



## Introduction

Joan Marler

This issue of the *Journal of Archaeomythology* is dedicated to British archaeologist James Mellaart whose discovery in 1958 of the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük, on Turkey's Konya Plain, revolutionized the study of Anatolian prehistory. Two years before Mellaart investigated the "forked mound" and discovered that it was "Neolithic at the bottom *and* Neolithic at the top" (Mellaart, personal communication), Seton Lloyd, former Director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, had asserted that Anatolia "shows no sign whatever of habitation during the Neolithic period" (Lloyd 1956:53). It was commonly assumed that farming technologies were transported westward by sea, and that Anatolia functioned solely as a land bridge for the introduction of Neolithic technologies into Europe.

Between 1961 and 1965, during four seasons of excavation, Mellaart's team uncovered hundreds of well-preserved rooms, dozens of polychrome wall paintings and bas reliefs, ritual installations, exquisitely fashioned female figurines, finely crafted tools, and evidence of long-distance trade and peaceful living throughout the duration of the site—now dated to c. 7400-6400 BC. Mellaart's excavation reports, high profile articles, and his 1967 book, *Çatal Hüyük*, created enormous public interest which continued long after the excavation was closed by the Turkish government.

In 1993, another British archaeologist, Ian Hodder, reopened the excavation as project director with an international team of specialists, described by journalist Michael Balter (2005:4) as "the greatest concentration of scientific firepower ever focused on an archaeological dig." In reestablishing the Çatalhöyük excavation, Hodder inherited one of the most important Neolithic sites in the world as well as a locus of intensive interest by a number of very different communities and stakeholders. The articles in this issue provide an introduction to the Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük and examine a

range of issues concerning various interpretations of the site and its remarkable contents.

In "Çatalhöyük: The Organization of a Neolithic Society," Shahina Farid (Field Director and Project Coordinator at Çatalhöyük) describes the layout of the densely packed settlement, its prominent internal features, its ecological context, economy, burial practices, wall paintings and plaster reliefs, portable sculptures and examples of important recent discoveries.

In one of two interviews, Joan Marler speaks with Project Director Ian Hodder about the reopening of the excavation at Çatalhöyük, new interpretations of the burials within the houses, Çatalhöyük social structure, the subject of 'visual metaphor' and Hodder's interpretation of the wall paintings and symbolic imagery, in contrast to previous interpretations by James Mellaart and Marija Gimbutas. In the following interview, Jak Yakar (Professor of Anatolian Archaeology and Near Eastern Cultures, Tel Aviv University)—who participated in the 1963 excavation season at Çatalhöyük—recalls working under the direction of James Mellaart and discusses Çatalhöyük in the context of Anatolian prehistory. Prof. Yakar offers his own approach to archaeological interpretation as a result of forty years of work as a field archaeologist in Turkey.

In "Turkish Friends of Çatalhöyük: A Tale of Friendship by a Handful of Volunteers," Reşit Ergener (President and one of the founders of Turkish Friends of Çatalhöyük) describes the creation and accomplishments of this volunteer organization that has stimulated public attention to the importance of Çatalhöyük and has generated tangible support for the ongoing excavation. Visual artist Lydia Ruyle offers a lively description of the results of a fruitful collaboration between "Turkish Friends" and her organization, "Goddess Conversations," which generated two

international conferences and historic dialogues between the excavators and “Goddess scholars” who often hold very different points of view. The discussions that took place at Çatalhöyük in 2005 and 2006 provided rich opportunities to practice multivocality.

Social Anthropologist Kathryn Rountree (Massey University, New Zealand) recognizes that the high-profile Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük has become an increasingly contested space in recent years. In “Talking Past Each Other: Practising Multivocality at Çatalhöyük,” she argues that attempts at dialogue between different groups sometimes stall because groups are “talking past each other,” apparently speaking different “languages” and employing different epistemologies and discursive practices. She discusses the way in which power is articulated and negotiated in a multivocal context.

The discovery in 2005 at Çatalhöyük of a well preserved stamp seal of a bear—in the same shape as some of the plaster wall reliefs—inspired Ian Hodder and his team to declare that the wall reliefs represent bears, not the Mother Goddess as interpreted by James Mellaart. In “The Goddess and the Bear: Hybrid Imagery and Symbolism at Çatalhöyük,” Joan Marler and Harald Haarmann pick up the gauntlet dropped by Hodder (interview, this issue) when he said, “you have to come up with some other idea of how to look at the evidence that will show that the mother is there, or that the bear things are women.” The authors discuss Çatalhöyük as part of a continuity of Paleolithic and Neolithic symbolic traditions, they emphasize the longevity of hybrid imagery functioning as visual metaphor, ancient traditions of the powers of the natural world rendered in female forms, and the bear as an ancestral being. The article concludes by pointing out an ancient and widespread image of woman that is a cryptic aspect of the newly discovered bear seal that may well indicate that the bear is a goddess after all.

In “The Moral Authority of the Maternal Reflected in Some Neolithic Finds and Observed in Villages of West Sumatra,” anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA) discusses specific commonalities between the maternal symbolism and ritual practices of the Minangkabau culture in West Sumatra and symbolic imagery found at Çatalhöyük and in the Neolithic societies of Old Europe. Sanday suggests that the Neolithic cultures of Europe and Anatolia

placed an equivalent focus on the significance of maternal authority in connection with the cycles of life in order to maintain the health and stability of their societies.

Philosopher and cultural historian Heide Goettner-Abendroth (Founder and Director of Hagia Academy in Bavaria, Germany) critiques Ian Hodder’s article in the January 2004 issue of *Scientific American* and asks “Did A Matriarchal Form of Social Organization Exist at Çatal Hüyük?” She rejects the common idea that matriarchy means “women’s rule” and presents an introduction to the economic, social, political and cultural criteria of matriarchal societies that can be applied to a new understanding of this important Neolithic community. Joan Marler also critiques Hodder’s 2004 article in *Scientific American* in a previously unpublished Letter to the Editor, “‘Women and Men at Çatalhöyük’: A Response.”

This issue concludes with a critique by writer, scholar Marguerite Rigoglioso of Michael Balter’s “biography” of Çatalhöyük, *The Goddess and the Bull. Çatalhöyük: An Archaeological Journey to the Dawn of Civilization* (2005). In “The Disappearing of the Goddess and Gimbutas: A Critical Review of *The Goddess and the Bull*,” Rigoglioso points out the inherent biases against the theories of James Mellaart, Marija Gimbutas and others who see evidence for the existence of female deities in ancient religious systems. She goes on to say, “This is a highly regrettable aspect of a book that is otherwise an interesting and intelligent portrayal of some of the major trends and personalities that have shaped the field of archaeology, and the theoretical controversies regarding the excavations at the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in Turkey.”

## References

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