

Symbolism at Çatalhöyük

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THE 9000 YEAR OLD SITE OF ÇATALHÖYÜK in central Turkey was first excavated by James Mellaart (1967) between 1961 and 1965. The importance of the site was quickly and widely recognized. In particular the great size of the mound was noted, remarkable for an early agricultural site. Grahame Clark (1977) estimated that it held a population of 5000 people. More recent estimates have suggested figures between 2000 and 10,000 (Hodder 1996). But it was not just the size of the site which hit the headlines. It was the art and symbolism which captured the imagination (see Plate 8). Commentators noted the bucrania (plastered bulls' heads) set on walls and pillars within buildings, plaster reliefs of leopards and 'Mother Goddess' figures, paintings of hunting scenes or of vultures stripping the flesh from headless human corpses, or of geometric designs.

New work began at the site in 1993, under the auspices of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara. The first three years of fieldwork concentrated on studies of the surface of the West (Chalcolithic) and East (Neolithic) mounds (published in Hodder 1996). Since 1995 excavation has been undertaken in the areas identified in Figure 1. One of the aims of this work is better to understand the art and symbolism at Çatalhöyük East.

It is often presumed that Grahame Clark focused his work mainly on ecology, environment, and long-term evolutionary trends. But it is important to recognize that he also gave due attention to social and symbolic factors. For example, in 1970 (95–6) he wrote '*Homo economicus* is a lay figure who never, in fact, walked the earth'. He can be used 'as a model, if only to point up the non-economic motivations of human behaviour' (ibid.). Back in 1939 (revised 1957, 219) he had emphasized that while the environment limits or constrains social choice it is social choice which determines cultural behaviour in its specific form. He argued that social factors are both a consequence and a cause of economic change (ibid., 221).

For Grahame Clark it was this social choice which, when released from environmental constraint, created the diversity of human culture which he celebrated in his 1982 book *The Identity of Man*. Changing patterns of subsistence associated with the shift to farming did not determine cultural diversity. Rather, the change to farming happened many

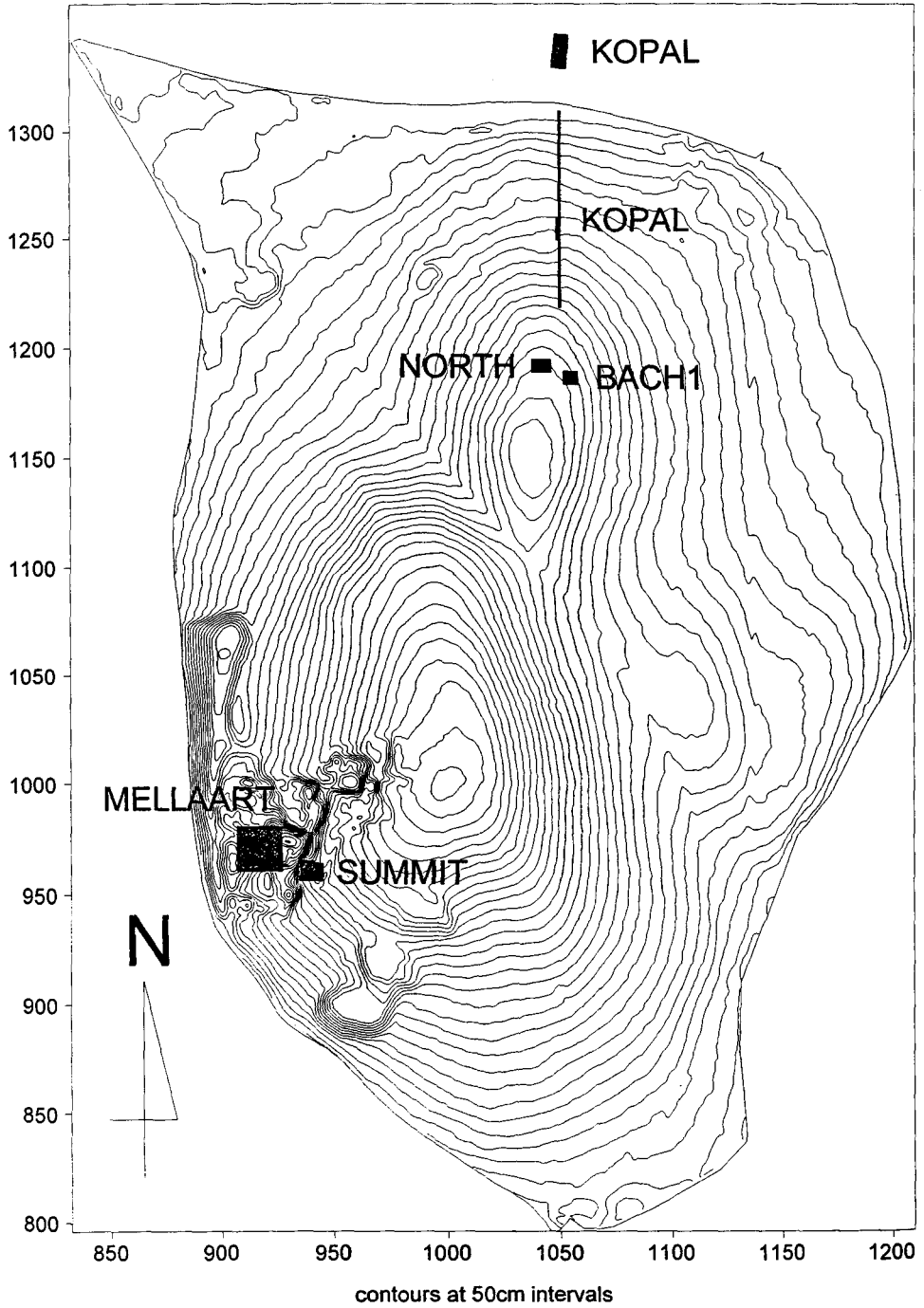


Figure 1. The excavation areas on the East mound at Çatalhöyük.

times in different parts of the world 'on each occasion under unique circumstances' (1982, 79). These circumstances included social factors such as craft specialization and the search for identity.

Çatalhöyük is a prime example of a unique response to farming—a prime example of the social creation of diversity of which Grahame Clark wrote. He recognized this himself and discussed the site at some length in his *World Prehistory* (1977), itself dedicated to 'the diversity of men'. In his description of the site he predicted, in a remarkably prescient way, many of the conclusions we have recently arrived at in the new work at the site. For example, he talked of the so-called 'shrines' at Çatalhöyük which we would now argue were used as domestic houses. Clark said of the 'shrines', 'but the number and small size of these argues for domestic family cults' rather than public temples with full-time priests (1977, 72). He also said the art was about 'the generative forces of nature' (*ibid.*) and with both these points I would substantially agree.

Clark argued in general for the 'social character of art' (1939, revised 1957, 224). For him, art mirrored and embodied social life and the physical environment. He saw art as systemically linked to society. It is this social character of art and its unique social character at Çatalhöyük that I wish to discuss in this paper. This is because Clark's view of art coincides very much with the primary aim of our own project which is to place the art into its full environmental, economic, and social context.

Building 1

I wish to provide an example of the social character of art at Çatalhöyük East by discussing the first building that we have excavated in detail: Building 1 in the North area of the site. I believe this discussion contributes to Grahame Clark's vision of art.

Scraping of the surface of the mounds at Çatalhöyük had earlier proved successful in establishing the overall arrangement of architecture on the Neolithic East mound. Despite some later (Hellenistic and Byzantine) occupation, in many areas on the top of the mound removal of the plough-soil immediately exposed plans of Neolithic buildings. These results and the supporting geophysical prospection are described by R. Matthews (1996) and Shell (1996). It became clear that the upper levels of occupation on the East mound consisted largely of densely packed small buildings and extensive midden areas. The small rectangular buildings recalled closely those excavated by Mellaart (1967) in the south-western part of the mound. Indeed, the scraping technique suggested that these buildings, even well away from the area excavated by Mellaart, included elaborate examples with complex internal fittings. This suggested that the so-called 'shrines' occurred in different parts of the site at a high density. Rather than envisaging a priestly elite in one quarter of the site, it became necessary to think of domestic cults widely spread.

Further study of the material excavated in the 1960s, including the artefacts housed in museums in Turkey, suggested a more complex picture (Hodder 1996). A continuum

of variation could be identified between more and less architecturally complex buildings. The more complex buildings with more platforms, bins, pillars, sculpture, and painting also tended to have more bifacially flaked obsidian points and more obsidian cores. They also tended to be more innovative in the use of ceramic forms, and to have more figurines. It was also clear that the more elaborate buildings in one phase would often continue to be more elaborate when rebuilt in ensuing phases. There are many difficulties with the definition of such variation between more and less elaborate buildings because of the limitations of the surviving records. In any case, what variation occurs is within a narrow band, and micromorphological work (W. Matthews *et al.* 1996) indicated that even the more elaborate buildings (termed 'shrines' by Mellaart) had traces of a wide range of domestic activities on their floors.

In approaching Building 1, therefore, we were of the opinion that the art at Çatalhöyük had a domestic context but that certain buildings played a slightly more central role in the generation and transmission of cultural elaboration. Unfortunately, the preservation of Building 1 proved to be relatively poor since the walls and upper fills had been subject to millennia of erosion on the top of the North mound, and since the plasters on the surviving walls and floors (the latter only 50 cm from the surface of the mound) had been affected by roots, animal burrows, and freeze-thaw action. Nevertheless, the building yielded a large amount of information, resulting from detailed data collection. All soil from the site was dry-sieved, and 30 litres from each deposit were wet-sieved in a flotation system. The heavy residues from this were collected in a 0.5 mm mesh, were dried and then sieved through 4 mm, 2 mm, and 1 mm meshes before hand sorting. The resultant heavy residue plots from the floors in Building 1 will be discussed below. (The results from the organic and inorganic chemistry analyses of the floor samples are not available at the time of writing.) This work on micro-artefact distributions on the floors at Çatalhöyük is needed because the floors were carefully swept clean in antiquity. Macro-artefacts (above 4 mm) occur rarely on or beneath floors, and when they do they appear to be special foundation or abandonment deposits or material which has fallen from roofs or walls.

Up to 40 layers of replastering were found on the walls and floors of Building 1. We believe, on the basis of correlations with dendrochronological sequences, that these replasterings occurred annually (Kuniholm & Newton 1996). The use of the building has been divided into the eight phases summarized in Figure 2. The following is a brief summary of the story of these phases. During the construction of the building (phase one), clean foundation deposits were placed between the walls, and burials were placed within these deposits. In particular, a row of three neonate burials was placed just in front of what was to be the entrance from the western room (Space 70) into the main eastern room (Space 71). In the first occupation phase (phase two) a fire installation was constructed within the south wall of Space 71. Adjacent to this were the traces of a ladder which allowed access to the building, presumably through the same roof-hole through which the smoke from the fire escaped. The western room (Space 70) contained a fire installation in the south-west corner. In the centre of the west side of Space 71 sculpture was placed on the wall, although

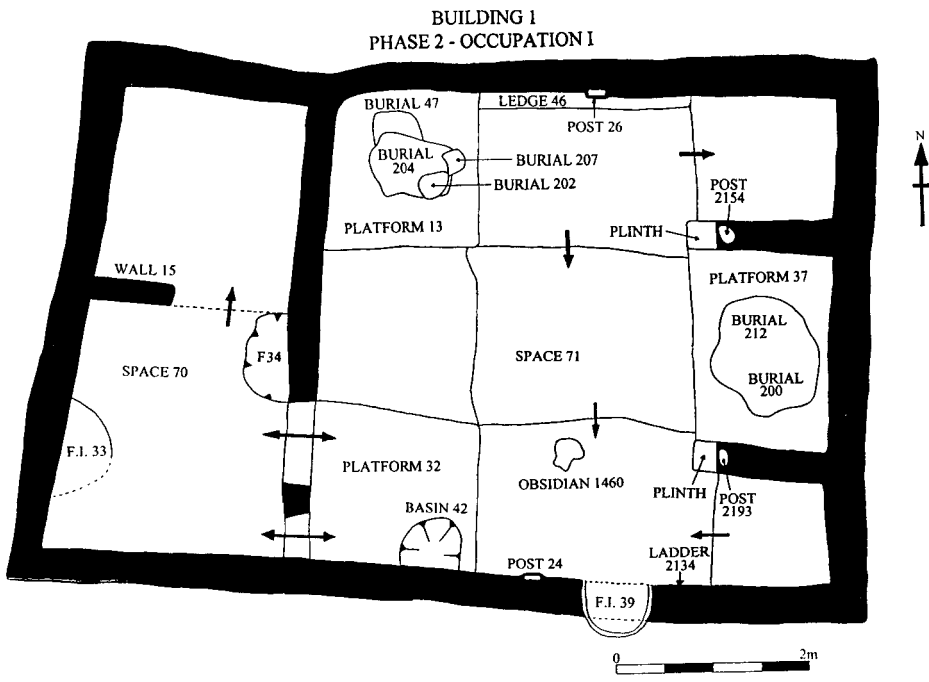
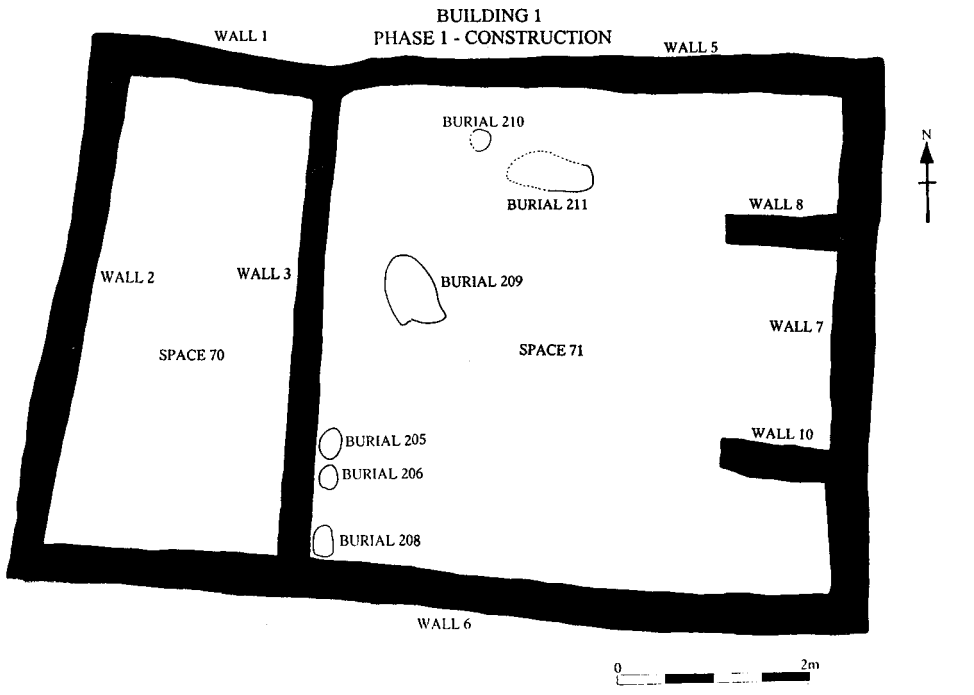


Figure 2. Building 1 at Çatalhöyük. The eight phases of use are summarized.

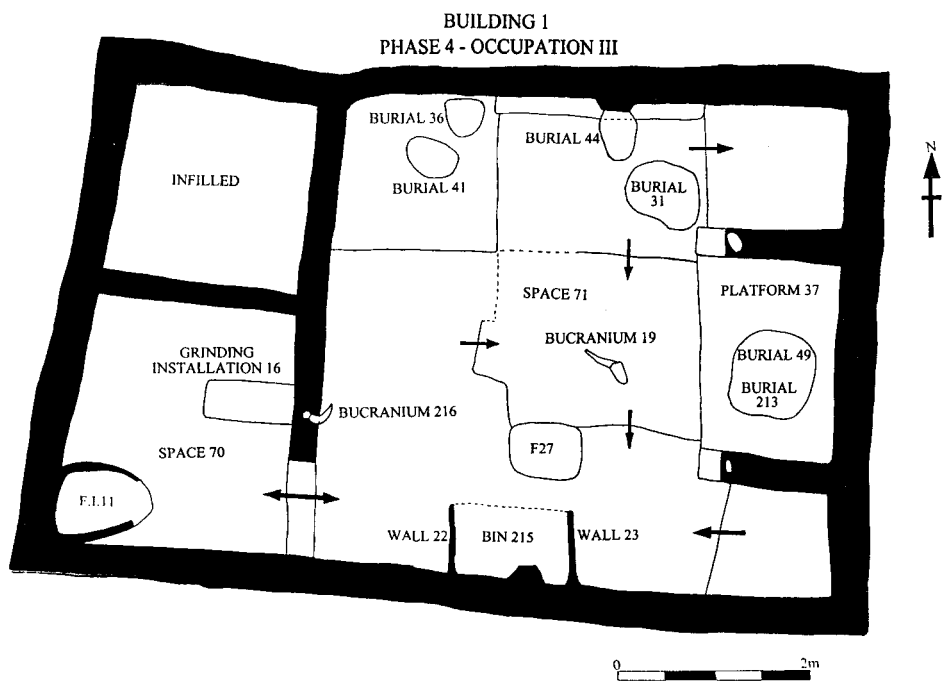
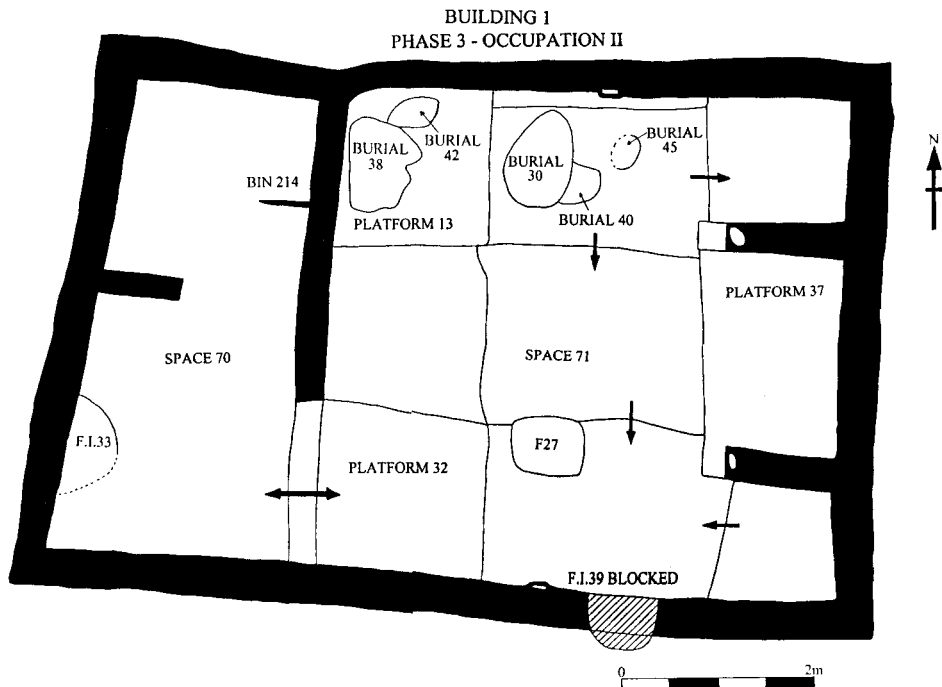
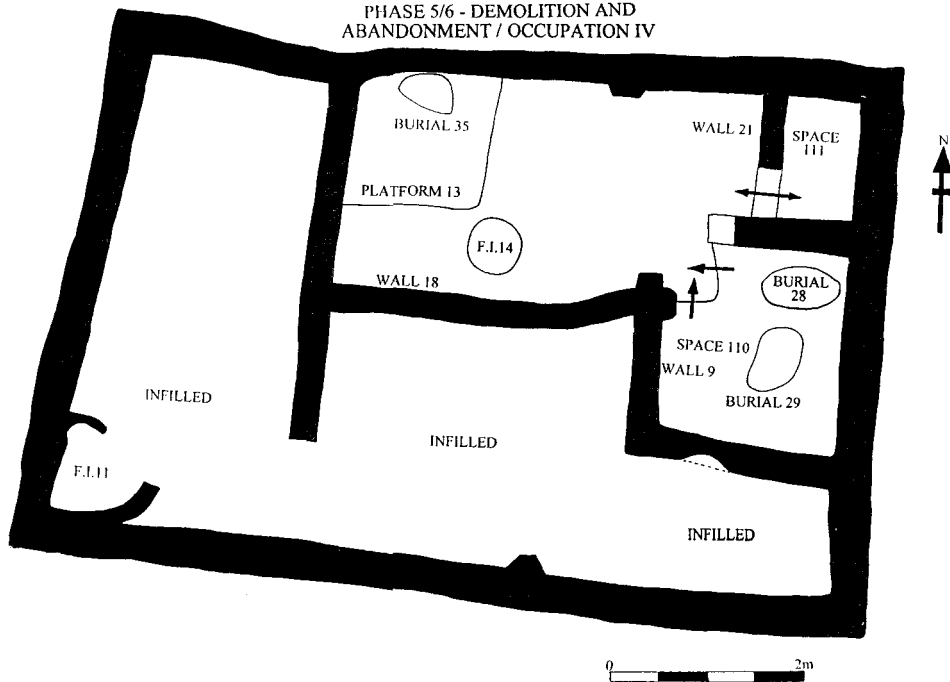


Figure 2. continued

BUILDING 1
 PHASE 5/6 - DEMOLITION AND
 ABANDONMENT / OCCUPATION IV



BUILDING 1
 PHASE 7/8 - DEMOLITION AND
 ABANDONMENT / POST-ABANDONMENT

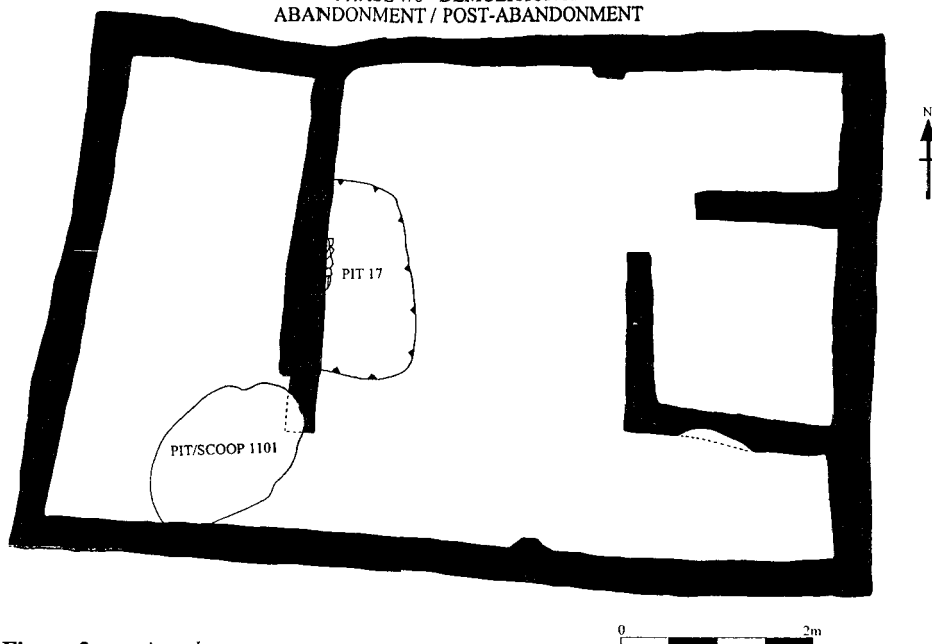


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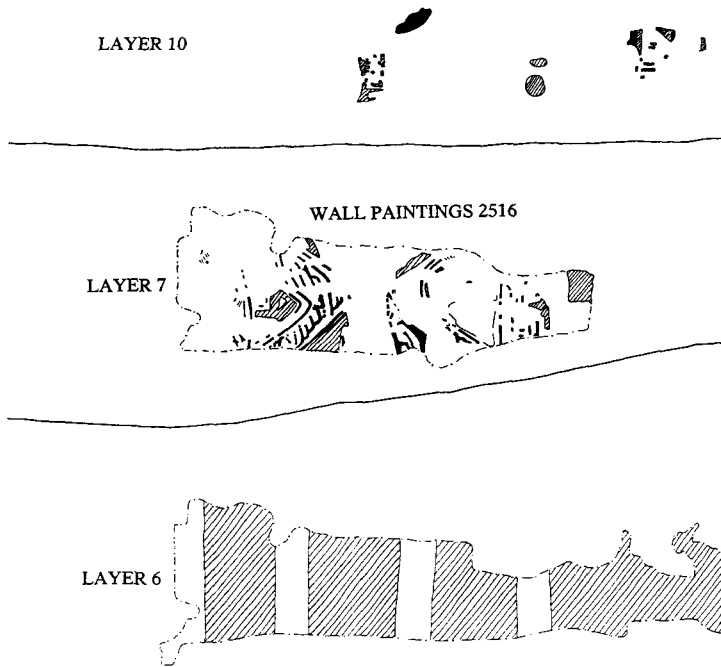


Figure 3. The painting on layers of wall plaster around the north-west platform in Building 1, Space 71.

since this was later removed (see phase eight) we do not know what this consisted of. Certainly there was a frame of vertical plaster edges within which the relief sculpture was placed. Although traces of red paint were found elsewhere on the walls of Spaces 70 and 71, the only concentration of painting and the only evidence of designs and motifs occurred around and on the north-western platform (Platform 13). Here some of the early layers of plaster were painted in geometric designs (Figure 3) in various hues of red and in black.

In order to understand the social role of painting in Building 1 we need to try and determine what activities were taking place in the building, particularly around the north-west platform. The micro-artefact distributions suggest a wide range of activities, as do the micromorphological studies by W. Matthews *et al.* (1996). It is clear that micro-traces survive of obsidian knapping, fish processing, wood-working, bone implement manufacture, hearth sweeping, and plant storage within the buildings at Çatalhöyük. There are indications of animal dung, even on the cleaner floors, although this may derive from dung used as fuel (*ibid.*). However, in Building 1 most of these activities occurred in the southern part of Space 71 and in the western room (Space 70), as is indicated by the micro-artefact plots (Figure 4). The floors in the north and east parts of Space 71 had thicker and cleaner plaster and fewer artefact residues. It is possible that this differentiation into 'clean' and 'dirty' floors resulted from the placing of carefully woven reed mats on the floors of parts of the building (the imprint of such mats having been recorded by Mellaart (1967)).

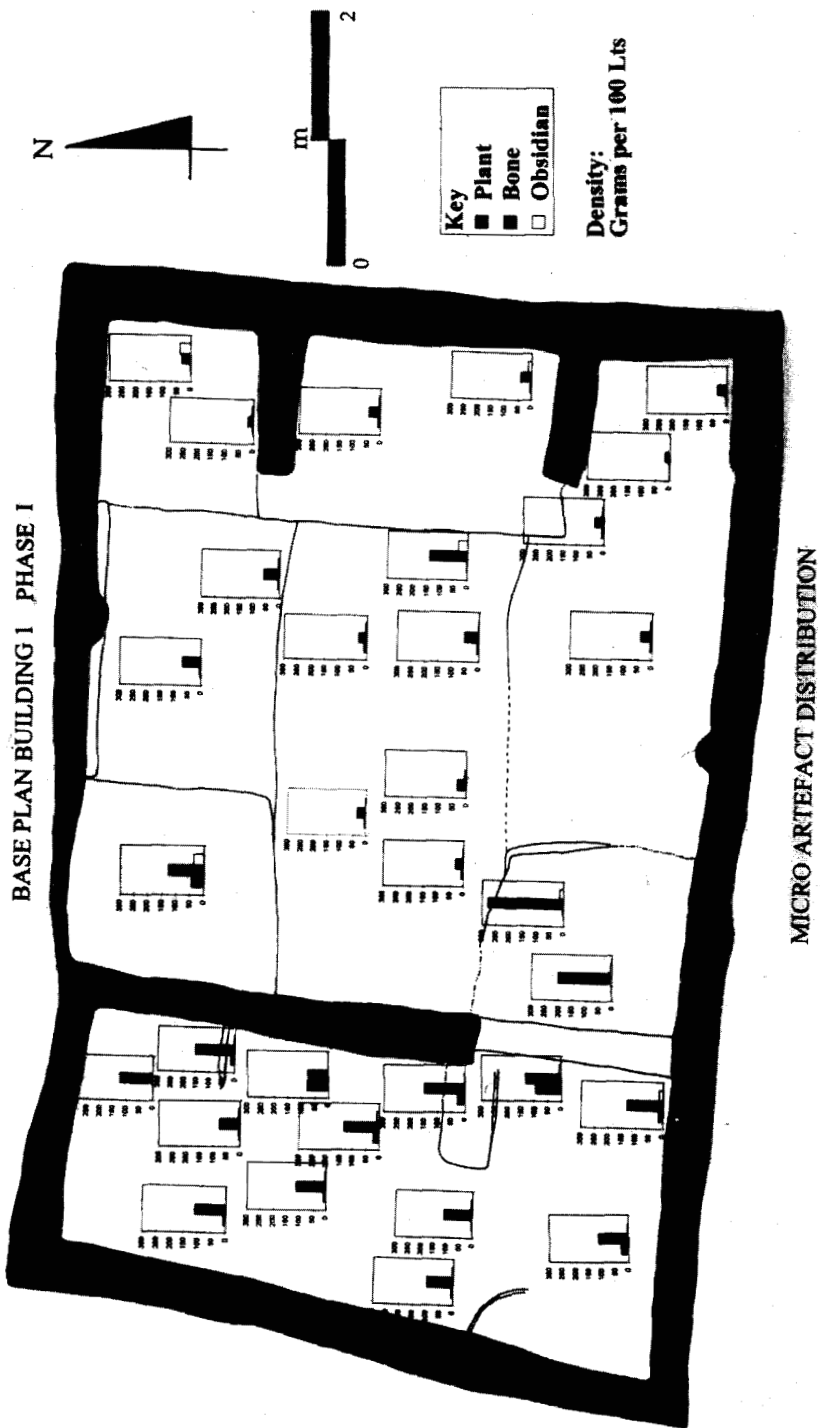


Figure 4. The distribution of micro-artefacts in Building 1.

The painting in Building 1 thus occurred, as Clark had suggested, in a domestic context. And in particular it occurred in the 'cleaner' parts of the building away from the main food preparation and storage areas. In order to understand these areas better, and in order to understand what particularly was happening on the north-west platform, we need to continue on to the second occupation phase (phase three). In this phase, the fire installation in the south wall of Space 71 was blocked up. A small basin (F27), perhaps used for grinding (grinding stones with traces of red ochre were found within it), was placed in the southern part of Space 71. A wooden bin, perhaps for storage, was built within Space 70. In this phase, the same division in the use of space between the south-west and the north-east parts of the building occurred, as seen in the micro-artefact distributions and micro-morphological studies.

In phase four, the third phase of occupation, a substantial fire installation was built in the south-west corner of Space 70. A grinding installation was also constructed in this room. A storage bin used mainly for lentils was placed on the south wall of Space 71. The entrance between Spaces 70 and 71 was remodelled and a cattle horn set within the western wall of Space 71.

What activities were occurring in the 'cleaner' parts of Building 1 during these first three occupation phases? One important activity seems to have been burial. So far at least 64 individuals have been found in a series of graves beneath the north-western platform, beneath the floor immediately to the east of the north-western platform, and beneath the main eastern platform. Study of the human remains (Molleson & Andrews 1997) has indicated that most of the burials were placed in small graves while still fleshed, the bodies tightly flexed and often wrapped in cloth or braids. As later bodies were added into graves, earlier bones were disturbed, moved aside, or removed. This repeated cutting and recutting of graves has made phasing of the grave sequence difficult, as will be discussed below. But bodies seem to have been added to the building throughout the phases of occupation.

The spatial patterning of the ages of the individuals buried in different parts of the building is informative (Figure 5). The north-west platform has not only the highest concentration of burials, but also the highest proportion of young individuals. So the painting in Building 1 is associated with burial, especially of young people. If this spatial link can be established, what of the temporal link between the painting and the burials?

The fourth phase of occupation (phase six) occurs after a serious fire—perhaps deliberately controlled—had destroyed the southern half of the building. As a result, the building was remodelled (phase five). A wall was constructed to separate the rubble in the southern half of the building from the re-occupied northern half (Figure 2). The eastern platform was rebuilt as a separate small room (Space 110) and a small, perhaps storage room, was built in the north-east of the building (Space 111). A fire installation was placed near the north-west platform.

The micro-artefact distributions suggest that even in this remodelled space the west was kept for food processing and other 'dirty' activities, while the eastern spaces were kept 'clean'. Burial continued especially under the floor of the eastern room (Space 110),

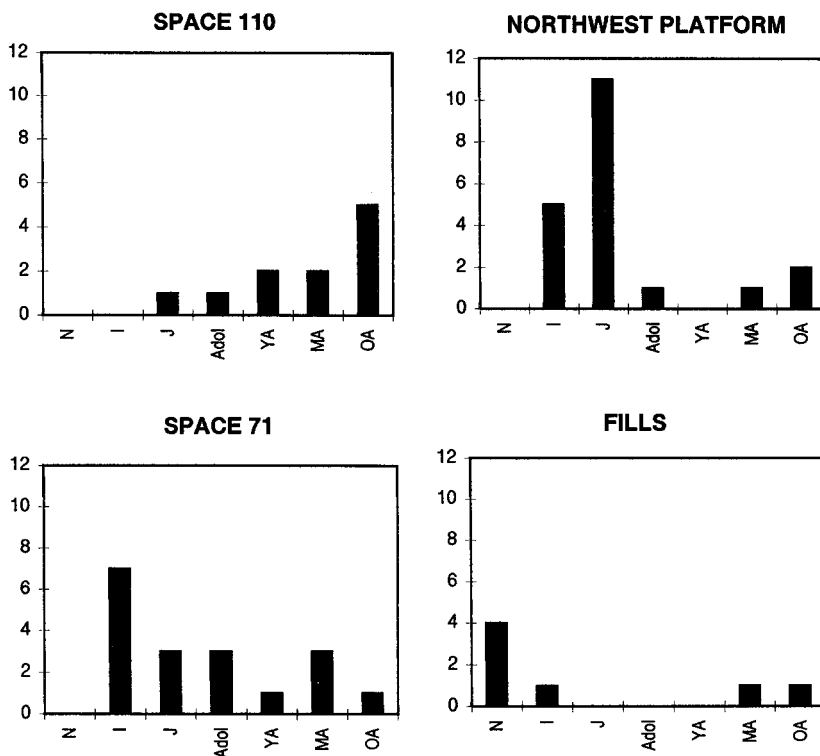


Figure 5. Histogram of the ages of individual skeletons buried beneath different parts of Building 1. Fills indicates phase one constructional deposits; Space 71 is immediately to the east of the north-west platform, and Space 110 is the eastern platform (see Figure 2). Ages are given as Neonate (N), Infant (I), Juvenile (J), Adolescent (Adol), Young Adult (YA), Medium Adult (MA), Old Adult (OA).

and declined beneath the north-western platform (Platform 13). Perhaps this was because this latter platform had come to be used for domestic activities. Indeed, the last floor surface on this platform was associated with a concentration of fish bones. It is thus of interest that the latest layers of plaster around this platform do not seem to have been painted.

There is thus both a spatial and a temporal link between the painting around the north-western platform in Building 1 and burial, especially of young people. What can we say about the traces of relief sculpture on the west wall of Space 71, including the cattle horn set into the wall here? In the first three phases of occupation the sculpture is not associated with a particular activity area. Instead it seems to be centrally located, looking out into Space 71 as a whole. Behind it is the food storage and preparation taking place in the smaller western room. Unlike the painting which has a short, annual cycle of use, the relief sculpture has a life cycle linked to the building itself. Fixed to the wall it is less easy to change and transform. As Mellaart often remarked (1967), the relief sculptures are inte-

gral to the architecture of the Çatalhöyük buildings, being attached to upright beams and pillars.

The sculpture in Building 1 is centrally placed in the building and it has a life cycle which spans the building as a whole. That 40 year cycle in Building 1 seems to follow the life of an extended family. There are too many individuals buried in Building 1 to have been produced by deaths within a small nuclear family in this time period. We assume that a larger, extended group had rights of burial in this building. However, the early burials are predominantly of young individuals and the later of older individuals (Figure 6). It would appear, therefore, that the building was constructed by a young family which suffered a high death rate among its young children. Most of these young deaths were accommodated beneath the north-western platform. But as the family matured, some individuals lived on within the building, they had fewer children, and the building was abandoned after the burial of the last old family head beneath the floor in Space 110.

The relief sculpture thus seems to be related to this longer family/house cycle. A specific relationship between this sculpture on the west wall of Space 71 and the house

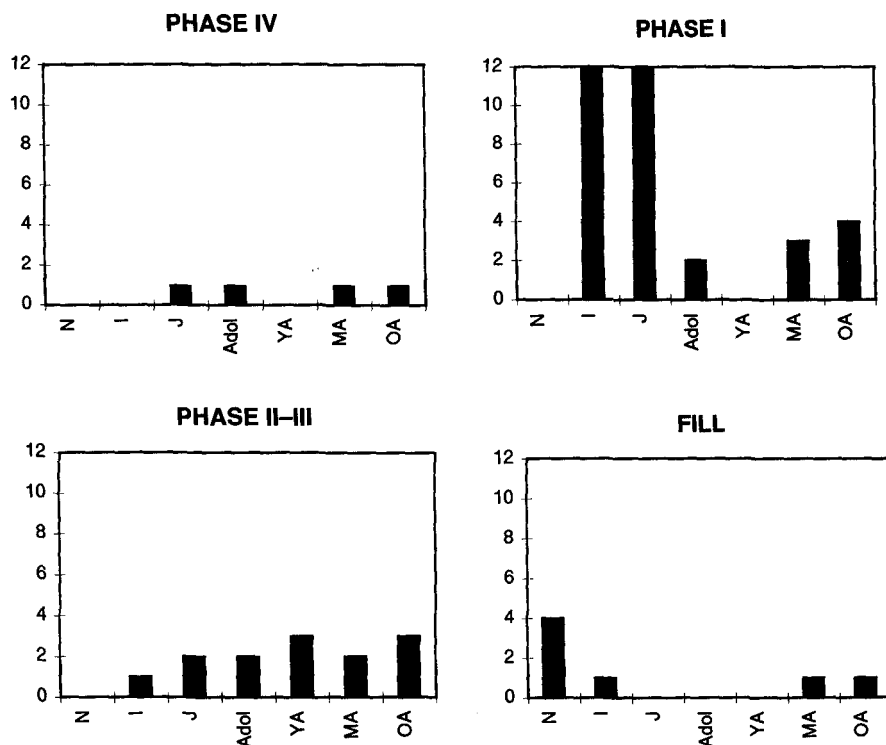


Figure 6. Histogram of the ages of individual skeletons buried in Building 1 in different occupation phases (see Figure 2). For ages see Figure 5.

cycle is indicated by the final phases of use of Building 1. We do not know what happened to the sculpture in the fourth occupation phase. This is because, after the abandonment and infilling (phase seven) of the fourth occupation in the building (phase six), a pit was dug down against the west wall of Space 71 and the sculpture removed (phase eight) leaving only traces and fragments. Small deposits of bone points and obsidian blades were left as offerings against the wall. The pottery from the robbing pit suggests that the removal of the sculpture occurred in the Neolithic, not long after the abandonment of the building.

This social concern with the sculpture on the west wall of Building 1 is reflected in numerous similar acts at Çatalhöyük. In Building 2 in the Mellaart area of the site (Hodder 1997), the west wall had been violently destroyed, and in the debris around the wall a very large wild bull's horn was found. Mellaart (1967) had noted a repeated pattern of destruction of the west walls of buildings. These actions can be seen as destructive, or as attempts made to recover sculptures of great social significance. Whatever the specific interpretation, it does seem that the end of the use of a building was often linked in some way to the relief sculptures within it. As already noted, the sculptures are often found integrated into the architecture of the buildings. And the buildings themselves are built and rebuilt as part of family cycles.

Conclusion

Clearly we do not yet have a full answer to questions regarding the meanings of the unique flowering of art at Çatalhöyük. So far we have made only short steps. But the approach being followed is to contextualize the art and by doing so we have seen that, as Grahame Clark would have it, the art had a social character.

The life of the houses in which the art occurred may relate to the life cycles of extended families. Some of the art, especially the relief sculpture on the western walls, seems to be related to these longer cycles. It seems to have been used and destroyed as the house was used and abandoned, and as family heads grew from young to old. The destruction or recovery of relief sculpture from central points in abandoned buildings perhaps suggest a concern with the passing on of authority, rights of access, or ancestral ties.

Other aspects of the art, in this case the geometric wall painting, seem to be linked to shorter cycles of activity. The painting in Building 1 is placed on plaster which is annually renewed. Any particular painting is quickly covered over. Mellaart (1967) records examples of repeated repainting of similar motifs. But the best examples of this are on relief sculptures such as leopards and bulls' heads. Our own observations are that most walls have some painting but that this is infrequently applied, to different degrees in different parts of a building. The motifs painted are much more varied than the relief sculptures. It is thus of interest that in Building 1, the painting around the north-western platform seems to be related to specific events rather than to the life cycle of the building as a whole. The painting here seems to be related to concentrations of burials, especially the

burials of young people. Perhaps this spatial and temporal link implies some generic association between painting and young people, say between painting and the initiation of young people. On the other hand, the painting may be related specifically to the death of young people.

Because of the link to young people under the north-western platform, it seems unlikely that the painting (perhaps in contrast to the relief sculpture) is associated with ancestors. Rather, the painting may have something to do with protecting the inhabitants of the building from negative spirits surrounding young death, or the painting itself may have helped directly to calm or control those spirits (as happens in many small-scale, shamanic societies—Humphrey & Onon 1996).

Jean Clottes (this volume) has pointed to the way in which animals in some south-western French Palaeolithic art seem to be ‘coming through’ the walls in the deep parts of caves. David Lewis-Williams, in his work with the Çatalhöyük project, has suggested that the bulls’ heads and some other relief sculpture at the site may be seen as ‘coming through’ the membrane of the walls in the interior parts of buildings. Certainly, there is much evidence of vulture beaks, jaws of fox and weasel, and the tusks of wild boar protruding through the walls into the interior spaces at Çatalhöyük (Mellaart 1967). It is possible that much of the art and symbolism at Çatalhöyük has little to do with representation and symbolism at all. It may be more like a tool, used to control or communicate with animals, spirits, and ancestors. The common use of the hand motif at Çatalhöyük may suggest the idea of touching or reaching through the walls. The location of the images deep in buildings does not suggest a concern with communication or display to other people. Rather it suggests a concern to control or communicate with another world.

We must await further excavation at Çatalhöyük in order to see whether the patterns so far identified in Building 1 are repeated elsewhere. We still have little idea of the degree of conformity to social norms at the site. Hopefully further analyses in Building 1 and further excavation of other buildings will allow a fuller contextualization of the imagery. Only in this way can the social character of the ‘art’ that I have suggested here be further explored. Only in this way can the different types of ‘art’ be related to the differing social rhythms of life at Çatalhöyük, and perhaps to conceptualizations of the world very different from our own.

Acknowledgement

The work at the site is undertaken with a permit from the Turkish Ministry of Culture, and is funded by the British Academy, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, Newton Trust, and McDonald Institute. The main sponsors are Visa and KoçBank, the long-term sponsor is Merko, and the co-sponsors are British Airways, Shell, and GlaxoWellcome. The official tour operator is Meptur. I would personally like to thank and acknowledge all the project members whose collaborative efforts make articles like this possible. In particular I wish to thank Roger Matthews and Gavin Lucas for their painstaking work on Building 1.

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JEAN CLOTTES

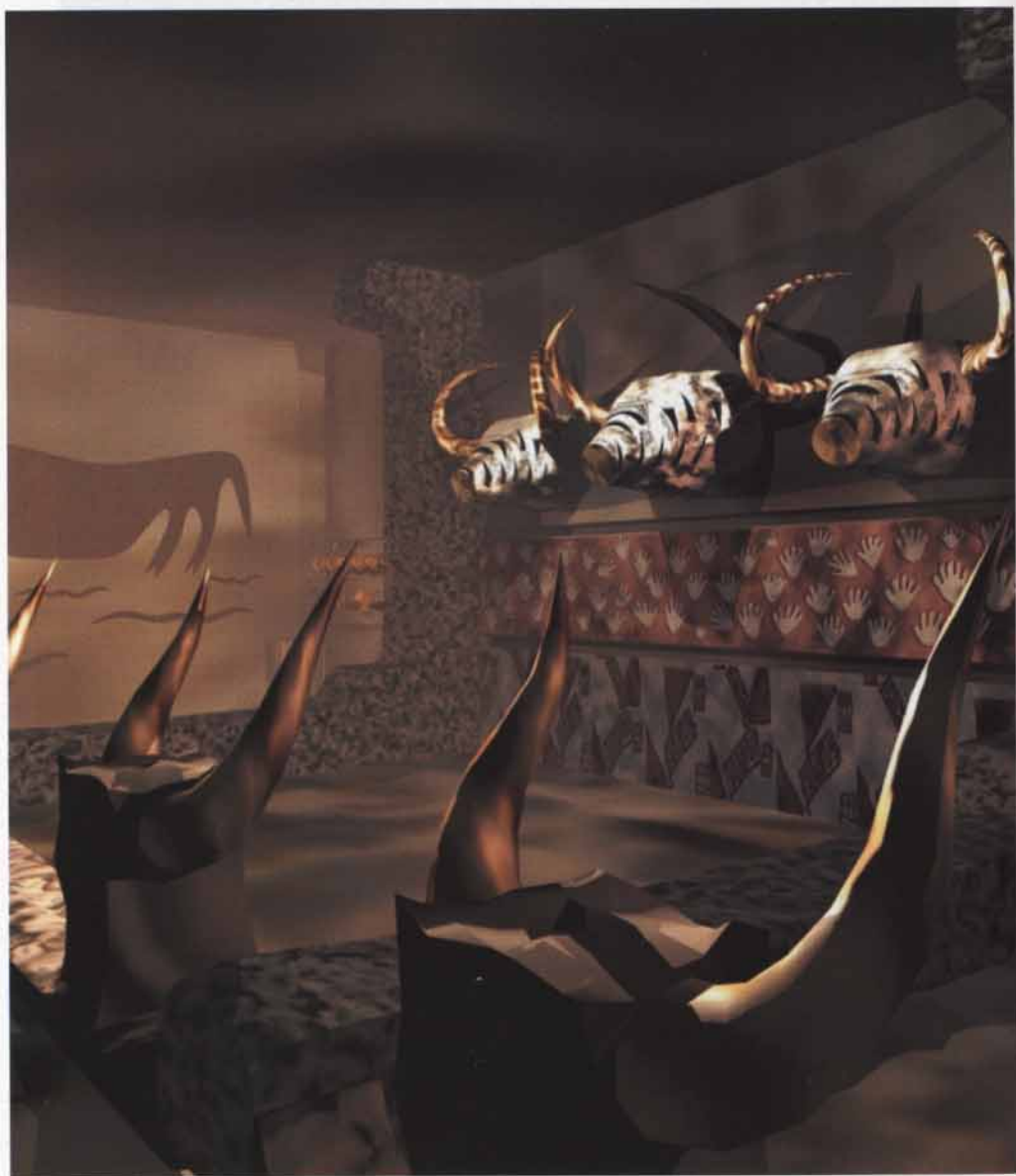
Twenty Thousand Years of Palaeolithic Cave Art in Southern France

Out of the 350 or so sites with rock art known in the Upper Palaeolithic about half are located in Southern France. A number of important discoveries have been made in the past few years. This overview will be mainly concerned with three points. The first deals with the results of direct radiocarbon dating for the art. The direct dates available range from $32,410 \pm 720$ BP for a painted rhino in Chauvet to $11,600 \pm 150$ BP for a painted horse in Portel. The realization that Aurignacians had mastered all the artistic techniques that were supposed to have developed gradually over the following millennia upsets the long-held theory of a gradual evolution of art from supposedly crude beginnings. The second point overturns the concept that particular themes, which were thought to be chronologically and/or spatially restricted (Placard signs, claviforms, hand stencils, composite creatures), are not. Finally, the third part examines some consistent types of behaviour all over the Upper Palaeolithic, relating to the deep caves. They testify to a common attitude in relation to the cave itself from the Aurignacian to the end of the Magdalenian, that is, to a common frame of beliefs that passed from generation to generation.

IAN HODDER

Symbolism at Çatalhöyük

This paper follows Grahame Clark's interest in the social character of art and in the diversity of cultural achievement. These themes are pursued in relation to the 9000 year old site of Çatalhöyük in central Turkey. Re-excavation of the site since 1993 has allowed questions to be asked about the environmental, economic, and social context of the art, although this paper deals only with social aspects. The detailed excavation of Building 1 in the north part of the Çatalhöyük East mound is described and the arrangement of activities in each phase of the building is shown. It is argued that two types of art relate to two different social rhythms. The relief sculpture is associated with the life cycles of buildings and whole extended family groups. It may be related to ancestral links between families and buildings. The painting, on the other hand, appears to be related to the burial of young people. It may have a specific and shorter-term role in dealing with the spiritual dangers of young death. These examples are presented as a first step in the understanding of the symbolism at Çatalhöyük.



Virtual reality reconstruction of Shrine 10 in Level VIB. (Courtesy Monique Mulder and Heinrich Klotz, Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe)