



atalhöyük

Site Guide Book





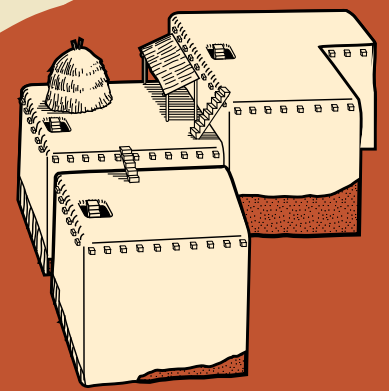
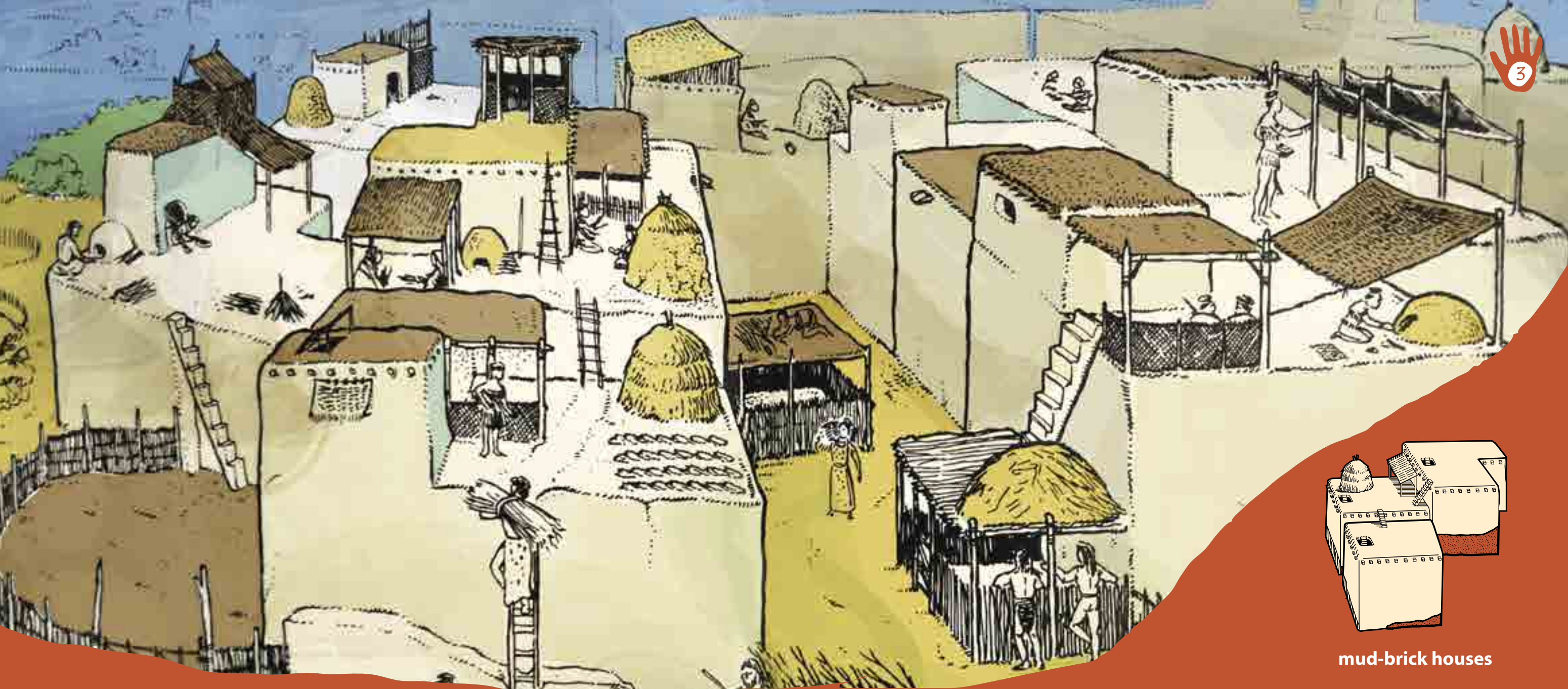
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Images and text by Çatalhöyük Research Project team



The ancient town of Çatalhöyük appears today as a large hill on the Anatolian plain. However the grass and soil conceal a settlement that was once lived in by 3,500 to 8,000 people more than 9,000 years ago. This concentrated farming community produced exceptional art and architecture for its time, making it one of the most important archaeological sites in the world.





**mud-brick houses**

Catalhöyük was originally settled approximately 9000 years ago during the Neolithic (New Stone Age). It extended over a massive 13.5 hectares of land, and was occupied for around 1400 years. Over this time period, the town grew as people abandoned old houses, filled them in, and built new ones on top—creating a mound over 21 metres high. The buildings were packed tightly so that there were few or no streets. Instead, people walked across roofs and down ladders into interior spaces.

Each house was probably inhabited by a family of 5 to 10 people. There was a main room for living, craft activities, cooking, eating and sleeping, and there were side rooms for storage and food preparation. The interiors were sometimes decorated with rich art, and the dead were buried under the floors. As Catalhöyük grew in population, it is likely that its residents began to disperse, ultimately leaving the town for other sites in the vicinity and beyond.

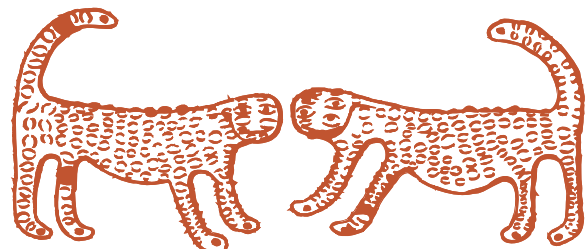
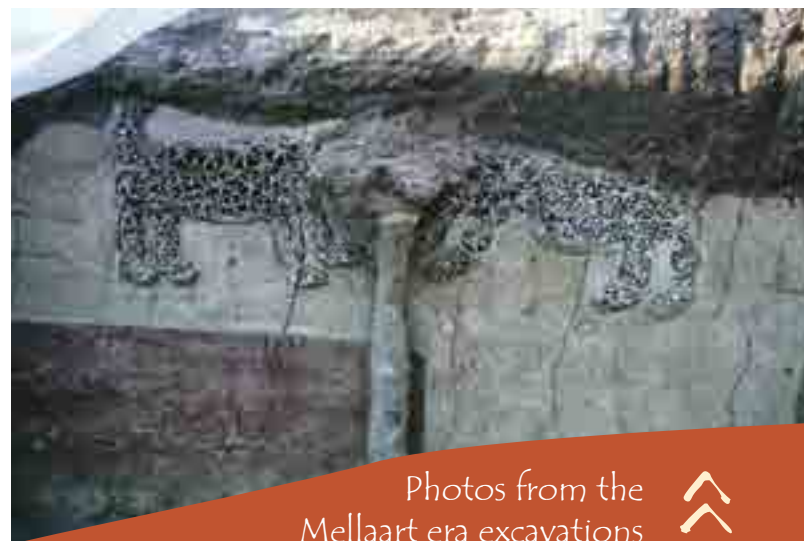


# A half century of excavation at Çatalhöyük



After the 1960s excavations ended, work was resumed by Professor Ian Hodder in 1993. He recruited an international group of specialists to continue investigating the details of human life at Çatalhöyük. These experts now visit the site each year from Turkey and dozens of other countries around the world. Hodder's team aims to advance knowledge not only of the site itself, but of scientific technique, conservation, and the public presentation of archaeology. The excavation is internationally famous due to its large scale and the wealth of information it provides about life in the Neolithic period.

Although the local community has long known of Çatalhöyük, archaeologists learned about it only in the late 1950s when James Mellaart, David French and colleagues went searching for evidence of farming and major settlement in central Anatolia. With a large team of Turkish labourers and some Turkish and international scholars, Mellaart excavated about 160 buildings between 1961 and 1965. At the same time, he widely publicised the findings, thus launching Çatalhöyük's world-wide renown.



plaster reliefs

Photos from the Mellaart era excavations



Recent excavations in the North Shelter area



Most of the findings uncovered at Çatalhöyük over its 50 years of study are housed and displayed in nearby institutions. The artefacts excavated by Mellaart's team in the 1960s are held by the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. Those excavated more recently by Hodder's team are held in Konya at the Archaeological Museum.

# What is Çatalhöyük?



The earliest settlement at Çatalhöyük was probably located in a shallow depression on the landscape, surrounded by plains and wetlands rich in resources: reeds (for building and matting), birds and eggs, as well as wild cattle, boar, and deer. Evidence suggests that households cooperated in tending fields (e.g., of cereals) and grazed their sheep and goats around the settlement on slightly raised ground. People also appear to have set up long-distance networks of exchange across the eastern Mediterranean, trading materials like obsidian from Cappadocia and baskets from the Red Sea.



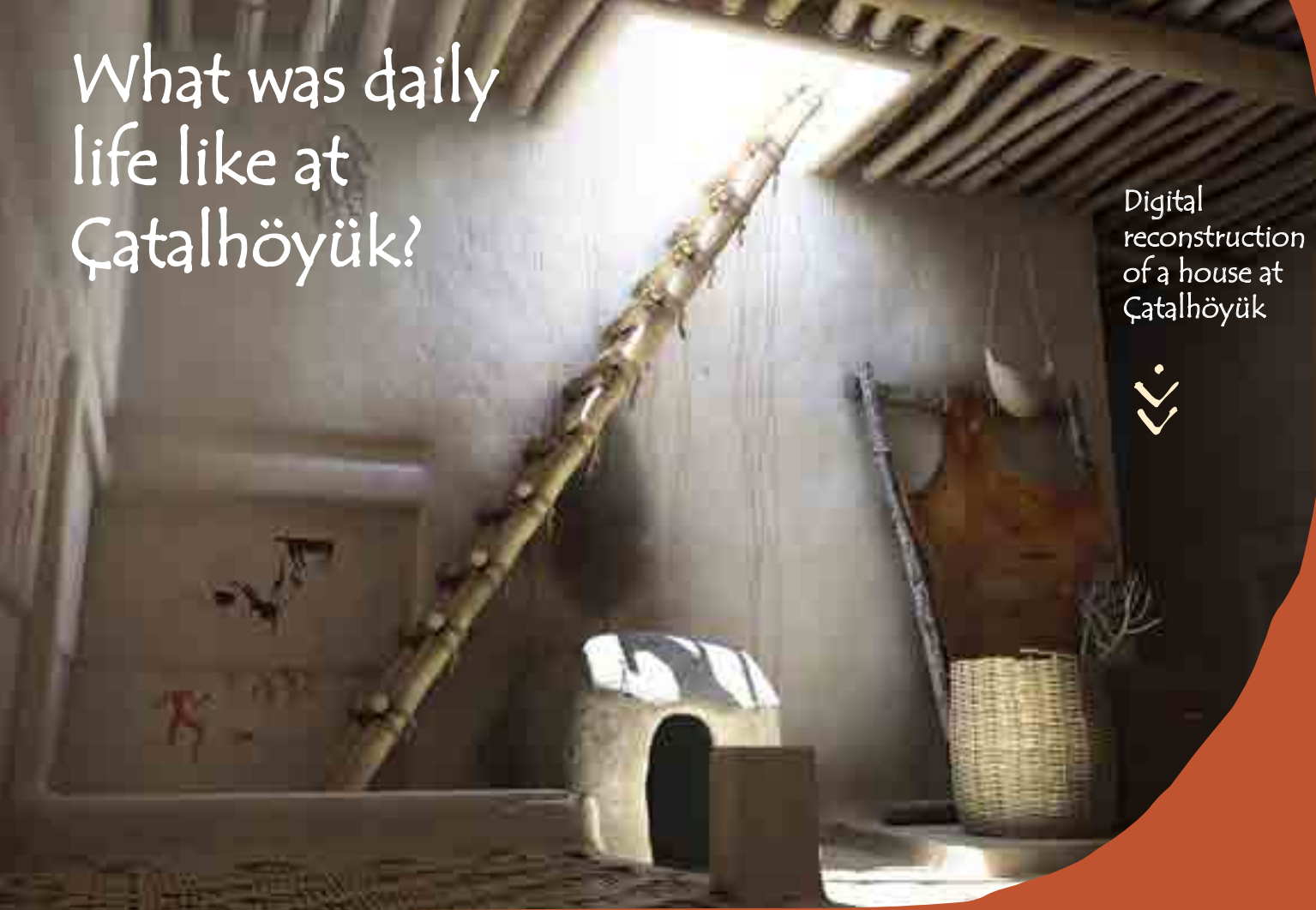
Farmers separated the wheat from the chaff using a technique called winnowing.

The term 'Çatalhöyük' means 'fork mound,' probably referring to the fact that the road from the nearby town of Çumra divides here in multiple directions. Çatalhöyük is in fact two separate hills: the East Mound dating from 7400 BC (during the Neolithic period), and the West Mound dating from about 6000 BC (the Chalcolithic period). Over time, it is likely that the population of the East Mound increased to such an extent that people began to move to different locations—the West Mound being one such site.

It was once thought that Çatalhöyük represented the first sedentary settlement of people anywhere in the world. We now know that the site was built several thousand years after the emergence of such settlements in the Middle East and after the domestication of plants, sheep and goats. Nevertheless, Çatalhöyük remains unique in having the densest concentration of art and symbolism in the eastern Mediterranean.



# What was daily life like at Çatalhöyük?



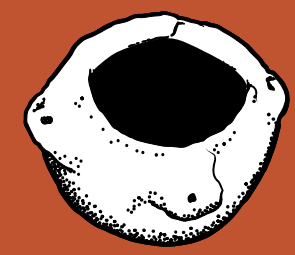
Digital reconstruction of a house at Çatalhöyük



It seems that the people of Çatalhöyük lived without any clear central authority or ruling elite. There is no evidence of administrative centres at the site, nor of ceremonial buildings or upper-class quarters. Groups of individuals may have worked together to coordinate actions. However, in general, Çatalhöyük seems to have been a very large, mostly egalitarian community, with people conducting the majority of their activities within or on top of their houses.

The archaeology at Çatalhöyük provides a rich record of the minutiae of daily life. Everyday activities at the site seem to have been structured around highly repetitive practices, much like at other and earlier settlements in Anatolia and the Middle East. These practices included careful house maintenance, like the reconstruction and relocation of ovens, and the repeated whitewashing of walls to cover soot stains and reflect incoming light.

Basic domestic items such as clay balls and pots (for heating and cooking food), and obsidian and bone tools were made within the home or on its roof. Animal bone evidence indicates that food was processed here too.



pottery

Each household had the same limited amount of storage space, and families probably engaged in most of the same forms of small-scale domestic production, meaning there was very little difference between residences.

The production of specialized items and skills may have increased over time, but households in Çatalhöyük were mostly self-sufficient and equal in their activities.

# How did Çatalhöyük's architecture relate to everyday living?

Homes at Çatalhöyük were the centre of social life. Unlike modern towns where different buildings tend to have different functions (like churches for religious activity or workshops for business), at Çatalhöyük all these separate functions seem to have occurred in one place: the house. Here people produced goods, buried their dead, made art, and engaged in domestic and ritual activity. Beyond homes, the only other spaces that archaeologists have uncovered at the site are refuse areas and animal pens.

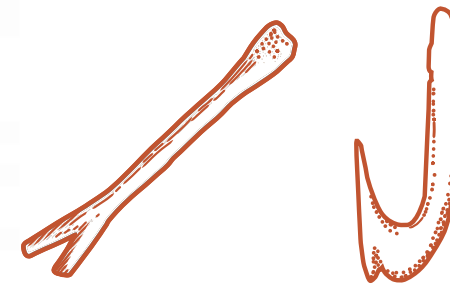
The site's houses were one or possibly even two storeys high, windowless, and accessible only through entryways in the roof. They were constructed purely out of mud bricks which were probably made by household members themselves.



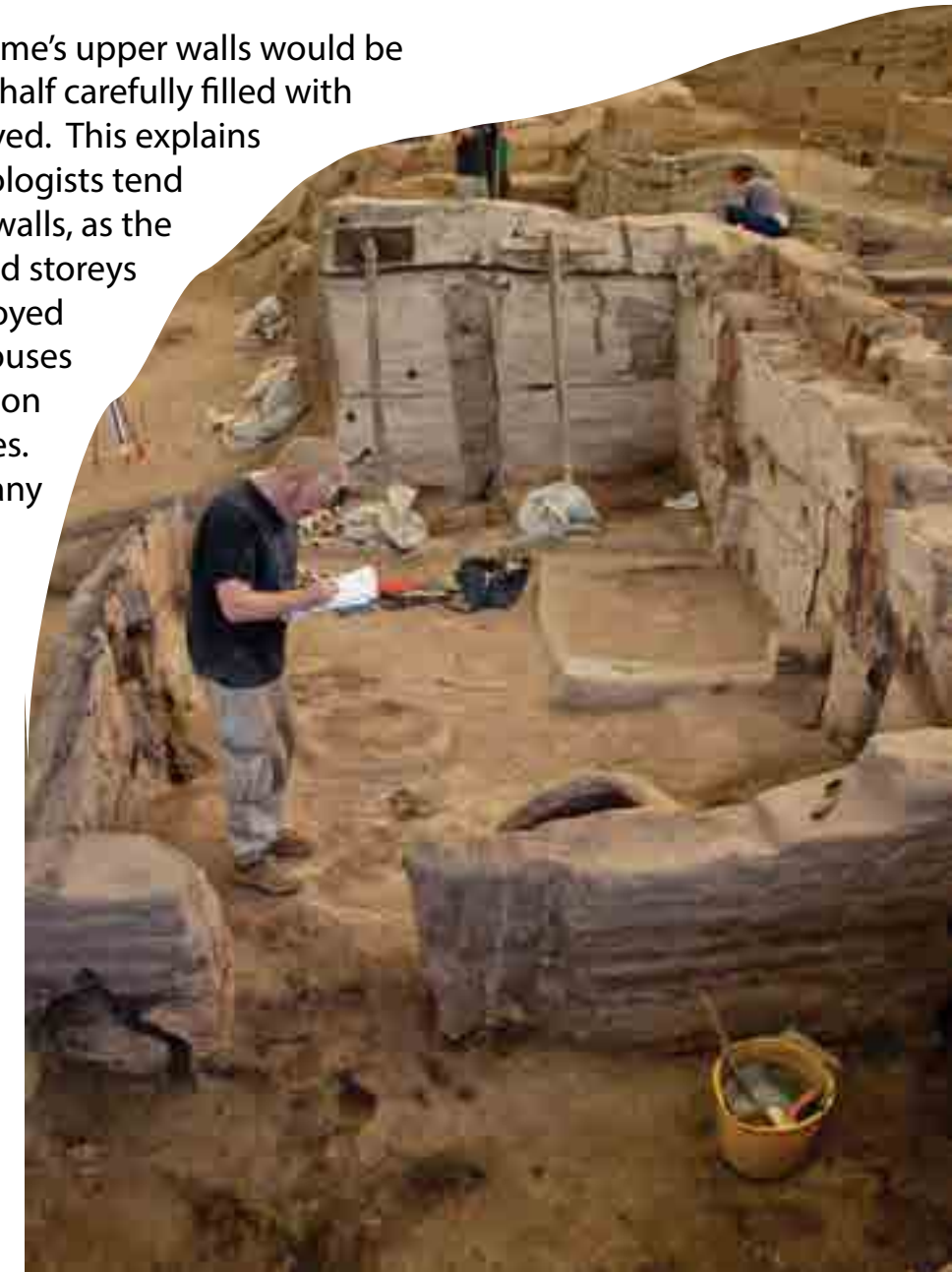
Çatalhöyük's houses tended to be lived in for 45 to 90 years, with occupants continually re-plastering their internal walls and floors—perhaps on an annual or even a monthly basis. There is evidence that some homes were plastered up to 450 times.

Each building had its own outer walls that abutted the houses next door. These independent walls allowed people to dismantle and reconstruct their homes without affecting surrounding residences.

Upon abandonment, a home's upper walls would be demolished and its lower half carefully filled with soil, leaving it well preserved. This explains why on site today archaeologists tend only to uncover very low walls, as the upper portions and second storeys were systematically destroyed by past residents. New houses were then constructed upon the bases of the old houses. There is evidence of as many as six rebuildings in the same place—one on top of the other.

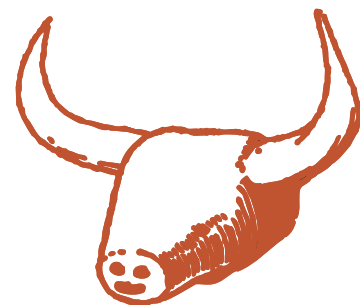
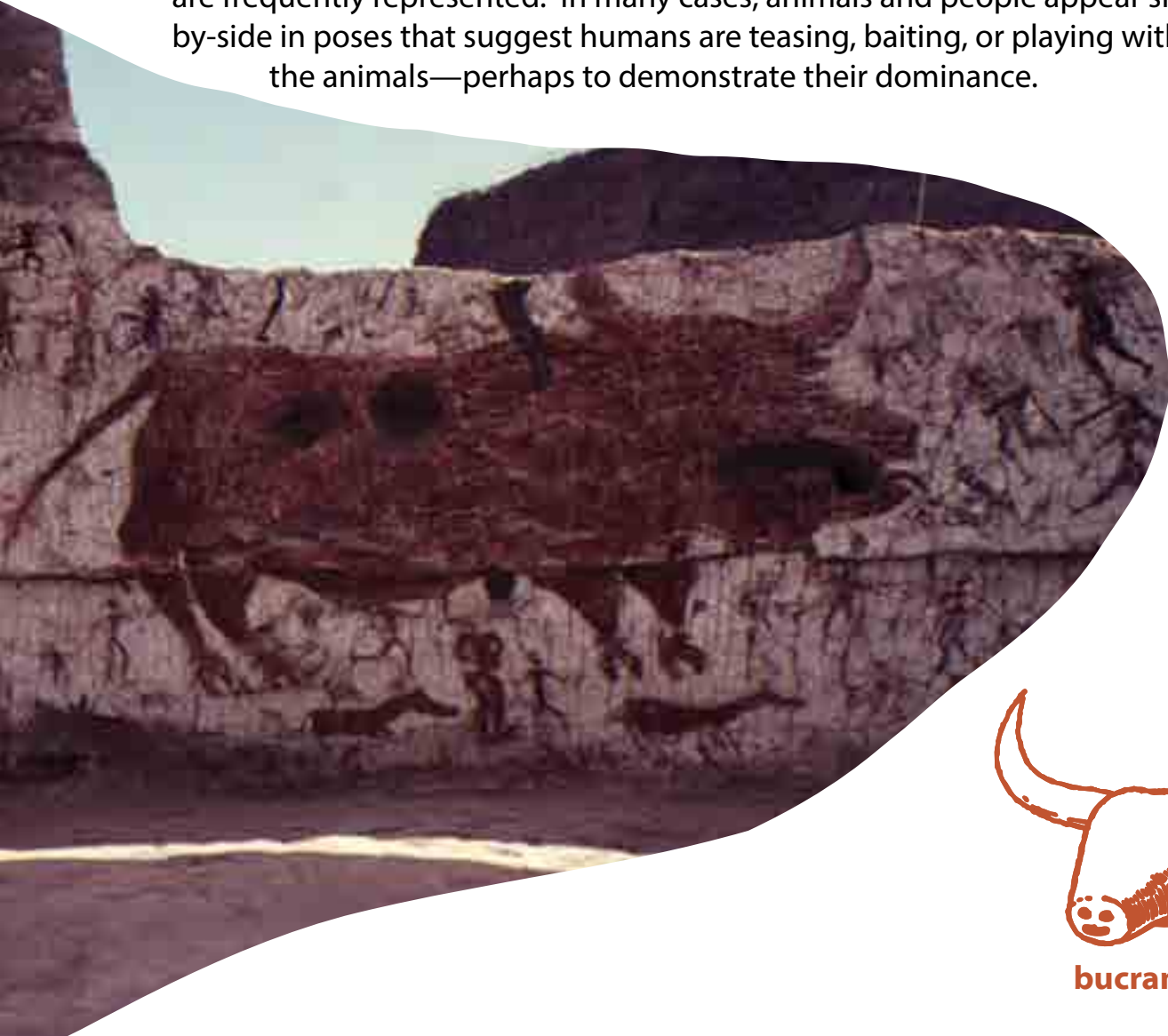


**bone tools**

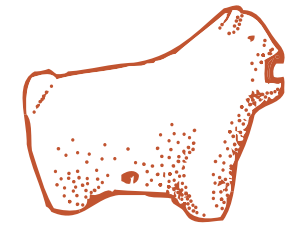


# What was the role of art and symbolism at Çatalhöyük?

Çatalhöyük has some of the most important art of any archaeological site in the world. This is because the art is very densely concentrated, symbolically complex, and takes many forms: paintings and reliefs, installations, sculpture, incised geometric patterning, clay seals, and figurines. Animals such as wild bulls, rams, deer, vultures, bears and leopards are frequently represented. In many cases, animals and people appear side-by-side in poses that suggest humans are teasing, baiting, or playing with the animals—perhaps to demonstrate their dominance.

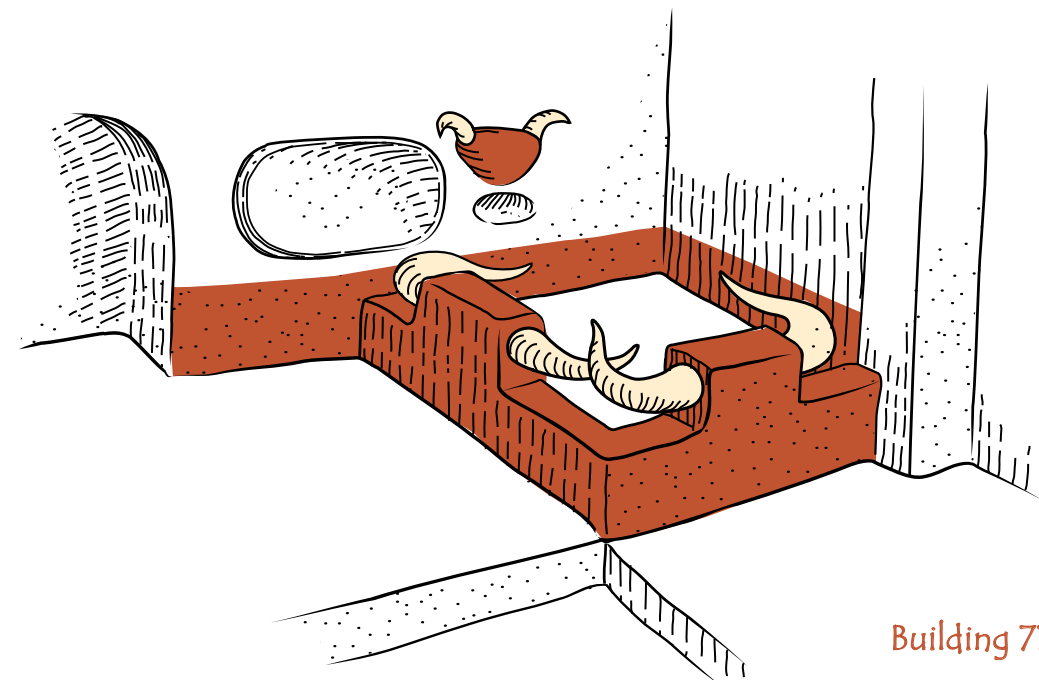


**bucranium**



**figurines**

Many small figurines have been uncovered at Çatalhöyük in a striking variety of styles and forms, including human, animal, and other types. This diversity in form challenges previous interpretations of the figurines as being representations of a 'Mother Goddess' or specifically religious or cult objects. There is no evidence of their purposeful burying or caching, and most were probably made very quickly in domestic environments. Although some may relate to ritual behaviour, the majority of figurines were likely linked to everyday use.



**Building 77**



Amongst the most distinctive of Çatalhöyük's artworks are its bucrania—bull's head sculptures. These were constructed by covering part of a bull's skull (including the horns) in plaster and mounting them to walls, benches and pillars. Those uncovered in Building 77 surround a burial place and were maybe intended to protect that area.



# Who was buried at Çatalhöyük?



Reconstruction of a burial at Çatalhöyük

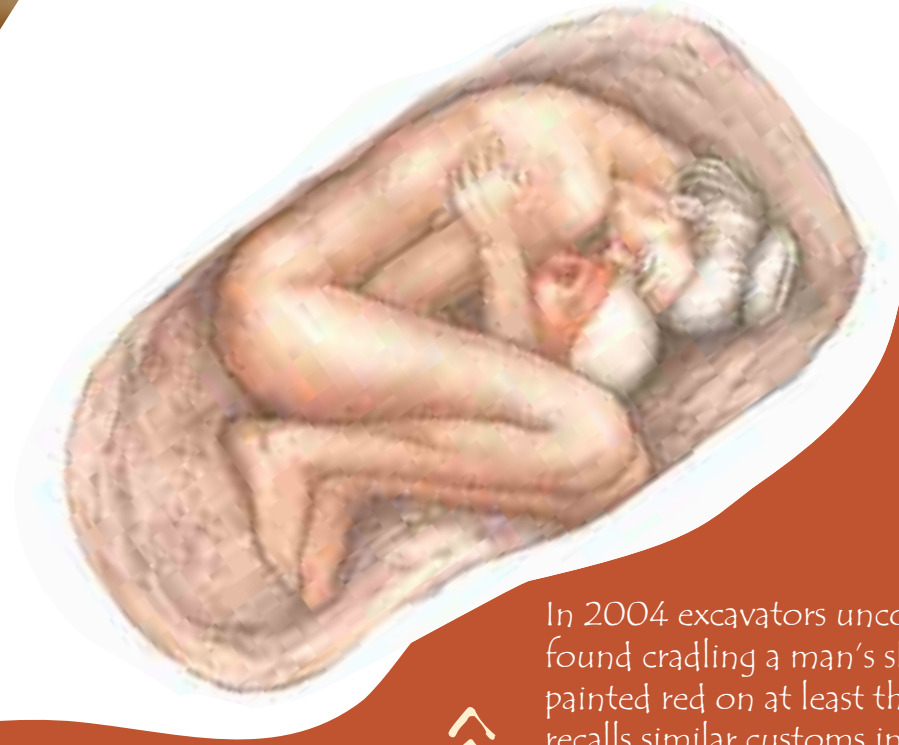
Evidence from preserved plant remains indicates that some people would have been bound or wrapped in matting before interment. Although the majority of people were probably buried in one spot immediately after death (often with other bodies), we know that certain people were removed from their original graves and placed in different ones over time. In fact, sometimes only the skull was removed, and sometimes the long bones of the arms and legs.

It is not yet clear why the people of Çatalhöyük were buried inside the homes, and why they were often under the platforms that residents may have used as sleeping areas. The bones do reveal, however, a great deal about the diet and lifestyle of the occupants of Çatalhöyük. We know, for example, that they had a physically-demanding lifestyle, with a low prevalence of bone infection. Despite higher levels of cavities (due to their consumption of wheat), the people of Çatalhöyük were healthy compared to other early farmers in North and South America and in parts of Europe.



wall murals

Many of the houses at Çatalhöyük contain burials beneath their plaster floors. Some have only one burial, most have a few, and occasionally a house may have up to 60 skeletons interred within it. Typically these are positioned under raised platforms, usually at the northern ends of homes where wall decorations and installations are concentrated.



In 2004 excavators uncovered the grave of a woman who was found cradling a man's skull. The skull had been plastered and painted red on at least three separate occasions, a practise that recalls similar customs in the Levant. It is unclear why the bones were associated with one another, but they may have been intended to communicate ancestry and links between people across time. Responses to death and dying in Çatalhöyük were likely to have been very different from our own responses to these issues today.

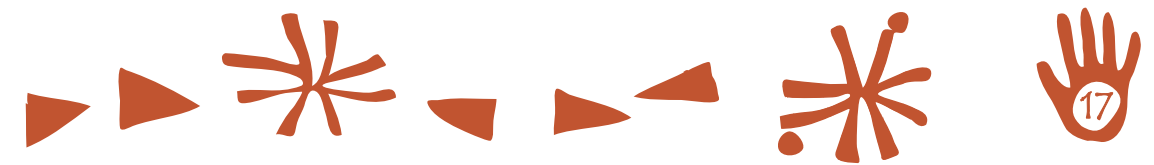
# What happened to the people of Çatalhöyük?



Excavations on the West Mound



After 1400 years, Çatalhöyük was finally abandoned by its occupants, who began new settlements nearby and in other areas of the region. It is not clear exactly why this change occurred, although there may be multiple factors involved—including a change in climate, an exhaustion of resources, and over-population.



Some of the occupants moved to the West Mound, directly across the river from the East Mound. This new settlement shared some of the East Mound's architectural and artistic traditions, however it was also distinctive in many ways. For example, there were no geometric or figurative wall paintings or reliefs, but rather elaborately painted ceramics—something which did not exist until the very late stages of the East Mound's occupation. Also, there was no evidence of burials under the floors, and there were fewer re-plasterings of the house walls. This indicates a decrease in the ritual and symbolic importance of the house walls and floors.

These changes coincided with a division of labour among the population of the West Mound. Buildings adopted new layouts and functions as individuals began to specialise in certain tasks. Households became less self-sufficient, making the community more interdependent.



This pottery fragment was discovered on the West Mound in 2008. The figure is probably female, based on comparisons with similar ceramics discovered during excavations.



# Who participates in the interpretation of Çatalhöyük?

An international group of scholars converges at Çatalhöyük each year to study all aspects of Neolithic life, as well as the conservation and visual representation of the site. Many other individuals are also directly involved in giving meaning to the site. Building strong partnerships with local communities and international interest groups is vital to the future of Çatalhöyük. School children, for example, are key collaborators in raising awareness about the site's heritage and preservation. Many return from Çatalhöyük each year to transfer their knowledge to family and friends.



clay stamps

Çatalhöyük has been attracting attention since its initial excavation in the 1960s, and inspiring diverse audiences from around the world. Writers, artists, tourists, and members of the goddess community play an important role in intercultural exchange, as do the media, sponsors, and commercial and private interests. All those involved offer different ways of looking at the site and, together, give it international relevance.



Examining the Neolithic diet

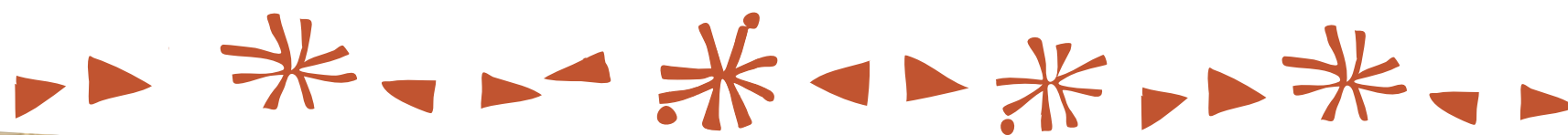
Painting plaster reliefs



# The future of Çatalhöyük

Çatalhöyük is famous around the world for its archaeological legacy and scholarship. It attracts more than 15,000 local and foreign visitors per year, alongside hundreds of research experts. As a result of its global importance, Çatalhöyük is currently on the shortlist for UNESCO World Heritage Site status. However, its long-term sustainability depends on the ongoing commitment of local communities, visitors, and worldwide sponsors.

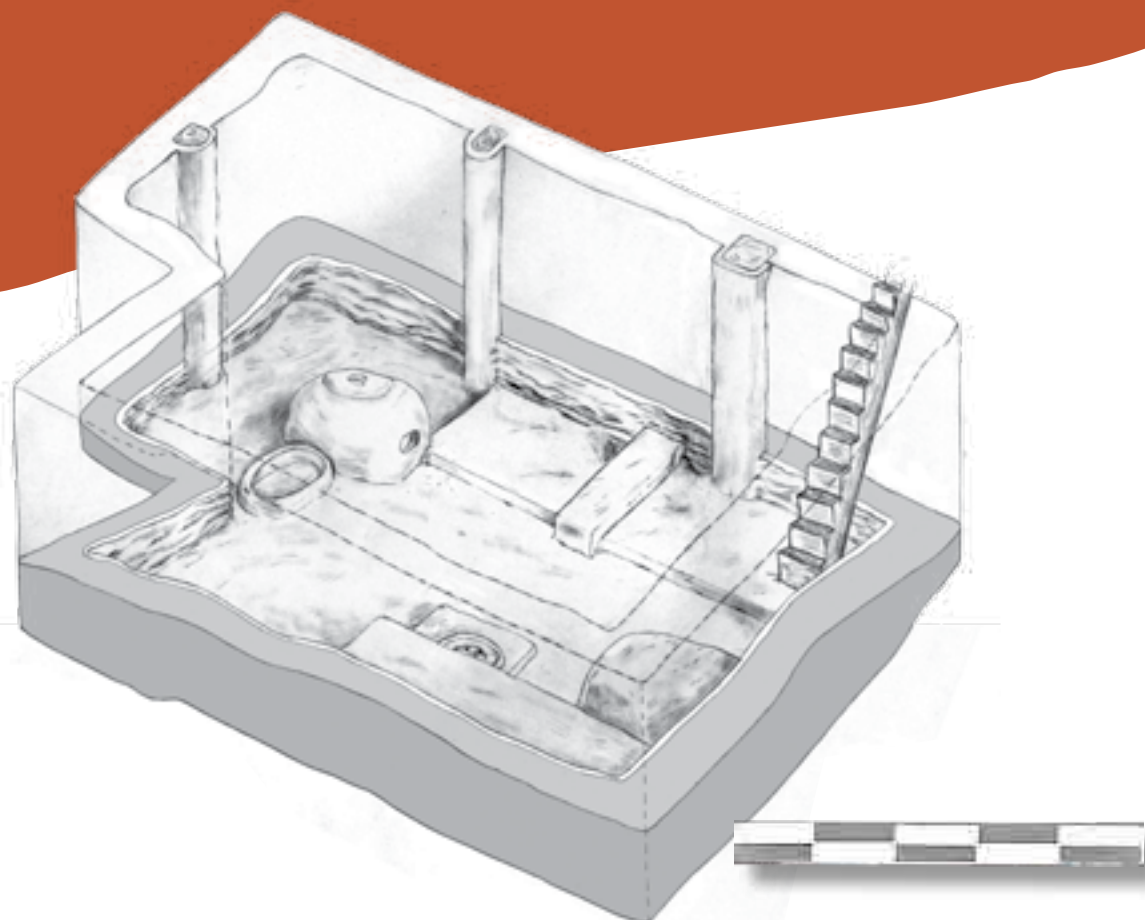
Excavations continue to bring to light different perspectives on Çatalhöyük's past, and a renewed programme of site visualisation means that there are always new ways of seeing and interpreting the history of this Neolithic settlement. But future investment is needed to enable continued archaeological innovation and conservation of excavated materials. Such investment, along with community input, is essential to planning for the sustainability of the site once active investigations are complete, as well as to maintaining local and international interest for future generations of visitors.



# Images of Çatalhöyük

As archaeologists excavate the remains of Çatalhöyük they document all aspects of their findings—including the smallest shapes and details of the Neolithic houses, and the contents buried inside. Much of the uncovered material is photographed, and published in reports produced each year by the Çatalhöyük Research Project.

These are some of the images made by archaeologists during their excavations. Certain images are used to help scientists analyse the complex data they unearth; others are intended primarily for the public to see. But all images play a vital role in how Çatalhöyük is understood. It is important, therefore, to ensure that the images we create and publish represent careful interpretations of the archaeological evidence. As the evidence changes, the images we use must change too.

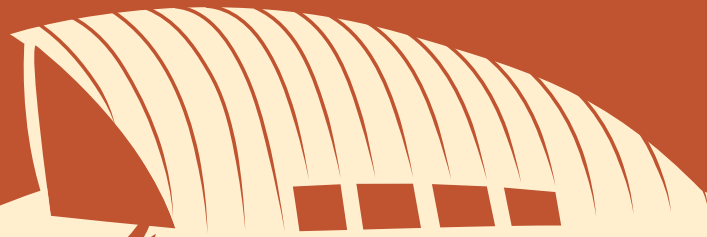




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