

CHAPTER TWO

THE LATE NEOLITHIC AT ÇATALHÖYÜK IN THE TPC AREA: AN OVERVIEW

ARKADIUSZ MARCINIAK, PATRYCJA FILIPOWICZ, AND KATARZYNA HARABASZ

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at providing an overview of the results of excavations in the TPC Area in Çatalhöyük East. The project was carried out during the years 2012–2017 and was directed by Arkadiusz Marciniak. It comprised an integral element of the Çatalhöyük Research Project led by Ian Hodder. The TPC Area is located directly to the south of the Mellaart Area A and is placed directly to the east of the South Area (Fig. 2-1). It consists of four trenches located in a north-south alignment. The northernmost Trench 1 is 5 × 5 m in size and is located directly to the south of Mellaart Area A. Trench 2 has dimensions of 5 × 6 m and is placed directly south of Trench 1. The following Trench 4 measures ca. 8 × 6 m. Directly to the south is Trench 3. It is quadrilateral in shape with southern and eastern edges being 10 m long and the northern edge measuring 6 m in length. Trench 3 was further expanded to the west into the South Area in the form of two rectangular trenches measuring 2 × 6 and 2 × 3 m respectively. The latter trench physically links the TPC and South Area strands. Altogether, an overall surface of ca. 170 m² was excavated in the TPC Area.

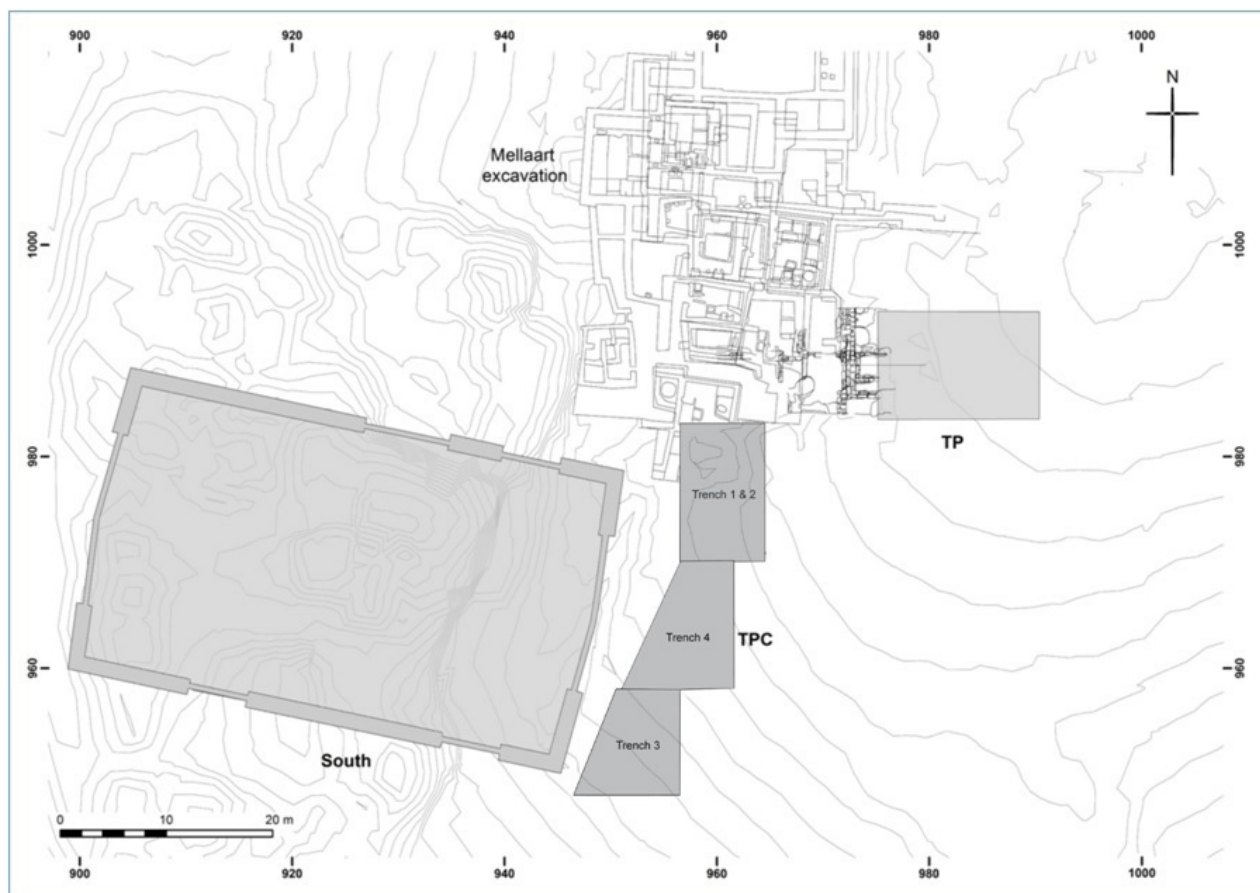


Figure 2-1. TPC Area and other excavations areas in the southern part of the East Mound at Çatalhöyük (drawing by Camilla Mazzucato, revised by Gareth Cork).

The TPC Area is located in the previously unexplored zone on the southwestern slope of the southern prominence of the East mound. It was deliberately selected to investigate the hitherto poorly recognized developments at the settlement in the final centuries of its occupation. The Late Neolithic was a period of profound transformation of local

community, marking the disintegration of their constitutive principles, the building up of new arrangements, interaction with the dynamically growing communities in near and further regions, and the eventual failure to cope with these newly emerging challenges leading to the demise of the community and abandonment of the settlement. Accordingly, the project aimed at investigating different dimensions of this rapidly changing community and the circumstances of its existence, including house architecture, organization of space, burial practices, and material culture, as well as farming, husbandry practices, landscape exploitation, procurement of raw materials, exchange patterns, demography, ritual and ceremonial practices, and social organization.

The tempo and scale of these developments can only be revealed by meticulous recognition of the stratigraphic sequence and dating its subsequent stages. An important goal of the project involved also establishing a stratigraphic connection between the TPC and South Area strands (see Bayliss et al. 2015; Hodder 2014) making it possible to build up a new and complete stratigraphy of the Neolithic occupation of the East mound settlement, solely excavated within the Çatalhöyük Research Project. The corresponding goal was also to link the stratigraphic sequence of the TPC Area with the chronologically corresponding sequence in the TP Area, located directly east of Mellaart Area A (Marciniak and Czerniak 2012; Marciniak et al. 2015a).

This chapter presents an outline of the Late Neolithic stratigraphy in the TPC Area as well as the stratigraphic overlap between the uppermost levels in the South Area and the bottommost levels in the TPC Area. Furthermore, the chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of two major aspects of Late Neolithic archaeology in the TPC Area, namely domestic architecture and burial practices. As the corresponding developments revealed in the first three years (2012–2014) of the campaign have already been presented (Marciniak 2015), this chapter will focus on discoveries from the final years of the project (2015–2017). The chapter will conclude by presenting a synthetic overview of major developments in the Late Neolithic at Çatalhöyük, based on the results in the TPC Area and corresponding developments unearthed in the neighboring TP Area excavated in the 2000s (Marciniak and Czerniak 2012).

THE LATE NEOLITHIC STRATIGRAPHY AND PHASING IN THE TPC AREA: THE SOUTH AND TP STRANDS

The TP strand was developed for the uppermost levels of the East mound at Çatalhöyük in 2010, covering both the Late Neolithic as well as different post-Neolithic phases of the mound occupation. It is an integral element of the new phasing program introduced by the Çatalhöyük Research Project (Farid 2014). It was originally designed for the TP Area and later adopted for the TPC Area. The Late Neolithic levels were labeled using letters of the alphabet from TP M through TP R, substituting for Mellaart's levels 0, I, and II (1967). An implementation of the Late Neolithic phasing development in the TP Area was possible thanks to the recognition of superimposed dwelling structures. A detailed examination of the TPC stratigraphy revealed its direct correspondence with the stratigraphy and phasing developed for the TP Area. Consequently, the TP strand was adopted for this area and all ten dwelling structures (B.121, 122, 150, 166, 110, 152, 109, 115, 133, and Sp.520) unearthed there were ascribed to one of the six Late Neolithic TP Levels (for more, see Marciniak 2019). Consequently, the TP Levels are now used to label all the uppermost strata of the main strand of the East mound at Çatalhöyük. They are placed directly above the South Levels used to delimit the strata from the very bottom of the mound (see, e.g. Bayliss et al. 2015). The early phase of the Late Neolithic in the TP and TPC Areas overlaps with the two uppermost levels in the South sequence, namely Level TP M that corresponds with Level South T, while Level TP N corresponds with Level South S (see Regan 2014).

One of the major achievements of the work in the TPC Area was establishing a physical connection between the TPC and South strands. This made it possible to link both stratigraphic sequences and build up a complete stratigraphic strand from the very bottom to the very top of the East mound. It will eventually make it possible to date subsequent phases of the settlement occupation using a Bayesian modeling framework. As of today, only the beginnings (Bayliss et al. 2015) and the final centuries (Marciniak et al. 2015a) of the occupation of the Neolithic settlement have been dated.

With the aim of discovering the relations between B.166 (see below) in the TPC Area and the corresponding structures in the South Area, a ca. 2 m wide strip was excavated that reached the eastern edge of the structures excavated in 2004 and 2005 (Regan 2004, 2005), particularly the platform F.1312 located next to the western wall of B.44 (F.1340) (Fig. 2-2). A blocking, F.8668, made of very firm clay and one course of bricks, was later built on the platform surface. It most likely closed down the opening between B.44 and the area outside directly to the east. It was later truncated by the foundation cut for later wall F.8667, most likely used to stabilize and strengthen the blocking wall. The zone between B.44 and B.166 was later turned into the dumping area filled in with a number of superimposed midden layers deposited against both the wall F.8667 as well as the western F.8681 and the northern F.1077 walls of B.166 (Marciniak et al. 2017).

The TP strand in the TPC Area is characterized by complicated stratigraphy reflecting a complex occupational history, with numerous reconstructions, rebuildings, and abandonments of houses and their changing relations with open spaces of different character.

The earliest Level TP M is represented by four houses (B.121, B.122, B.150, and B.166). These are solid constructions with distinct floors and numerous built-in structures, such as platforms, hearths, ovens, and bins. They have been intensively used as implied by their numerous reconstructions. The walls in three of them, which have been preserved, were covered by plaster and then painted with black and white geometric designs. The houses from this

level are contemporaneous with B.44 in Level South S (Regan 2014). Their abandonment is followed by a short period in which the area went out of permanent use, as manifested by layers of midden and infill with indications of use in the form of hearths and activity areas.



Figure 2-2. Catalhöyük East, TPC Area, western wall of B.44 (F. 1340) and the platform F.1312.

The following TP N is represented by three solid multi-roomed houses (B.110 and B.152, Sp.520) with compound walls but without distinct floors and burials beneath them. They were built either on middens or infill deposits, which marks a discontinuity in the sequence and layout of buildings. They are contemporaneous with B.10 in Level South T (Regan 2014).

Levels TP O and TP P mark a major discontinuity in the occupational sequence. The area might have been abandoned and later re-occupied in the form of some kind of open space, as identified by a solidly made bricky layer with fragments of a tramped floor (20256). After some time, the area went out of use and was transformed into a midden (20232 and 20215). In the TP Area, a hut-type construction, with a light roof, was identified.

Levels TP Q and TP R are characterized by distinct multi-roomed dwelling structures of significant size. They were built directly on top of the midden and infill layers of the open area from the preceding level. Small fragments of two superimposed buildings were recognized in Trench 1 and 2. In the former case, earlier B.115 is represented only by a fragment of an unspecified platform built on a layer of bricks, itself placed directly on midden (20213), and the following make-up layer made of small pebbles (20207). Two distinct superimposed floors were identified. As the house is only preserved in very small fragments, no details of its construction and layout are available. B.109 was fragmentarily preserved, consisting of walls made of greyish/beige bricks of a poor quality. B.133 from Trench 3 and 4 was a large structure composed of rooms of different size.

THE LATE NEOLITHIC ARCHITECTURE IN THE TPC AREA

The earliest dwelling structures unearthed in the TPC Area represent the latest classic houses. They come from Level TPM and are dated back to ca. 6400–6300 BCE. Altogether, four such structures were recognized: B.121, B.122, B.150, and B.166; they have been thoroughly investigated but none of them completely excavated. These are relatively large buildings that were intensively used and rebuilt many times. The walls were plastered and extensively decorated. Internal furnishing comprised distinct floors as well as numerous built-in structures such as platforms, benches, bins, and fire installations. Numerous burials were interred beneath platforms inside the house. Similar to their predecessors from earlier phases, the northern parts of the structures were of ceremonial character while the southern parts served more domestic purposes.

The most clearly recognizable house from this phase is Building 150 in Trench 4 (Marciniak et al. 2017). This ca. 50 m² building (Fig. 2-3) has been reconstructed at least four times (Spaces 639, 637, 612, and 594), as indicated by a

sequence of superimposed floors with corresponding platforms and fire installations. It may have been occupied even longer, as its foundations, and thus earliest occupation, have not been unearthed due to termination of the Çatalhöyük Research Project.



Figure 2-3. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 150.

All four walls of the building have been exposed: west wall (F.7357), north wall (F.8288, F.8267), south wall (F.7499), and east wall (F.8762) (Marciniak et al. 2017). They were plastered over and most likely painted. An internal layout of the house comprised a series of platforms and benches alongside its eastern and northern walls and ovens in the southern part. The north-central platform contained numerous burials (see below). A sequence of superimposed ovens with solidly constructed bases was placed against the southern wall. Next to the ovens, circular pits deliberately cut into the floor contained intentionally placed standing vessels. Similar pot deposits have been recorded in contemporaneous B.166 in Trench 3 (Marciniak et al. 2017) and in B.44 in the South Area (Regan 2014).

The southwest corner of the house (F.8672) seemed to have a special significance, as indicated by a rich concentration of various objects (Marciniak et al. 2017). It was the oldest structure unearthed to date in the entire building, and most likely it is associated with one of the earliest phases of building occupation. It was constructed in the place where the older large platform might have been deliberately cut off to make a space for this room. Three features were sitting directly on this floor: two bins (F.8674, F.8692) with white plastered walls, and an unspecified and plastered clay construction (F.8752), placed against the room's northern wall.

The room contained more than 200 items, mostly worked stones, including stone tools such as querns, pestles, and abrading or polishing items, and a concentration of large animal bones, mostly cattle scapulae and mandibles. It also comprised a rich cluster of special finds (F.8678), including a piece of wooden pounding tool, two extremely well preserved reed containers with seeds (lentils, barley, almond), and a dozen astragali. A clay stamp seal in the shape of a hand with carved geometric patterns came out from a dry sieve of the room infill (23993). The exceptional finds were two large stone anthropomorphic female figurines (32806.x1 and 32806.x2) found nearby (Marciniak et al. 2017). The first (32806.x1) (see below, Fig. 2-8, is around 10 cm high and depicts a seated female, with a corpulent body with breasts, and exaggerated stomach and buttocks. The second very large (see below, Fig. 2-9, 25 cm high) and heavy figurine (32806.x2) made of marble depicts a standing female. Additionally, a cluster of 35 stone tools and worked stones, including a polished mace-head made of red marble and two nicely finished pounding tools, was deposited in rectangular bin F.8674 built on the room floor. Of very similar character was the southwestern room in the neighboring contemporaneous B.44 in the South Area (Regan 2014).

Another distinctive dwelling from this phase is Building 122 from Trench 3 (Marciniak et al. 2017). As only its two last phases have been unearthed, its construction as well as the character of earlier occupational levels remain unknown. Moreover, a large section of its western portion is situated outside the excavated area. This rectangular longitudinal house was oriented along an east-west axis. It was 4 m wide; the area located within the trench was ca. 5 m long. An earlier phase of B.122 comprised a storage room (Space 493) of ca. 3 m² with five rectangular bins. It was

inserted into the previously existing structure, most likely the platform, and was located in the northeastern part of the building. The room infill yielded a great amount of carbonized botanical remains, and a large deposit of naked barley and wheat was found inside the bins (Marciniak et al. 2015b).

The later phase of its occupation involved a construction the room west of this older storage room (Space 562; Fig. 2-4). Its eastern wall re-used the western wall of the latter structure. Its outer surface was plastered and painted with



Figure 2-4. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 122, Space 562.



Figure 2-5. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 122, Space 562, geometric decoration of the northern wall.

black and white geometric designs in the form of vertical and transverse sets of parallel lines (Fig. 2-5). A similar decoration was applied on the northern wall. The room had numerous internal features, such as platforms with burials underneath (see below), benches and bucranium in its northern and eastern parts, and ovens and hearths in the

southern part. Two extraordinary features comprised small painted pillars placed on the bench against the northern wall of the room.

A similar dwelling is Building 166 located in the western part of Trench 3 and southeastern part of the South Area (Marciniak et al. 2017). The northern (F.3878) and southern (F.7174, F.8680) walls in Trench 3 continued westwards into the South Area. The eastern wall (F.3879) was placed in Trench 3, while the western wall (F.8681) of the building was placed in the South Area. Only the eastern part of the building in Trench 3 was excavated.

The earliest phase (Sp.515) is represented by a sequence of platforms in the northeastern part and the floor area with fire installations in the south. Two platforms (F.8669 and F.8670) were placed one next to the other along the eastern wall of the building. Their surfaces were plastered but not painted. The southernmost platform (F.8670) abutted the bench-like feature (F.8686). Interestingly, the platforms appear to have been inserted into the room with their eastern edges abutting the already existing plastered surface of the eastern wall of the building. The following two platforms were built directly on top of their predecessors, respecting their shape and size. The northern platform (F.8660) was constructed above platform F.8669, while the southern platform (F.8661) was above F.8670. The latest platform (F.7173) was most likely the only built-in structure, representing the final phase of the B.166 usage. The burials were interred beneath the platforms (see below). The dirty area in the southern part of the structure underwent some kind of reconstruction after the fire installation went out of use. This involved the construction of a north-south partition wall (F.8684), the floor surface (32824), and the bench-like construction (F.8686).

These three buildings are contemporary with B.121 in TPC Trench 2 (Marciniak 2015). They represent the last classic Neolithic houses. Their end marks a major departure in the architectural forms, construction tradition, exploitation character, and abandonment practices of the Neolithic house.

The following Level TP N represents the first departure from the hitherto dominant architecture. These are solid multi-roomed houses with compound walls that lack floors and corresponding built-in features as well as in-house burials. These are represented by two buildings: B.110 (see Marciniak 2015), B.152, and Sp.520. B.152 can only be partially reconstructed, as its southern part is outside the limit of excavation (Marciniak 2019). The house is made of the solid northwest-southeast wall (F.3852) and two perpendicular walls (F.3850, F.3851). In the northern area, these walls form three small rooms serving unspecified purposes. These walls do not respect the alignment of the preceding B.150 and have been placed directly on the platforms and floors from the previous phase (Sp.594). The building had neither its own floor nor any built-in structures.

Later in time, the site architecture underwent further changes, and the look of the buildings changed significantly. B.133 from Level TP R is the latest building in the TPC Area discovered in the last three years of the project. It is contemporary with B.115 and 109 discovered earlier (see Marciniak 2015). It was composed of a number of small rooms, most likely surrounding some kind of large room. Altogether, three rooms have been identified in Trenches 3 and 4. The most southern room (Sp.517) had a distinct floor. The second room (Sp.557) is placed directly north of Sp.517, but its floor was indistinct. The northernmost room (Sp.560) had three partition walls and two postholes. The building had neither built-in structures nor burials beneath the floor. However, the reconstruction of B.133 is very tentative due to its considerable destruction by the post-Neolithic occupation and post-depositional processes.

THE LATE NEOLITHIC BURIAL PRACTICES IN THE TPC AREA

The excavations in the TPC Area in the years 2015–2017 brought about a discovery of 37 individuals interred beneath the floor of the latest classic houses: B.122, 150, and 160 from Level TP M. No burials were found in any of the later Levels TP N–R (Table 2-1).

The deceased were assembled in specially prepared burial pits placed, in most instances, in the north or northeastern parts of the building. They were buried in a flexed position, predominantly on the left side. The deceased were sometimes decorated with beaded necklaces made of stones or shells. Plant-based mats comprised an important element of the grave goods. The remains of new individuals were often put either in an already-occupied burial pit or associated burial contexts, destroying the remains of the earlier buried individuals. The deceased were placed in the grave within a short span of time, as indicated by a very similar condition and color of the bone.

The largest number of burials comes from B.150. In total, as many as 23 individuals were found beneath this structure's northeastern platform. The remains were heavily commingled, their body condition varied due to multiple openings of the grave and the intentional manipulation of previously-interred remains. Among them were nineteen adults over 20 years of age and four pre-adults, i.e. juveniles (Marciniak et al. 2017). During these burial activities, some anatomical parts of remains buried previously were deliberately removed and then placed among different individuals, most likely as a part of some kind of ritual practice.

The sequence of burials deposited in the burial pit beneath the eastern platform begins with two primary individuals. The first inhumation was a woman aged 25–35 years, who died in childbirth and was buried along with the 40th week fetus (Fig. 2-6). The body of the deceased was in an articulated position, lying on the left side. Her bones showed traces of cured rib fractures, osteoporosis, and spinal fusion, which indicates a large calcification, loss of bone mass during pregnancy, as well as an injury that occurred during the woman's life.

The second individual, who is of particular interest in terms of funeral practices occurring in the Late Neolithic period, was a middle-aged man (Fig. 2-7). Red pigment in the form of a straight stroke of paint was placed on the

TP Level	Building	Sp/F/Sk	Age	Sex	Deposition	MNI
TP M	150	594/3868/32848	3	5	6	23
TP M		594/3868/32835	3	5	6	
TP M		594/3868/23972	5	4	6	
TP M		594/3868/23965	5	3	6	
TP M		594/3868/23954	3	8	5	
TP M		594/3868/23953	1	3	6	
TP M		594/3868/23904	6	9	1	
TP M		594/3868/23903	5	5	6	
TP M		594/3868/23902	3	5	6	
TP M		594/3868/23901	1	7	6	
TP M		594/3868/23900	3	7	6	
TP M		594/3868/23799	1	4	1	
TP M		594/3868/23798	1	4	4	
TP M		594/3868/23783	1	5	2	
TP M		594/3867/32818	5	5	4	
TP M		594/3867/23957	5	6	6	
TP M		594/3867/23955	3	8	6	
TP M		594/3867/23911	6	2	6	
TP M		594/3867/23910	5	5	6	
TP M		594/3867/23909	6	2	6	
TP M	594/3867/23906	6	2	6		
TP M	594/3867/23905	3	5	6		
TP M	594/3867/23760	3	5	4		
TP M	122	562/3888/23781	6	2	1	8
TP M		562/3889/23751	1	5	1	
TP M		562/3889/23754	4	7	2	
TP M		562/3890/23920	2	3	4	
TP M		562/8691/32856	2	4	2	
TP M		562/8676/32801	1	5	1	
TP M		562/8685/32841	3	4	4	
TP M		562/8671/23983	6	1	1	
TP M	166	515/3891/23752	5	6	1	6
TP M		515/3891/23746	6	2	1	
TP M		515/3896/23921	1	6	1	
TP M		515/3896/23787	1	6	1	
TP M		515/3896/23772	3	6	4	
TP M		515/8662/23961	6	1	4	

LEGEND						
Sp- Space	Code	Age	Code	Sex	Code	Deposition
F- Feature	0	Neonate (birth- 2 months)	1	Female	1	Primary
Sk- Skeleton	1	Infant (2 months- 3 years)	2	Female?	2	Secondary
	2	Child (3- 12 years)	3	Indeterminate	3	Tertiary
	3	Adolescent (12- 20 years)	4	Male?	4	Primary disturbed
	4	Young Adult (20- 35 years)	5	Male?	5	Unknown
	5	Middle Adult (35- 50 years)	6	too young to determine	6	Primary disturbed loose
	6	Old Adult (50+ years)				
	7	Adult (20 + years)				
	8	Age not determinable				
	9	Prenatal (pre- fullterm)				

Table 2-1. A list of the Neolithic skeletons from the TPC Area.



Figure 2-6. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 150, Space 594, burial of a woman with fetus.



Figure 2-7. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 150, Space 594, burial of a man.

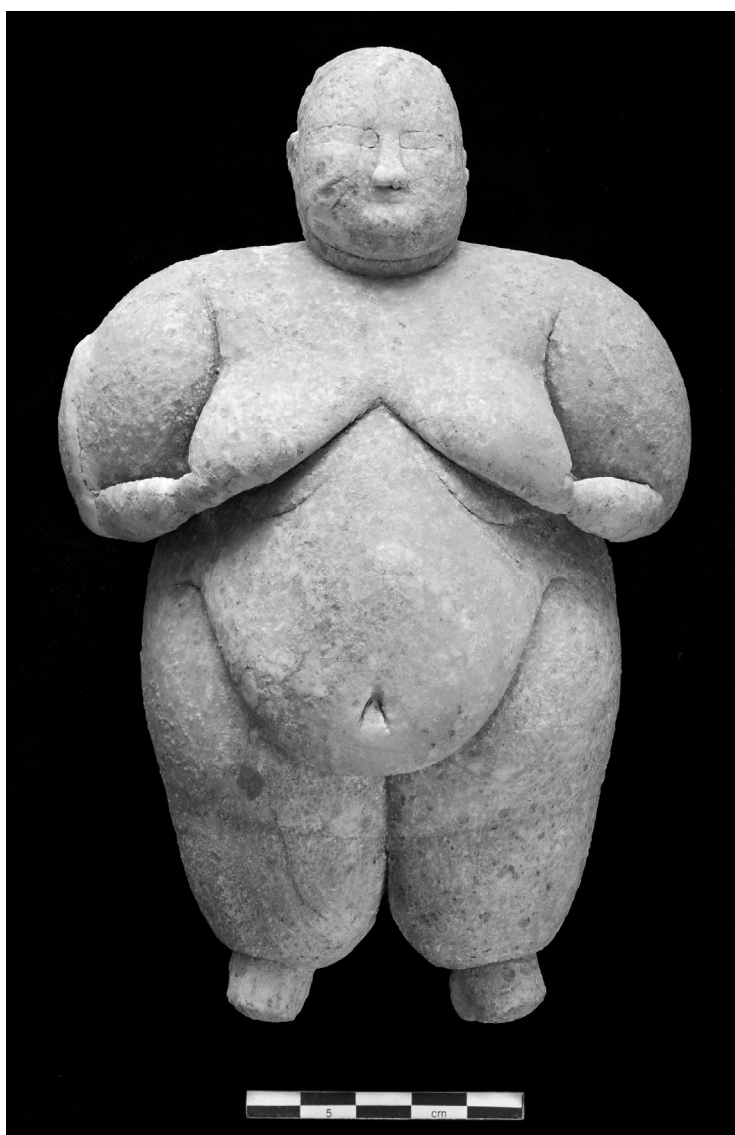


Figure 2-8. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 150, Space 594, big female figurine (32806.x1).

frontal part of the skull. The pigment was applied sometime after the death of the individual, and after significant decomposition of his soft tissues; the excarnation probably took place outside of the settlement. The individual was buried with the remains of food, as indicated by the animal bone remains positioned at the level of the cervical and abdominal regions. Unlike most of the dead, this individual was facing east, which was unusual, because in the same context the preferential orientation was westward. It is possible that this individual had a special social status, as he was provided with an elaborate post-mortem treatment of the corpse before the final burial into the burial pit.



Figure 2-9. Çatalhöyük East, TPC Area, Building 150, Space 594, small female figurine (32806.x2).

Two figurines were discovered on the surface of the eastern platform of Building 150. They were probably placed during the intentional final closing of the burial pit which contained the pregnant woman (Marciniak et al. 2016). The platform then was covered with a limestone layer, which also covered both figurines. The larger figurine was about 17 cm tall and weighed about one kilogram (Fig. 2-8). The corpulent figure of a standing woman was depicted with her arms folded under her breasts. The ears, nose, and mouth are marked with clear lines. The smaller figure was made of yellow limestone (Fig. 2-9). It was only 7 cm in height and weighed 55 g. It was made in an extremely careful manner, with precise elaboration of anatomical details, including physiognomic features of the face. There were traces of red dye on the right foot and ears. Two holes on the top of the head indicate that the figure could serve as a pendant. The find may suggest that in the Late Neolithic period, some figurative practices could mediate relationships between the living and the dead, perhaps treating these figures as a reference to human burials under the platforms. It is also possible that some figurines depict dead individuals (Meskell et al. 2016: 141). In the grave itself, objects, such as an obsidian blade, a blue pigment, an orange stone bead, a bone blade, and a mineral crystal, were also identified.

The platform with burials in B.122 was built against the eastern wall and was decorated with white geometric wall paintings (see above). Altogether, eight individuals were interred, lying in flexed anatomical position, mostly on the left side. Half of them were identified as women in early adulthood. Some of the individuals had funerary equipment in the form of beads lying in situ around the neck and hands. The beads were made of stones or shells. Among the grave goods there were also the remains of mats made of plants. In some cases, the deceased body was wrapped in a mat. A very similar condition of bones as well as their color seem to imply a very short break between the interments of the deceased. In the neighboring B.166 house, six adults of various sexes and ages were buried in flexed anatomical position beneath the northeastern platform. The individuals were interred in shallow burial pits in the crouched position on the right or left side.

Available evidence from the latest phase of the classic phase of the Neolithic occupation at Çatalhöyük implies a continuation of funerary practices known from preceding centuries. Repetitive practices continued, as indicated by placement of the adult deceased in the same pits dug under the north and northeastern platforms. Newborns were often interred in benches or in very shallow depressions beneath the platform. Considerable post-inhumation corpse manipulation also took place, in particular in B.150. The burial customs in the TPC Area, in particular in B.122 and 166, reveal striking similarities with the contemporaneous B.44 from the South Area. This makes the reported practices representative for the final phase of the classic phase of the settlement occupation.

However, these practices rapidly ceased as a result of significant social re-arrangements, well manifested by the immediate departure from the construction of elaborated and richly decorated houses. This change also involved a removal of burial practices from the domestic domain. No Neolithic burials were found in the TPC Area in any of the latest Levels TP N–R. Changes in funerary practices remain poorly understood due to the dearth of relevant evidence.

One represented form comprises special purpose burial chambers inserted into the previously used dwelling structures. Two such chambers (Sp.327 and Sp.248) were constructed in the TP Area around 150 and 300 years, respectively, after the last occurrence of in-house inhumation (e.g. Marciniak et al. 2015a).

ÇATALHÖYÜK IN THE LATE NEOLITHIC—A VIEW FROM THE TPC AREA

The second half of the seventh millennium cal BC marks a major threshold in the development of Neolithic communities in the Near East. It was a period of important re-evaluation of the constituent elements of the Neolithic revolution, including procurement strategies, modes of production, subsistence basis, the character of arable economy, and husbandry practices and social relations (Marciniak 2016). A significant portion of the lifetime of the settlement at Çatalhöyük fell into this turbulent period. This large urban center was exposed to these large-scale transformations, which not only changed its character but led to its ultimate demise. What makes this process even more interesting is that the site had been occupied throughout the so-called “8.2-kyBP event” (Roffet-Salque et al. 2018). This sudden climatic crisis put to test the farming communities in the Near East and may have accelerated the spread of early farmers out of Anatolia to new pastures in Greek Macedonia, Thessaly, and Bulgaria.

The settlement at Çatalhöyük emerged around 7100 BCE (Bayliss et al. 2015). Through centuries of steady and uninterrupted development it became a densely packed semi-urban agglomeration around the middle of the 7th millennium BCE. Houses were built of loam. Their interior was carefully designed and richly decorated and built with distinct platforms, benches, and ovens. The walls were decorated with elaborate painting. The entrance to the house was through the southern part of the roof. The inhabitants buried their dead beneath the platforms and floors. The houses were clustered in streetless neighborhoods, which were separated from each other by alleys and courtyards. Houses were continuously used by 3–4 generations, being rebuilt on the same location, with the same proportions and interior arrangements.

The final phase of the construction and use of these houses took place around 6300 BCE, indicating the emergence of some problems of unspecified character. As in previous centuries, the houses were deliberately abandoned by filling in their interior with sand and rubbish. However, instead of constructing a new house on top of these older structures, people started to use this area in a different fashion by constructing hearths and other fire installations. Soon afterwards, the inhabitants made an attempt to reconstruct new houses that differed significantly from their predecessors. These were solid multi-roomed structures with neither distinct floors nor burials underneath them. They were slightly bigger than previously (ca. 50–75 m²) and were made of orange/dark yellow walls carefully bonded with each other. They were composed of two to four distinct rooms. They appear to be unfinished and most likely never occupied. Comparable structures from the neighboring TP Area were in use for a relatively short period of time, around 15–20 years, encompassing no more than one generation (Marciniak et al. 2015a).

The problem that inhabitants of Çatalhöyük faced was real and serious. It challenged the hitherto practiced mode of life and required a speedy response. Constructing solid architectural structures was no longer feasible, so they were replaced by light shelters and open spaces. The unfinished solid buildings were re-used. Some of their parts were turned into a hut-type construction with a light roof while others served as open areas, most likely delimited by the walls of the earlier house. The latter areas were intensively used, as indicated by numerous fire spots. They were later turned into a continuously used kitchen midden, as demonstrated by fire installations and rich occupational debris.

This period lasted until 6100 BCE. The climatic turbulence ceased, creating better living conditions for those inhabitants of Çatalhöyük who still remained at the settlement. They started to develop a new strategy of existence, which differed significantly from the bygone time of more luxurious living in the settlement. They began building new houses which were composed of a series of small, cell-like spaces surrounding a larger central “living room,” and which lacked symbolic elaboration. The main room had a central hearth and hardly any other built-in structures. The houses had neither platforms nor intramural burials. They underwent numerous reconstructions, as indicated by a complex sequence of floors and partition walls.

This new strategy proved to be unsustainable in the short term to the extent that the settlement was rapidly shrinking and unable to avoid its collapse and ultimate abandonment. It did not keep pace with the developments in other neighboring regions by not adopting new ideas and solutions. For example, the inhabitants avoided stone architecture, painted pottery, or new forms of vessels, and continued living by their old habits, using wild cattle in ceremonial settings. The Neolithic Çatalhöyük remained occupied until around 5950 BCE and then was abandoned.

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