

## **Examples of the first towns on earth: Çatal Hüyük**

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- Today we will look at a somewhat later large, early town that happens to have survived and been excavated, as a further example of the first towns on earth: Çatal Hüyük.
- Çatal Hüyük
  - located in Anatolia, where a river breaks up into branches in an inland delta, forming a marsh
    - notice that Çatal Hüyük is far, far away from Jericho
  - First settled some time before 7400 BC
    - (usually given as 6500 bc, the lower case "bc" indicating an uncalibrated radiocarbon date)
    - Notice that this is more or less when PPNA Jericho was being abandoned; Çatal Hüyük is later than the first walled town of Jericho
    - there was no direct connection, although both shared some of the same general cultural traits that were widespread throughout Anatolia and Southwest Asia
  - First excavated in early 1960s (1961-1963, 1965) by James Mellaart
  - More is being excavated now (the current excavation project has excellent web pages; click the link on the class web page)
  - Incredible preservation
    - the current excavators think this is because they quickly ran out of fuel needed to prepare the good, hard material widely used at this time for plastering floors
    - and began using a softer mud plaster that required replastering every year or even more often
    - every replastering sealed in evidence from the previous year and gradually raised the floor level
  - much of the Neolithic site is not covered by later occupations
  - Remarkably stable, relatively unchanging culture during 1000 years of occupation (to about 6400 BC, calibrated)
  - Rectangular flat-roofed houses stuck together with back-to-back walls, something like a southwestern pueblo, stepping up the side of the mound.
    - one story tall, some possibly with a light structure on the roof
    - Walls made of mud bricks filling spaces between massive squared oak posts
    - Generous-sized rooms average 6 by 5 m (20 by 15 feet)
    - Small windows high in the walls
    - No ground-level doorways
      - Entrance from roof only, by climbing down a ladder
  - Possibly arranged for defense
    - that might explain the lack of doors and only high, small windows
    - but no known town wall, few weapons, etc.
  - Small side rooms entered only from main room through small doorways, contained storage bins possibly for grain
  - Raised bench around 3 sides of room, apparently for sleeping and activities (burials underneath, too)

- Hearths and raised, plastered “ovens”
- Traces of plant fiber mats on floors
- Walls plastered in cream color, often with paintings in red, yellow, brown, blue, green, purple, and gray; mica included may have added glitter
- Some walls have low reliefs modeled on them in mud plaster
- Some paintings seem to imitate complex geometric designs similar to modern Anatolian kilims (Turkish rugs)
- Rooms were kept clean, trash dumped outside in abandoned houses and spaces in between
- Formation of site:
  - rooms built and used
  - replastered and repainted repeatedly
  - eventually abandoned and allowed to partially fill with trash, or rebuilt immediately
  - walls knocked down to partially fill room, new walls built using stubs of old ones as foundations
- Religion
  - of the forty rooms excavated by the original project, over 1/4 were sufficiently decorated that Mellaart called them “shrines”
    - although the current excavators feel that there was simply a range of decoration, from plain to elaborate, rather than two distinct kinds of rooms
  - repeated repainting of wall designs; Mellaart suggests maybe annually
  - some wall paintings may be related to burials immediately below them
  - aurochs (wild ox) imagery
    - “bucrania” (the horns and top of skull of a cow or similar animal) on walls, pillars, and in rows on benches
  - reliefs on walls
  - stone and clay female “statues”, showing young woman; woman giving birth to child, ram, or bull; older woman; possibly variants of a single deity
    - a few male “statues” as well
    - these “statues” are small, really figurines
    - a recent find is a familiar fat female on the front, but a skeleton on the back!
      - illustrates how hard it can be to infer ideology from objects
  - Mellaart felt that much of the imagery at Çatal Hüyük represented human females, suggesting some beliefs about fertility or female deities
    - the recent work has found a better preserved example of one of these motifs, and it had the head and paws of an animal, maybe a leopard, rather than a human
    - so it looks like the prevalence of human female imagery at Çatal Hüyük may have been overstated
  - Mellaart reported that in some burials, the condition and positions of the bones indicate that the body was exposed to the elements until little flesh was left, often without its head, and then the bones were buried in a room or shrine
    - this is probably what the wall paintings of birds and headless bodies represents
    - the recent excavations have found only intact burials, or burials intact but missing specific parts like arms or the head
    - the recent excavators suggest that Mellaart may have been mistaken about his burials

- human heads or crania were set up in shrines, in baskets beneath ox heads, etc.
  - one with cowry shells placed in eye sockets, like the roughly contemporary PPNB ones at Jericho
  - a recently excavated burial of an adult female was holding a plaster-modeled skull in her arms
- much has been written about what all this symbolism might mean
  - for our purposes, the important point is not the content of the beliefs, but rather that:
    - a lot of effort and space was devoted to some kinds of ritual practices
    - these efforts were scattered among many separate, modest rooms not very different from living spaces
    - as opposed to just one or a few temples where many people would have gathered and a few would have presided
    - so this religion would have been practiced by families or many individual specialists, probably part-time, rather than a single, powerful institution
- The subsistence base was the usual SW Asian Neolithic resources:
  - farmed wheat (emmer, einkorn, and bread varieties), barley, pea
  - gathered nuts: almonds, acorns, pistachios
  - probably herds of sheep and cattle (but possibly hunted)
  - hunting of wild oxen, red deer, wild ass, etc.
- Trade
  - lots of obsidian, often said to have been the source from which came much of the obsidian used in western Anatolia, Cyprus, and the Levant
    - except that the source is about 180 km (about 110 miles, maybe 5 days on foot) away; “control” cannot have been very tight
    - Caches of up to 23 obsidian spear points buried in bags below floors: storage of wealth?
  - What they got in exchange:
    - flint from Syria
    - Shells, especially *Dentalium*, from Mediterranean
    - possibly copper?
- Many craft items and lots of waste from craft production found (cut bone fragments, stone flakes, etc.)
  - pottery, but rare and simple; plain cooking pots; minimal painted lines, no plastic decoration
  - stone beads, figurines, and vessels
  - grinding equipment
  - greenstone axes and adzes
  - bone rings, hooks, etc.
  - native copper and lead beads
    - (“native” metals are rare finds of natural metal flakes or chunks ready to be hammered, versus ores from which metal can be extracted by heating under special conditions)
  - ochres and other pigments
  - wooden cups, platters, boxes
  - seals made of pottery, possibly for applying paint to textiles, or for body painting (not used on clay, like later seals)

- exceptional flaked stonework that presumably could only have been made by skilled specialists
- ground obsidian mirrors, very labor-intensive
- woven wool textiles, maybe as complex as modern Turkish rugs, if the wall paintings are representations of them
- i.e. clearly at least part-time craft specialists, probably some degree of interdependence and exchange for products made by others
  - this is much more marked at Çatal Hüyük than at Jericho
- Social status differentiation
  - by sex
    - burials of both sexes contained textiles, wooden vessels and boxes
    - female burials: jewelry, bone spatulae and spoons, obsidian mirrors, baskets with red pigment powder
      - but also adzes, which are heavy woodworking tools, for tasks like squaring up beams
    - male burials: maceheads, flint daggers, obsidian points, bone hooks and eyes, belt fasteners
      - suggesting hunting, maybe fighting; fasteners suggest more warm clothing, possibly needed for hunting in winter
      - but also clay seals... why? body painting?
    - wall painting of bearded figures hunting suggests that hunting was done by men
  - by religious role?
    - burials outside shrine rooms tend to have only a few personal ornaments
    - burials in shrine rooms often have more goods, including tools, utensils, etc. -- things beyond what the deceased probably carried on them in life
    - suggests that ritual activities were associated with access to more goods, that is, higher status
      - did ritual activities bring people high status, or did high-status people do rituals?
      - or were high-status people just more likely to be buried in the ritual places?
    - the burials with the most goods are of females in “shrine” rooms
      - combined with all the female imagery in the shrines, this suggests that some women may have had the preeminent roles in religious life
      - and a high material status to go with it
      - some people see this as evidence of a matriarchal society (one in which women hold most political power)
        - does it necessarily mean that?
- Total area of mound is 13 ha (33.5 acres)
  - roughly ten times the size of PPNA Jericho
  - over 6 times the open area of SSU’s main quad
- Population estimates vary widely, from 1,650 to 10,000
  - Unknown whether excavated areas are representative of whole site
  - Unknown what portion of the whole mound was occupied at any given time
  - Unknown how much space might have been open, for gatherings, ceremonies, market, animals, etc.
  - Unknown what fraction of rooms might have been abandoned at any give time

- The recent project at Çatal Hüyük estimated around 5,000 people
  - based on estimates of density of houses across the site, made by scraping the surface to find walls
  - and a guess of 4 people per house, with full occupation
  - they have also suggested that it fluctuated between 3,000 and 8,000 people
- Adult burials average 34 years old for men, 30 for women, but some people lived past 60
- several sites contemporary with Çatal Hüyük are known
  - all considerably smaller
  - could Çatal Hüyük have been a special-purpose site that served others, maybe specializing in religious, craft, or other activities?
- Were the people at Çatal Hüyük living in a city? a civilization?
- The overall pattern:
  - Small farming villages were common in Southwest Asia from about 8500 BC on
  - around 8000 to 5000 BC, in various places, some of these villages grew larger
  - with more complex social, economic, and religious arrangements
  - these were widely scattered in both space and time, and relatively independent of each other
  - they were isolated flashes of complexity, or social experiments
  - some lasted a long time, but none developed into unequivocal “civilization”
  - Our examples of Jericho and Çatal Hüyük represent early steps in the direction of civilization, but they reached stable configurations and did not get larger or more complex after that
  - it wasn’t until around 5000 BC that one of these societies developed a kind of organization that was not stable, but continued to get bigger and more complex, eventually producing cities and civilization: the Sumerians in Mesopotamia