



Book Reviews

ASSEMBLING ÇATALHÖYÜK. THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY VOLUME 1 – EDITED BY IAN HODDER AND ARKADIUSZ MARCINIAK

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The productivity of the team at Çatalhöyük never ceases to amaze, as tireless bands of specialists continue to produce reports, interims and articles. What makes this volume stand out from the others is that its chapters include so many collaborative pieces written by members from several different specialist teams. Their contributions are loosely grouped around the themes of interaction and representation; bodies and identity; and architecture, household and inhabitation.

In Marciniak's introduction to the volume, these collaborations are, rather fashionably, likened to assemblages, in which relations between datasets, people, recording methods, objects and so on work together to constitute the (never objective) archaeological process. This may be a good characterisation of the general spirit in which many of the contributions were written, but one wonders whether the process in itself is really as much of a novelty as this new kind of rhetoric suggests – after all, interdisciplinary co-operation has always been like this. In a further scene-setting chapter, Hodder then likens Çatalhöyük itself to an assemblage of various field and specialist teams, cross-cut by diverging interests, social networks and power relations, all of which play their own part in how certain interpretations are chosen as particularly successful. Again, this sounds just like any archaeological project. It would perhaps have been interesting to reflect on whether the experience at Çatalhöyük is indeed more intense than elsewhere, given the size of the team, the logistical challenges, the expectations of a reflexive approach, the longevity of this project and the extent to which people have worked under a constant spotlight of media and public attention – the notion of assemblage could usefully have been extended to cover more of these 'external' factors, bringing home to us outsiders what makes this project so unique. In general

however, both introductory chapters do fulfil their brief in showing the rationale behind the combinations of authors and topics addressed in the volume.

The first thematic set of papers concerns data handling and visualisation and can be tough reading for the non-initiated. Engel and Grossner explain their vision for an interlinked database structure that would support reflexive practice by linking all the existing archives, currently spread in many different formats across many research teams. One key challenge is to allow for the identification of spatial and chronological patterning. To make this chapter follow on more closely from the introductions, it could have explored in how far the structure of these databases themselves becomes an actant in the process of interpretation, for instance through imposing sets of agreed-upon terms. In any case, this brief overview shows how much untapped potential still exists and can be drawn out by creating new sorts of (electronic) linkages. Mickel and Meeks provide one of the most interesting chapters in the volume, using network analysis to map how data and interpretive preferences flow through research groups and records. Although only texts and archaeologists themselves have been included (and not materials, or non-archaeological human actors), this is still a fascinating exercise showing a wave-like development of peaks in inter-group cohesiveness and communication followed by periods of collapse, for which a series of possible explanations are offered. It is through narratives such as these that the mutual fashioning of archaeologists and their interpretations becomes visible in a concrete way. In contrast, the paper by Forte and others is a rather jargon-heavy read in places and failed to convince me why a full 3D-reconstruction of buildings is necessary for writing narratives focused on overlapping activity areas within and between buildings. It is, however, clear that the development of such visualisation techniques will be central not only for conservation monitoring but also by increasing public engagement through the creation of virtual 3D-environments one can simply walk through and explore.

The next set of papers deals, broadly speaking, with the human body as a key locus of experience. Sadvari and colleagues show that osteologically documented patterns of activities are, rather satisfyingly, consistent with expectations generated by the available iconography, and that this remains so through various chronological changes. They thus suggest that the wall paintings may represent real events, rather than timeless mythical scenes – a new line of questioning that deserves broader discussion. In a complementary paper, Pearson and colleagues use figurines, osteologically

documented activity patterns and diet to argue that age was a much stronger structuring principle of daily life than sex. This point is reinforced by Agrawal and colleagues in a more tightly written contribution which also makes the important observation that gender, at least, is always also age-related. As a set, these papers build an excellent foundation for tracing how experiences of the human body changed at Çatalhöyük over time.

Houses, too, are central to any understanding of this site. In a highly readable paper, Carter and colleagues take us through the social implications of house construction events by characterising the changing nature of foundation deposits over time, and how these may reflect re-alignments in how wider social networks were drawn upon in these situations. Barański *et al.* build on the importance of deposition by considering the use of in-between spaces such as threshing floors and animal pens. They also reflect on the impact of subsiding ground for the construction of new buildings in later phases of the site. The chapter by Taylor and colleagues is again mostly based on computer-aided visualisations, in this case attempts to show site phasing in a dynamic way, for instance through animated sequences of shifting activity zones in domestic units. With more development, this opens the exciting possibility to map not just finds categories or types of deposit, but increasingly complex interpretive constructs such as 'symbolic' versus 'technological' behaviour, in an interactive way.

The final section deals with integrating Çatalhöyük into its wider landscape. Although the level of proof reading distinctly deteriorates in this section, these papers provide some of the most interesting connections. Marciniak and colleagues trace how landscape use changed in the upper levels of the tell, with households developing greater autonomy in practices like herding. This goes hand in hand with an increase in individual mobility, for which a second paper by Sadvari and (different) colleagues offers a series of compelling potential explanations. One nevertheless wonders whether 'autonomy' as a concept perhaps needs to be relativized somewhat – more varied economic strategies may still need communal negotiation to access resources and territories, and one could ask through which materials and practices this was enacted. The paper by Özdöl-Kutlu and colleagues suggests some possibilities. Their comparison of material culture from Çatalhöyük and other areas of Anatolia documents a general diversification in ceramic and lithic styles, in spite (or because?) of increased contact between regions. In this mosaic pattern, the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük can be

characterised as particularly conservative. For the authors, this implies a marginal position of the site, increasingly 'left behind' as other, more innovative communities take the lead. However, could this not also be a strategy that continues to bind together Çatalhöyük's inhabitants, perhaps creating an increasingly emblematic identity where daily practice began to diverge?

Certainly, the present volume provides a wealth of data, stimulating interpretations and new ideas, and as such is an open invitation to readers to formulate their own readings of this fascinating site. The many full-colour illustrations also make this an attractive volume, as reflected in the price tag. While many of the chapters offered here have been presented in other forms elsewhere, and one can recognize some of the arguments from conference papers, journal articles and so on, as a whole the collection achieves its aim in becoming more than the sum of its parts through the juxtaposition of several angles of research. Like in most edited volumes, the price to pay is that the volume as a whole can feel a bit disjointed in places, but both those who come to dip in and out of particular areas of research and those who want a sustained level of information will come away satisfied.

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