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The excavations of the East Area at Çatalhöyük in the 2022 season

Introduction

The 2022 excavation season brought about a continuation of the work in the East Area. It is the most distinct element in the eastern part of the East mound, directly east of both the southern and northern eminences of the main mound. It takes the shape of a circular and regular mound about 50 meters in diameter¹.

The East Area work in 2022 aimed to further its major objectives: (1) recognize the character of occupation in the eastern zone of the Çatalhöyük settlement and establish its chronology; (2) compare the character of occupation in this part of the settlement with the contemporaneously occupied areas, particularly TP and TPC in the southern eminence of the main mound; and (3) recognize the demise of this part of the mound in relation to the abandonment of the settlement towards the end of the seventh millennium BC (see Marciniak 2015; Marciniak et al. 2019).

The East Area is made of the 10-by-50-meter longitudinal trench in the W-E alignment. The area was divided into Squares 1–5, each 10 x 10 m, as seen from the west. Following the results of the work in previous seasons, it was decided to concentrate on the three westernmost Squares of the trench, covering an area of 10 x 30 meters. A rich and complex stratigraphic situation was revealed in this part of the trench. Its major components were numerous Neolithic buildings with corresponding open spaces and middens representing different chronological horizons. There were also two phases of the post-Neolithic occupation, including a settlement with a complex of pits and ovens as well as a cemetery made of burials with stone and tile superstructures (see Marciniak et al. 2019, 2021).

The focus of the work in the 2022 field season was the excavation of different deposits and features dating back to the Late Neolithic. The work commenced on July 25 and concluded on August 24. The work was focused on Squares 1 and 3 and a significantly smaller amount of time was spent on excavating different deposits in Square 2 (Figure 1). The work involved the exposure of a large, special purpose building, B. 174. It also led to the discovery of B. 179. The work in the 2022 excavation season resulted in the complete excavation of B. 173 and B. 178.

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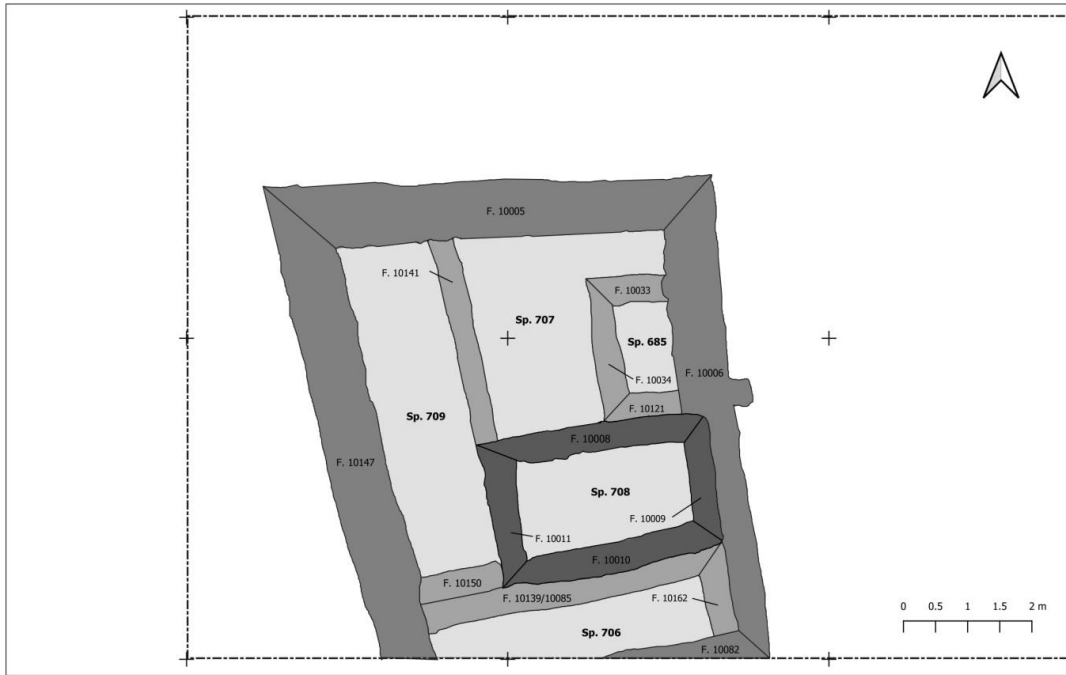
Figure 1. Plan of the East Area (Squares 1–3) with Neolithic structures (drawn by Marta Perlińska)

BUILDING 178, Square 1

Building 178 is a special purpose building that was inserted in the southern part of B. 173, prior to the construction of small rooms or cells (Figures 2, 3). It was a rectangular structure measuring about 3.5 x 1.5 m. It was constructed of four walls: the eastern wall (F.10009), the northern wall (F.10008), the southern wall (F.10010), and the western wall (F.10011).

The 2022 field season brought about the completion of the excavation of this structure, which was intensively researched in the 2021 season. The Building was pretty long in use, as indicated by the reconstruction of its interior and a complex history of its abandonment. The original phase of its occupation was ascribed to Space 708. It had the form of a single room with a large oven (F.10151) placed in its SE corner. Altogether, the floor was made of six superimposed layers, all of which were excavated in 2022: floor (U.40331), make-up layer (U.40392), thin floor layer (U.40399), floor (U.40401), make-up (U.40402), and make-up (U.40409).

The subsequent phases of the building use were excavated in 2021 (see Marciniak et al., 2021). The next phase involved splitting up its interior into two rooms—the western (Space 703) and eastern (Space 702). Both rooms were then abandoned, as evidenced by distinct fill deposits. The building was later used, and, similarly, at its beginning, it had a single room (Space 668).



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Figure 2. Plan of Building 178 and Building 173 (drawn by Marta Perlińska)

BUILDING 173, Square 1

Building 173 is a large dwelling structure in the south-central part of Square 1. In its original form, it measured about 35 m². The construction was made of four solid walls: the northern (F.10005), eastern (F.10006), southern (F.10082), and western (F.10147). The work in 2021 comprised intense excavation of its different parts. It was completed in the 2022 field season.

This building was split up into a number of small rooms/cells. They were arranged around B. 178, itself built inside B. 173 in its southern part (see above; also Marciniak et al. 2021). Three constructional phases were recognized, as indicated by their stratigraphy.

In the first phase, the building was made of two rooms (all of them ascribed as separate Spaces): Space 711 in its northern-central part and Space 710 in its southern part (Figure 1). The second phase marked further sub-division of the building interior into Spaces 707 and 709 in its northern-central part (Figure 2). At the same time, Space 710 was continuously occupied in its southern part. The third and final phase of the building's occupation marked further division of its space into smaller rooms: Space 685, Space 689, Space 700, Space 701, Space 704, and Space 705 in the Building's northern-central part, and Space 687, and Space 688 in its southern part.



Figure 3. An orthophoto of Buildings 178 and 173 (photo: Mateusz Dembowskiak).

Space 685

Space 685 is a special purpose room of 1.5 m² that served as a burial chamber. It is located in the eastern part of B. 173. All human remains, purposefully deposited on the floor of the room, were excavated in 2021 (Marciniak et al. 2021). In the 2022 field season, we excavated three walls of that chamber: western F.10034 (bricks: U.40393; mortar: U.40394); northern F.10033 (bricks: U.40395, mortar: U.40396), and southern F.10121 (mortar: U.40406; bricks: U.40407) (Figure 4). These three walls making up Space 685 were built against the eastern wall of B. 173–F. 10006. The preserved walls are made of 11 courses of grey bricks and clear beige/yellowish mortar. The bricks appear to be of standardized shape. Whitish grey plaster was used to cover the interior faces of the walls.



Figure 4. The southern wall of Space 685 (F. 10121), Building 173 (photo: Mateusz Dembowski)

Spaces 689, 700 & 701

Spaces 689, 700, and 701 are three small rooms/cells built up along the western wall of B. 173. They were intensively excavated in the 2021 season (Marciniak et al., 2021). The work carried out in 2022 led to the complete excavation of all three rooms.

Space 689 is the room in the northwest corner of Building 173. It has 2.6 m². The work this year involved excavation of the third and lowest floor (U.40352) of the room, along with the make-up layer right beneath (U.40398). The floor marks the earliest occupation of this room. A small animal figurine was placed in the floor layer (U.40352:x1).

Space 700 is placed directly south of Space 689. It has 1.5 m². The work in the 2022 season involved excavation of the make-up of the third and lowest floor (U. 40363) of the room.

Space 701 is placed directly south of Space 700 and west of B. 178. It has 1.6 m² (Figure 5). The work this year involved the excavation of two floor layers (U. 40330 and U. 40390) and two make-up layers (U.40387 and U.40410). The partition wall between Spaces 700 and 701 was also excavated. This construction has undergone a number of reconstructions. It is composed of three elements: (i) the uppermost part of the wall (F.10149; U.40355), followed by (ii) the bench (F.10156) (Figure 6), and (iii) the lowermost part of the wall (F.10086).



Figure 5. Space 701, B. 173. Make up layer 40410 (photo: Mateusz Dembowskiak)



Figure 6. Space 701, bench F. 10156 (photo: Mateusz Dembowskiak)

Space 707

The work in the 2022 excavation season involved the excavation of Space 707, located in its central-northern part. It was approximately 7 m². Its two superimposed floors were identified (U.40376 and U.40382). This area was later subdivided into two rooms: Space 685 and 704; and the corridor (Space 705), leading from the entrance to the building to its western part.

The room's floor (U.40382) is pretty distinct, and it is made of white silt. From the west, it has the form of a raised floor (F.10087), which itself was the floor level of Space 685 - a burial chamber. The raised floor was flanked by two ridges on both sides: U.40446, the north ridge, and U.40447, the south ridge. In the central part of the raised floor, there was a pit with a standing pot firmly in it (F.10163). Two pits were dug onto the room floor: F.10089 in the western part and F.10088 in the southern part. Both of them are pretty similar, they are regularly circular and shallow. In the NW corner of the room, there was a fire installation (F.10091).

Space 709

This is the room beneath Spaces 689, 700, and 701. It was separated from the contemporaneous Space 707 from the west by the N-S partition wall F.10141 (U.40443: bricks and U.40444: mortar). This wall was inserted between the northern wall of B. 173 and the northern wall of B. 178. The wall was built on the infill/makeup layer beneath the first floor of space 707. It means it was functionally linked with that space, and it marks the first partitioning phase of B. 173. At the same time, it postdates the construction of Building 178, as this partition wall was built against its northern wall. The room had two floors that were superimposed: the well-preserved floor of white or greyish silt (F.40417) and the floor (U.40419). They covered the entire extent of this large room.

Space 711

The room is placed in the central-northern part of Building 173 and marks the earliest reconstruction of its interior. It's an L-shaped structure that sits directly beneath Space 707 and Space 709. In its southern-western corner, there was a white and well-preserved floor (U.40462). In the very SE corner of the room, there was a burial, F.10178, containing an incomplete fetus skeleton (U.40475). The baby was certainly buried there deliberately, most likely as a part of the room closure. The last deposit in the room was the infill layer.

Space 706

In the 2022 season, we continued excavating Space 706 (see Marciniak et al. 2021). It is a longitudinal room placed against the southern wall of B. 173. It is made of two related stratigraphic sequences of floors and makeups that are separated by the cut of late burial, exactly in the middle of this room. The room is clearly linked to the reconstruction of the southern part of B. 173, as evidenced by the partitioning of its interior into smaller rooms or cells. In the case of Space 706, it involved inserting wall F.10085 into its southern part, between the southern F.10082 and eastern F.10009 walls of B. 173. The burials of three Neolithic individuals were found in Space 706, all of them were excavated in 2021 (Marciniak et al. 2021).

Space 710

The work in 2022 involved also the excavation of Space 710. It is located directly beneath Space 706. It is marked by an internal wall built against the external wall of B. 173. It had a form of the longitudinal regular room on the E-W axis, which was 4.50 m long and 0.80 m wide. The work involved unearthing and excavating all its infill layers and walls.

The southern wall, F. 10166, of the Space, was built against the northern wall of B. 173 and has been unquestionably inserted into that building sometime after it was built. The wall F.10166 was not completely excavated as, similarly as in the case of the southern wall of B. 173, it was

placed diagonally in relation to the edge of the trench and hence goes beyond its perimeter at the middle of the room's length. Next, the bonded eastern F.10165 and northern F.10085 walls of the Space were excavated. The uppermost infill of the room was made of heterogeneous bricky and sandy deposits. It is very unlikely the room was used for dwelling purposes. F.10167 was an unspecified feature in the center of the room. Its top was made of a regular cluster of horizontally placed small pot fragments. Three additional small pits were dug into the floor of the room (Space 710). The most distinct is a burial pit (F.10176) located in the very northeast corner of the room. It contained a fetus skeleton (U.40458) (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Fetus burial (F. 10176, skeleton: U. 40458) in the corner of Space 710 (photo: Mateusz Dembowski)

BUILDING 174, Square 3

Building 174 was identified in the 2018 excavation season. It is almost entirely located in the excavated area, except for a small part of its northwest corner. The building is rectangular in shape and is approximately 6 m long and 5 m wide. Its inner surface has ca. 30 m² while the outer surface has ca. 35 m². Its single walls were made of brown bricks. Three walls were unearthed in its full extent: northern - F.10035, eastern - F.10036, and southern - F.10037. The western wall, F. 10045, was partly exposed. Altogether, five layers of infill were distinguished and excavated as follows: from the top, U.40391, U.40405, U.40434, U.40461, and U.40472. They were inscribed as Space 673. In the infill, a fetus skeleton (F. 40429) was deliberately interred in the NE corner of B. 174, ca. 30 cm above the built-in structures. It marks an element of the building's closure and certainly post-dates its use.

Building 174 has numerous features and built-in structures (Figure 8). They were designated as Space 715. Except for two, all of the structures are non-domestic in nature and consist of platforms, benches, and pilasters. The only domestic structure is a large oven (F. 10195) built against the southern wall of the building, as well as a fire spot (F. 10211) in its central part. The following built-in structures were found in Building 174:

- 14 platforms: F.10169, F.10172, F.10183, F.10187, F.10198, F.10191, F.10207, F.10208, F.10205, F.10209, F.10199, F.10164, F.10168, and F.10201. Out of these numbers, nine are placed along all four walls, while five others are in the center.
- 7 benches: F. 10170, F.10175, F.10196, F.10200, F.10202, F.10203, and F.10206.
- 2 pedestals with horn cores attached to them: F. 10173 and F.10174 – these are placed at the western edge of the central platform itself located along the eastern wall (F.10172).
- 4 pillars, one on each wall: F.10192 (N), F.10171 (E), F.10193 (W), and F.10194 (S).
- 2 access/crawl holes: F.10177 (S) and F.10204 (W).
- 1 floor: F.20213
- 1 oven: F.10195
- 1 fire spot: F.10211
- W moulding on the floor: F.20212
- 1 burial (F.10210), against the central platform (F.10172), most likely marking the building's closure. The burial fill has not been plastered over.



Figure 8. An orthophoto of Building 174 (photo: Mateusz Dembowski)

The building is in a very good state of preservation except for holes in built-in sections and walls. Its space has been carefully and explicitly designed. However, the building has undergone numerous reconstructions that have darkened its original character and made it difficult to recognize. Altogether, at least four phases of its reconstruction can be identified.

The Building was accessible via two access holes in its northwest and southeast corners. A rectangular access hole (F. 10177) with a well-preserved threshold was dug onto the eastern edge of the southern wall. In an opposite corner of the building, a longitudinal niche/crawl hole whose length inside the trench was 90 cm was placed in the northern corner of its western wall. The communication track was most likely originally run through the floors between these two access holes in opposite corners of the building. However, at some point in the building's history, a platform (F.10183) was added in the very SE corner of the building. Sometime later, a centrally placed platform (F.10209) was also added. In a similar way, the inhabitants constructed two platforms in the northeastern corner of the building, partly against the access hole in its western corner.

The Building's walls were plastered over, and some of them were painted. However, the quality of the plaster and the state of its preservation differ across different walls. The best-preserved plaster with the painting is on the southern part of the western wall of the Building. The high-quality plaster is made of two clearly distinguishable plaster layers. It was most likely created as a result of numerous replastering actions. The upper layer is white and thick and does not have any painting on it. The lower layer is more compact and does have a red painting. It takes the shape of diagonal and horizontal lines. Details of the painting have not yet been revealed.

The Building was highly elaborated. The main platform F.10172 was positioned in the center of the building, against the eastern wall. Two distinct pedestals were symmetrically placed on its western edge. They had two horn cores sticking out from both sides of the pedestals. The northern pedestal F. 10173 and the southern pedestal F. 10174 are in a good state of preservation.

The northern part of the western wall is constructed around a distinct pilaster. It is 60 cm wide, and it is carefully plastered over. Directly north of that pilaster, there was a pillar with rounded corners. It was carefully plastered and painted white. In the upper part of the pilaster, a small red pigment painting was created. Some decorative elements, most likely functionally related to that wall, were also found. In particular, these comprise two fragments of clay reliefs. The preserved fragment of the first relief has the shape of an irregular square. The relief is made of deep incisions into the clayish matter. Its central part comprises two parallel lines. Three diagonally incised grooves and four diagonal grooves spread out from these two lines (Figure 7). The other incised fragment is smaller and is embedded into the southern edge of the crawl hole.

The work in the 2022 season involved a complete exposure of the Building and revealing the last phase of its occupation. It was then carefully cleaned and thoroughly documented. This involved the photography of all features and built-in structures, an orthophoto of the Building's interior and walls, and the preparation of the 3D model. It was then carefully protected.



Figure 9. Decorative relief, Building 174 (photo: Mateusz Dembowskiak)

SPACE 678, Square 2

Space 678 is located in the north part of Square 2. It was exposed and partly excavated in the 2019 and 2021 seasons (Marciniak et al. 2019, 2021). The space is defined by three walls: the western (F.10049), southern (F.10048), and eastern (F.10067), the latter placed against the western wall of B. 175 (F.10047). Only a small southernmost part of the Space is located inside the trench, while its larger part goes beyond its northern section. The internal surface of the space inside the trench measures 1.1 m².

Space 713 is a room of unspecified character. It is delimited by three walls that were placed directly beneath the walls of later Space 678: the western wall, F.10185 (directly beneath the W wall of Space 678, F. 10049); the southern wall, F. 10184 (beneath wall F. 10048); and the eastern wall, F. 10186 (beneath wall F. 10067). The northern wall of the Space is beyond the northern edge of the trench. It difficult to reliably estimate the time span between the construction of these two walls and, ultimately, two Spaces. The space has a distinct floor and pit clearly associated with it. An unspecified fill U.40478 was recorded on that floor. There were no built-in features. This infill sits firmly between the walls of the Space and on the crown of the northern wall of B. 179, Space 714. However, it is not impossible that the walls attributed to Space 713 were in fact the foundations of the room Space 678.

BULDING 179, Square 2

The earliest occupational structure in Square 2 discovered to date is Building 179 (Space 174). It is located directly beneath a sequence of infill/midden layers stretched between B. 172 and B. 173 from the west and B. 175 from the east. The crown of the northern wall was unearthed, which is placed exactly along the northern edge of the trench. The building was constructed between the western wall of Building 175 and the eastern wall of Building 172.

In the 2022 field season, the northern part of the eastern wall was unearthed. It was built against the western wall of B. 175, respecting its shape. No southern wall was unearthed this season.

It was most likely destroyed by a large post-Neolithic truncation, similar to the one that largely destroyed the southern wall of neighboring Building 175 (see Marciniak et al. 2019). It may either be discernible further below or might have been completely turned down. A small fragment of the western wall of Building 179 was also found (U.10216). The lack of its larger part is difficult to explain. One rather unlikely possibility is that it is placed right beneath the eastern wall of neighboring Building 172. The other possibility is that the wall was built parallel to the eastern wall of B. 172 and the topmost part was eroded away, hence it is not visible at the level exposed in the 2022 season. Another possibility is that this wall has never existed. It means that B. 179 reused the eastern wall of B. 172 as its western wall. In any case, the most likely scenario is that B. 179 is later than both B. 175 and B. 172 and 173.

Following the abandonment of B. 179, the next phase of occupation in Square 2 was the construction of room Space 713, which was later redesigned as Space 678. It created a space for temporary occupation (Space 676) that took place in the corner defined by B.175 and Space 713/678. The last sequence from the top of the surface was recorded as Space 669 and was made of four superimposed layers. These structures and deposits were excavated and described in detail in the 2019 excavation report (Marciniak et al. 2019).

Final remarks

The work in the 2022 season marks an important step in the study of the occupational history of the East Area. The significant achievement was the complete excavation of Building 173 as well as Building 178 – a rectangular structure inserted into its southern-central part. B. 173 and its internal element B. 178 were constructed on natural soil and were not built on the walls of any previous dwelling structures. One could legitimately argue that they were the only structures in the East Area's westernmost reaches.

However, a major discovery in the 2022 season was Building 174. This is an extraordinary structure of non-domestic character. The number and character of built-in structures are unprecedented and can only be compared to 'shrines' from the Mellaart excavations in the 1960s. The upcoming excavation season will involve the excavation of various features and intramural burials in this building.

Another important discovery in the 2022 season was the recognition of B. 179, located between B. 172 and B. 173 in the west and B. 175 in the east. The details of this structure, including its shape, size, and character, are yet to be revealed. It is also necessary to establish stratigraphic relations among the neighboring buildings. This will ultimately lead to a more thorough understanding of the character of this special purpose district in the easternmost part of the settlement, whose major elements comprise the charnel house (B. 173) and the large communal building (B. 174).

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