

## **Examples of the first towns on Earth: Asikli Höyük and Çatal Hüyük**

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- Last time, we looked at some examples of early group projects that suggest increasing social complexity in the early centuries of the Neolithic
  - the wall and tower at the small settlement of Jericho
  - the ritual structures at Göbekli Tepe, apparently built by mobile foragers
- A bit later in the Neolithic, contemporary with the Pre-pottery Neolithic B, larger, denser towns began to develop in a few places
  - some of the best studied, earliest examples are from Anatolia
  - there was no direct connection between cultures in the Levant and those of Anatolia
  - although both shared some of the same general cultural traits that were widespread throughout Anatolia and Southwest Asia
  - you can't draw a line of development from PPNA Jericho, through Göbekli Tepe, to Asikli Höyük
  - instead, these are examples from different regions of some ways that societies in different places were diversifying
- Asikli Höyük
  - located in a cold, dry region that is just able to support dry (non-irrigated) agriculture
  - a sizable tell, composed of many layers of rectangular to trapezoidal mudbrick house remains
    - 3.5 to 4.0 ha in area
  - mostly the upper levels have been excavated, since those would have to be destroyed to get to the lower ones
  - these upper levels are dated to 8200-7500 cal BC
  - the lower, earlier levels look similar in the few places that they have been exposed
    - but had not been dated as of 1999
  - the upper, later levels were occupied by people with a mixed foraging and farming subsistence base
    - got more than half of their diet from wild grains, other wild plants, and hunted wild animals
    - but also farmed three varieties of domesticated wheat, as well as barley
    - the earliest inhabitants may have farmed even less, but there is much less evidence from these levels
  - houses are structurally independent, but mostly pressed one up against the other
    - that is, the site is a collection of independently built houses, each presumably occupied by a nuclear family
    - there are a few gaps or alleyways between some of the houses, but they are short, irregular, often blocked, not apparently planned or meant for access
    - almost no streets as we usually think of a town
    - access to most rooms must have been from the roof; there are no ground-level doorways, and few open spaces for doorways to open onto

- some open lots or plazas between houses were used to dump garbage, and probably as outdoor, sunlit working areas for butchering animals, chipping stone, working bone, etc.
- the houses were built, renovated, eventually abandoned, and then a new one built directly over the walls of the old one, or stepped slightly to adjust the sizes of the rooms
  - suggesting that the lots may have been owned by individual families, passed down, and reused, without much ability to affect all the other family lots that hemmed them in
- many rooms have hearths, suggesting that they were residential
  - at least some had woven mats on the floor, leaving impressions in the clay below
  - there are a few storage bins in some of these rooms, as expected for sedentary foragers or farmers
  - a few rooms are small, or long and narrow, or have stone slab floors, or other features that might indicate that they were storerooms, also to be expected
  - but surprisingly little evidence of storage overall
- obsidian
  - located right by the Hasan Dag volcano, the region has many outcrops of good obsidian
  - lots of obsidian tools
    - mostly with use-wear suggesting use in working leather, bone, and wood, not much sign of harvesting grains
  - residents may have been involved in trading obsidian to more distant locations, including the Levant and the island of Cypress
    - since this Anatolian obsidian is found in those regions
- lots of bone tools and implements
  - awls for working leather?
  - hooks and fasteners?
- many grinding stones, as expected for foragers gathering wild grain and farmers harvesting domesticated grain
- stone, bone, tooth, and native copper beads
  - almost all from burials
- there is an apparent street, paved with pebbles, in the southern end of the excavated area
- the street separates the regular houses from a complex of several larger, more substantial rooms
  - with much thicker walls on unusual stone foundations
  - thick floors that made from a paste of ground volcanic tuff that were painted red or yellow at different times, and polished
  - the walls and a built-in bench were also painted red
  - with a nearby large hearth or oven
  - an apparent porch overlooking the river
  - two burials under the floor
    - one with a young woman and an old man
    - the other with a young woman and an infant
      - this woman had a trepanation (surgical removal of part of the skull)
      - which she evidently survived for only a few days
- this may be a ritual structure that served much of the community (since there is only one known)

- or it might be a residence for privileged people
- or both
- a possible enclosing wall was added in the latest excavated levels
  - not nearly as substantial as the wall at Jericho
  - an odd, irregular curving shape, as if it followed the property lines associated with several different family dwellings
  - only visible in one area, so it is not clear that it actually enclosed anything
  - it may or may not be defensive
  - it may or may not represent a group project
- implications
  - this is a good-sized, dense village
  - originally settled by people who were only part-time farmers, still doing a lot of foraging
  - so?
    - maybe agriculture is not the only, or even the main, reason for people to settle into large villages
      - this is also being suggested at Çatal Hüyük
    - or maybe just committing to agriculture for a portion of the diet is enough to encourage settling in large, permanent villages
      - but why not small, dispersed ones, so everyone could be close to their land?
- the special-purpose buildings suggest either
  - group efforts for ritual purposes
    - if the buildings served most or all of the people at the site
  - or a few higher-status people
    - if the buildings were mostly for their personal use
  - or both
    - if the buildings served most of the population, but were connected to a few who lived in them, ran the rituals in them, or whatever
- Çatal Hüyük
  - located in Anatolia, where a river breaks up into branches in an inland delta, forming a marsh,
    - far from the Levant, but only maybe five day's walk from Asikli Höyük, in the same general region and cultural tradition
  - First settled some time before 7400 BC
    - (this date is often given as 6500 bc, the lower case "bc" indicating an uncalibrated radiocarbon date)
    - perhaps 1000 years after Asikli Höyük was founded
    - Asikli Höyük may have been abandoned by this time
      - or the later levels that were contemporary with Çatal Hüyük may just have been eroded away and destroyed by farming
  - Çatal Hüyük basically carries on a tradition very much like that at Asikli Höyük
    - but Çatal Hüyük was three to four times larger in size, and probably in population
    - and had different, more elaborate ritual practices
    - and has been extensively studied

- but, oddly enough, shows *less* evidence of social stratification and group coordination
- 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 over 1000 years of occupation (to about 6200 BC, calibrated)
- Similar to Asikli Höyük, the general plan comprises 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 repaintings of wall designs; Mellaart suggests maybe annually
  - some wall paintings may be related to burials immediately below them
  - aurochs (wild ox) imagery
    - “bucraneas” (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

- note that this seems to be different from the earlier town of Asikli Höyük
  - where there was virtually no evidence of ritual activity in the houses
  - but there was a special purpose room complex that may have been a ritual center for the whole town
- maybe this is a reminder that we should not think in terms of simple progress from simpler to more complex social organization
- or maybe it hints that there is a community-serving temple at Çatal Hüyük waiting to be found
- 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, the area around the Hasan Dag volcano, is about 180 km (about 110 miles, maybe 5 days on foot) away
    - worse yet for this view, the source is located in between Çatal Hüyük and the Levant
      - Çatal Hüyük would have been a long and unnecessary detour in travel between Hasan Dag and most of the distant places where the obsidian was used
    - so “control” cannot have been very tight
    - nevertheless, excavators have found caches of up to 23 obsidian spear points buried in bags below floors
      - more than any one household would need
      - this looks like storage of wealth, intended for exchange
      - maybe Çatal Hüyük was an important node in trade from Hasan Dag towards the west
      - or maybe this exchange was local or even internal to the town
  - Other exotic goods, maybe acquired by exchanging obsidian:
    - flint from Syria
    - Shells, especially *Dentalium*, from the Mediterranean
    - native copper, from unknown but possibly distant sources
  - 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, and somewhat more marked than at Asikli Höyük
- Social status differentiation
  - (this discussion is based on Mellaart's work; it may have to be revised in light of recent findings)
  - 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 three times the size of Asikli Höyük

- 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 villages of people practicing some agriculture were becoming increasingly common in Southwest Asia from about 10,000 BC on
  - around 9000 to 5000 BC, in various places, some of these villages grew larger
  - with more complex social, economic, and religious arrangements
  - and some people who were still mobile foragers also began organizing and supporting impressive collective efforts, as at Göbekli Tepe
  - these varied new social forms 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”
  - village life in the Levant and Anatolia represent early steps in the direction of civilization, but they seem to have reached stable configurations and did not get larger or more complex after that
  - it wasn't until around 5000 BC that societies in a formerly peripheral area developed a kind of organization that was not stable, but continued to get bigger and more complex, eventually producing cities and civilization
  - the area was Mesopotamia, and we will look at that next time