma konusunda internet üzerinden derinlemesine bir literatür incelemesi yaparak Türk ve dünya gastronomi literatürüne yeni katkılar sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Introduction

The excavations at Çatalhöyük shed light on human history with its 9,000-year-old past. This Neolithic settlement, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is considered one of the earliest settlements on Earth, where approximately 8,000 people lived together (Atlas, 2015). Discovered by British archaeologist James Mellaart and his team in the 1960s, Çatalhöyük is located in the Çumra district of Konya and is known as a large settlement belonging to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods.

The first settlement at Çatalhöyük occurred approximately 9400 years ago during the Neolithic Period. Established on a 13.5-hectare area along the shores of the ancient Lake Konya, this settlement was continuously inhabited for about two thousand years. Çatalhöyük settlement consists of two mounds, namely "East Çatalhöyük" dating to the Neolithic Period (c. 7400–6200 BCE) and "West Çatalhöyük" dating to the Chalcolithic Period (c. 6200–5200 BCE) (Uyanık and Ber, 2016). Located 52 km from the city of Konya and approximately 136 km from Mount Hasan, Çatalhöyük sits about 11 km north of the Çumra District, dominating the Konya Plain (Fig. 1 and 2). The Eastern settlement is believed to have formed a settlement unit reaching a height of 20 meters from debris during the Neolithic era (Konyayenigun, 2018).



Figure 1. Çatalhöyük is located in the Konya Plain. Eastern mound (right) from western mound (left) (İmre, 2019)



Figure 2. Excavations in Çatalhöyük, one of the most important archaeological sites in the world (Atlas, 2015)

Çatalhöyük is actually located in the Çumra district of Konya

Architecturally, Çatalhöyük houses were generally constructed adjacent to each other in rectangular shapes. However, despite variations in size and shape, most houses followed a specific overall layout (Fig. 3, 7) (Baş, 2016). In terms of arrangement, entry into the houses was provided through ladders over the roofs. The roofs of the houses were used as workshops or working areas, and there were enclosed rooms for storage. Each house had an oven beneath the ladder, and a platform was also present in each house where the deceased were buried beneath. The walls of the houses featured a wide variety of mural panels. These murals depicted various motifs such as geometric patterns, kilim designs, concentric circles, hunting scenes, dance scenes, stars, vultures, leopards, birds, deer (Fig. 5, 6). These paintings were more commonly found in areas where human remains were discovered (Baş, 2016). Since the houses were adjacent to each other, there were no windows or external doors. Entry into the houses was facilitated through ladders descending through a hole in the roof.

Archaeologists suggest that this arrangement was designed as a measure to protect against predatory animals. Daily transportation was mostly conducted on flat roofs for a significant part of the day.



Figure 3. Çatalhöyük houses in terms of architecture and house layout (Baş, 2016).

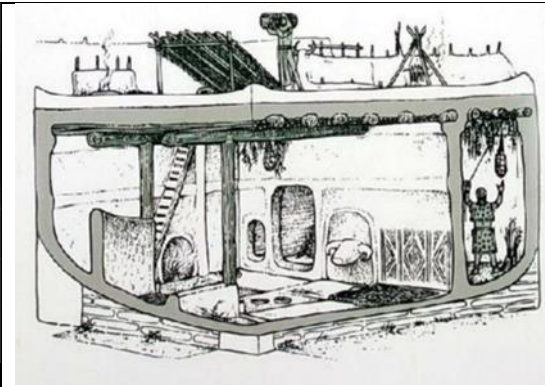


Figure 4. A Çatalhöyük house was in use for 45 to 90 years (Bursalı, 2014)

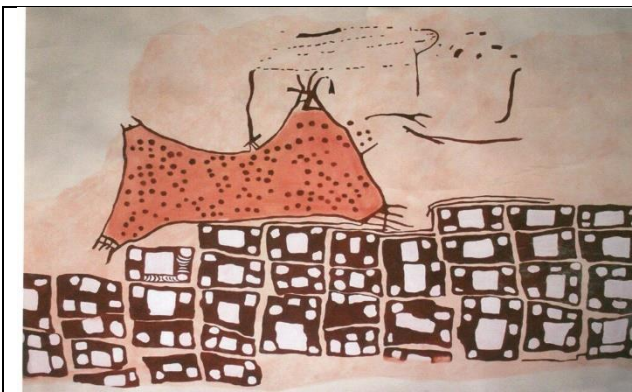


Figure 5. There are a wide variety of picture panels on the walls of houses. Çatalhöyük houses and a picture of a bull (Discover, 2022)

Over time, abandoned houses at Çatalhöyük were filled with earth by newcomers and new houses were built on top, resulting in layers stacked on top of each other, ultimately forming a 21-meter-high mound (Uyanık and Ber, 2016). People at Çatalhöyük lived in adobe houses adjacent to each other with entrances from the roof. These excavation works investigate various topics such as the social structure of the people, their dietary habits, and clothing (Figure 2 and 4). As a Neolithic settlement, Çatalhöyük is one of the most exciting excavation sites in the world of archaeology. British scholar "Prof. Dr. Ian Hodder" has sparked great curiosity worldwide about the details of the people who lived at Çatalhöyük 9,000 years ago (Konyayenigun, 2018).

With the advent of agriculture and their success in this field, the people of Çatalhöyük constructed special-purpose rooms around the main chamber for their specific needs and storage purposes. Most of these rooms had lower ceiling heights compared to the main chamber and were dark, functioning as storage compartments (Mellaart, 2003). It is estimated that these compartments stored sufficient provisions for the needs of the household. Various agricultural products such as wheat, barley, lentils, peas, and dried meats might have been stored separately in each compartment (Hodder, 2006b). The culinary culture of Çatalhöyük, which emerged approximately 8000 years ago, might have adopted

new culinary techniques from the cultures it encountered during the process of transmission from generation to generation (Çetin, 2018).

Çatalhöyük is an important archaeological site with settlements dating back to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Its discovery by James Mellaart in 1958 sparked significant interest in the archaeological world, transforming it into a major cultural heritage site. The discovery of Çatalhöyük challenged the prevailing notion at the time that agriculture and urbanization were only associated with the Mesopotamian region known as the Fertile Crescent (Hodder, 2007: 106). Now, scholars had found traces of agriculture and settled life outside of the Near East. As a result, the discovery of Çatalhöyük reverberated worldwide. This article aims to uncover the culinary culture of Çatalhöyük and contribute new insights to Turkish and global gastronomy literature through an in-depth literature review. Çatalhöyük is known as one of the most significant settlements globally, so understanding its culinary culture is an important step in understanding dietary habits and settlement life throughout human history.

The main staple of the Çatalhöyük people is believed to be grains (Çetin, 2018). It is estimated that Çatalhöyük, located in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, was where humans first began to harvest crops from the land. This is highlighted by the cultivation of wheat by the people, as depicted in wall paintings and prominent ox heads, reflecting their religious beliefs. The findings of Çatalhöyük, aimed at shedding light on the adventures of humankind (Figure 2), reveal new discoveries about human nutrition, bones, and genetic traits that are unknown to modern humans. The Neolithic era was a period in which humans transitioned to a settled lifestyle and adopted a social structure. During this period, Çatalhöyük inhabitants began agriculture while continuing to engage in gathering, and they developed the idea of food storage by adding granaries to their home layouts. Since agriculture was their primary livelihood, the people of Çatalhöyük spent their days cultivating and harvesting fields of grains and legumes (Hodder, 2006a; Çetin, 2018).

According to Çetin (2018), microscopic examinations were conducted by Andrew Fairbairn and Julie Near at Çatalhöyük, revealing a rich collection of botanical remains. These studies indicated the extensive presence of cereal and legume crops, with grains being the main staple (Asouti and Fairbairn, 2003). Among the grains, predominantly common wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) was identified, along with small quantities of einkorn wheat (*Triticum monococcum*) and naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare*). Legumes cultivated included bitter vetch (*Vicia ervilia*), lentils (*Lens culinaris*), peas (*Pisum sativum*), and chickpeas (*cicer arietinum*) (Asouti and Fairbairn, 2003; Hastorf, 1999; Çetin, 2018). Çatalhöyük played a significant role as a major participant in the cultural and economic changes that spread throughout the Near East during the Neolithic Period. Through its strategic location in Anatolia, Neolithic life at Çatalhöyük was disseminated to Europe and beyond (Uyanık and Ber, 2016).

1. People and the Status of the Deceased

It is said that 9,000 years ago, in Çatalhöyük, an ancient settlement where people were just beginning agricultural activities, individuals were shorter, around 1.70 meters tall, compared to modern humans, yet much stronger (Fig. 6). During excavations today, numerous graves and skeletons have been found in houses. Areas where the deceased were buried inside houses have been discovered (Kulturportali, 2018). The presence of leopard motifs adorning the walls of houses in Çatalhöyük is the oldest evidence of leopards living in Anatolia. These paintings are intriguing (Konyayenigun, 2018).



Figure 6. Seated Woman of Çatalhöyük, exhibited at The Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara, Türkiye.

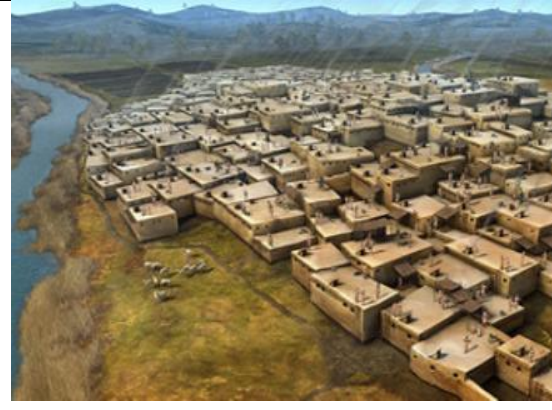


Figure 7. Mudbrick houses of Çatalhöyük with their rooftop doors.

2. UNESCO and Indigenous and Foreign Visitor Density

In 1993, Professor Dr. Ian Hodder of Cambridge University commenced excavations at Çatalhöyük, initially undertaken in collaboration with Cambridge University and subsequently involving London and Stanford Universities (Figure 4). The excavation efforts, which had originally commenced in 1960 at Çatalhöyük, yielded new discoveries over the years. In 2012, Çatalhöyük was officially recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Since then, the excavation site has attracted numerous visitors annually, eager to learn about the unearthed findings (Konyayenigun, 2018).

The excavations at Çatalhöyük, situated in Anatolia and recognized as one of the most significant archaeological sites, were made possible with the support of Yapı Kredi Bank. Among the remarkable discoveries during the excavations were paintings dating back 9,000 years. These ancient artworks, bearing crucial insights into Anatolian civilization, were unearthed in 2007, marking a milestone in archaeological findings, second only to pottery dating back 6,700 years. The inhabitants of Çatalhöyük had coated the walls of their dwellings with white clay to regulate temperature, leading to the meticulous removal of each layer during excavation. Beneath the plaster, vivid red paintings adorned the panel walls, their hues surprisingly fresh. Another intriguing find was a red-painted calf's head hung on a peg inside a dwelling, situated on a platform where nine graves were uncovered (Kulturportali, 2018).

Historical sources not only include architectural, geographical, and archaeological features but also elements that have been important for daily life throughout history. Tourists find historical sources appealing for various reasons. The remnants of past civilizations and the technological level reached by people living in eras without modern machinery can impress tourists. Archaeological sites, especially, fall into this category. One of the archaeological attractions for tourists is mounds. Prehistoric settlements mostly consist of cultural layers formed over time by human communities living in the same area for long periods, referred to as mounds. Mounds are the most tangible sources of information that convey details about early human life, contributing to our understanding of human history. Çatalhöyük is one such example (Tuncer and Bulut, 2019, 285).

3. The First Gastronomic Practices for Humanity

"A careful documentation revealed that the small, round, spongy residue found in the corner of the oven was bread. The thin layer of clay covering the structure has preserved both the wood and the

bread, allowing these organic remnants to survive until today. Radiocarbon tests conducted at the TÜBİTAK Marmara Research Center (MAM) indicated that our sample could date back to approximately 6,600 BCE." "It can be said that this discovery in Çatalhöyük is the oldest bread in the world. Considering observations, analyses, and dating, it's possible to estimate that this organic residue could be about 8,600 years old, representing a reduced version of loaf bread. It hasn't entered the oven but has been leavened, with its starches intact until today. This is an exciting find. There hasn't been any similar discovery of bread in this form found to date, making it arguably the oldest bread known to date."

It is believed that the people of Çatalhöyük enriched their diet by using wild tree food sources alongside cultivated plants. Analyses of collected fruits and nuts have identified pistachio shells (*Pistacia* spp.) as the most common fruit. In addition to this, wild plums (*Prunus* sp.) and almonds (*Amygdalus orientalis*), acorns (*Quercus* spp.) from oak trees (Asouti and Fairbairn, 2003), and seeds such as cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), sheep sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), knotgrass (*Polygonum cognatum*), mustard (*Sisymbrium* sp.), and vetch (*Vicia* sp.) have been found (Ağcabay and Düzenli, 2005; Çetin, 2018).

While agriculture was the preferred livelihood of the people of Çatalhöyük, they also engaged in hunting and animal husbandry. The animal remains unearthed during excavations are quite diverse, but the four main species most commonly consumed are sheep/goat, cattle, pig, and deer. Sheep/goat, comprising all bones, is the most frequently encountered animal species, constituting 63% of all animal remains. Upon examination of the sheep/goat remains at Çatalhöyük, it was observed that there were more sheep bones than goats. Comparison of sheep bone measurements known from other settlements in Anatolia with measurements obtained from various wild sheep species, and considering the frequent discovery of young sheep bones during excavations, it has been concluded that the sheep at Çatalhöyük could have been domesticated (Çetin, 2018).

Various traces of consumption methods have been found for food sources such as pistachios, acorns, and wild plums at Çatalhöyük. Dried pistachios were presented as a snack consumed as a simple bulgur pilaf sprinkled with spices or added to a snack called "kavurga," fried in oil for sweetness. Oak acorns, which were roasted over fire in winter months, were buried in soil to sweeten and then roasted over coals or used as a garnish alongside plain bulgur pilaf. Dried wild plums were served as a snack with raisins and also served as compote alongside rice dishes; additionally, they were added to lentil soup, leek, and occasionally meat dishes as a sweetener. Moreover, it is speculated that oak acorn shells may have been used in yogurt fermentation in Çatalhöyük households (Çetin, 2018).

From a nutritional standpoint, the discovery of fossils such as charcoal, grains, seeds, wild fruits, and plant husks holds significant importance. Likewise, the identification of hearths, storage containers, food processing implements, and areas designated for product storage in neighboring households suggests that these communities effectively managed food production and storage procedures. The presence of items such as wooden bowls, clay pots, and baskets made from plants indicates that these products were used, processed, and stored for a long time. These plant-based products indicate that they could be produced in the following year. Among the plants used in meals are wheat, barley, peas, lentils, wild almonds, oak, and thorn. Additionally, it can be said that herbs such as rye, chickpeas, lentils, figs, plums, sumac, blackberries, mallow, clover, and black pepper were consumed, and these plants were part of agricultural data (Batu, 2016).

The Anatolian Peninsula has long served as a vital bridge connecting Asia and Europe. Despite its rugged terrain, its strategic geographical location and abundant natural resources have made it a favored region throughout history (Yalçınkaya, 2000; Sevin, 2013). The Neolithic Age stands as a

pivotal era in humanity's cultural evolution and socioeconomic development, profoundly shaping the course of the 21st century. During this epoch, significant transformations occurred in human lifestyles and subsistence strategies, marking a shift from temporary natural shelters to permanent settlements, and from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to agriculture and animal husbandry. The rise of village communities centered around food production played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for modern civilizations. This new way of life, which initially emerged in Anatolia and the Near East, underwent a developmental process spanning approximately 4000 years within the region. Subsequently, its influence spread to Europe, contributing significantly to the formation of European civilization (Aksoy and Çetin, 2018; Güldemir, 2009).

4. Tools and equipments used in the kitchen

When it comes to kitchen utensils, various types of pottery made from baked clay are used in daily life by the local people, with flat bottoms, spherical bodies, mouths slightly narrower than the bodies, with or without lids, in various sizes, sometimes with one handle and sometimes with two (Figure 8). In this regard, it is observed that there are structural and shape similarities in the pottery types used in the Çatalhöyük kitchen. It is expressed that the pottery is especially used by the local people for cooking meals and storing food (Aksoy and Çetin, 2018).



Figure 8. Black and brick-coloured pots and bowls made of terracotta with coarse-grained paste and without wheels were found (Konyavalılıđı, 2024).

Çatalhöyük community is known to have utilized drying methods in their daily lives, and therefore, in their early periods, they carried out the firing processes of clay balls made from clay due to the absence of heat-resistant vessels. All this information indicates how much traces contemporary kitchen culture of the 21st century can carry from ancient civilizations' cultures and the necessity of tracing the origins of Anatolian culinary culture back to the Neolithic Age (Çetin, 2018). In this context, when kitchen utensils are considered, various types of pottery made from baked clay are used in daily life by the local people, with flat bottoms, spherical bodies, mouths slightly narrower than the bodies, with or without lids, in various sizes, sometimes with one handle and sometimes with two.

After learning the production of pottery with sand additives, the people of Çatalhöyük observed that pottery became indispensable in their life cycles for the firing processes (Hodder, 2006a). During excavations, tools such as stone hand mills, grinding stones, wrist stones, green stone axes, chisels, salt cellars, and obsidian knives, bone mixing tools, deep spoons, ladles, and spatulas were found (Mellaart, 2003; Çetin, 2018). Over time, the people of Çatalhöyük learned to make pottery from

thick-edged, shallow, vegetal additive clay but did not use these pots for firing purposes (Yalman, 2006: 36-37). It is thought that these vessels were used to store and serve meals. Çetin (2018) provided important information about the structures related to the kitchen, utensils, food sources, and dietary habits of the Çatalhöyük settlement. The structures related to the kitchen include hearths, ovens; utensils include pots, bowls, plates, spoons, various mixing tools, grinding stones, clay balls, tripods, and spice containers.

It has been observed that hearths, such as those in Çatalhöyük, are not positioned on the south facade of the houses, and it has been concluded that two types of ovens were used. The first one is a low-base oven, and the other is a high-base oven located about 1 meter above the ground. The low-base oven shows similarities in shape to the oven used in Çatalhöyük. Additionally, it is noted that the oven is not located in the kitchen but constructed in the courtyard of the house (Aksoy and Çetin, 2018). Kitchen structures used by the local people in the Çatalhöyük region include hearths, ovens, tandirs, biteks, and bastiriks. Mud was used by the local people in the construction of the hearth. However, it can be said that it underwent some changes over time in terms of its shape and was modernized to meet daily needs.

With the transition of the Çatalhöyük community to agriculture, it is known that they added pantries to their house layouts to store and preserve their food, and they made fixed compartments in their pantries to store their food separately. Although no such kitchen structure has been found in archaeological excavations in Çatalhöyük, it is thought that the bastirik, which was used to keep food cold during a period when refrigerators and freezers were not common, could have also been used in Çatalhöyük based on discussions with the local people (Aksoy and Çetin, 2018).

In conclusion, Çatalhöyük is a vast settlement area dating back 9,000 years, rich in cultural heritage from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Excavations ongoing since the 1960s have unearthed a plethora of significant findings. Particularly, valuable insights have emerged regarding agriculture, food production, nutrition, and culinary practices. Çatalhöyük has been identified as one of the places where agriculture began during the Neolithic era, with evidence of cultivation, processing, and storage of agricultural products. The continuity of dietary habits over hundreds of years is observed, which is quite intriguing. Furthermore, it has been noted that social traditions and behaviors remained relatively unchanged over time, indicating a certain conservatism in their culture. Information about culinary culture has been gleaned from various artifacts such as botanical remains, animal bones, fish and bird remains, microfauna, and organic residues. Woven baskets, clay cooking balls, ceramic vessels, stone tools, and grinders provide significant clues in this regard. Evidence of various cooking techniques, including drying, frying, smoking, pounding, grinding, straining, salting, fermenting, slicing, and chopping, has been found within the indoor spaces. While pottery was scarce in the early layers, only a few pots were used primarily for storing oil. Storage at these levels was typically done in organic containers, especially those made from leather and plaster-coated permanent vessels (Bursalı, 2014).

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