

East Dorset Antiquarian Society

www.dorset-archaeology.org.uk

mail@dorset-archaeology.org.uk

Established 1983

Edited by: Andrew Morgan, email: andrewmorgz@aol.com, tel: 01202 731162

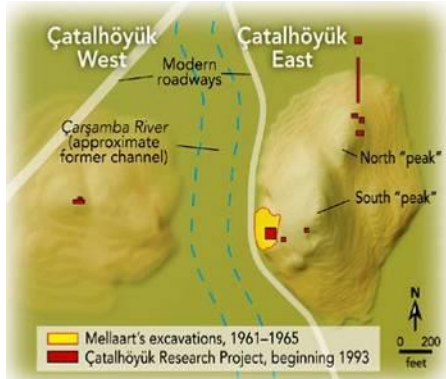
NEWSLETTER – MAY 2015

EDAS Lecture: 'Çatalhöyük excavations' by Professor Peter Andrews

Peter, whose roles include Curator of Blandford Museum, spent many years at the excavation of Çatalhöyük, where he was particularly involved in studying the human burials. This fascinating and somewhat enigmatic site, on the Konya plain of the Southern Anatolian Plateau in Turkey, dates back nearly 9,500 years. It is the largest known Neolithic settlement, covering about 30 acres, and perhaps the oldest town (or proto-city) in the world. Peter suggested a population of between 3,000 and 5,000, as large as some of the Roman 'cities' in Britain – although some suggest up to 7,000. Çatalhöyük is, therefore, well known for its size, but also for its continuity, wall paintings and figurines.



As you can see, the site consists of two 'tells', or mounds (Çatalhöyük means 'fork mound'), originally separated by a river. A 'tell' is the hill built up by the demolition of buildings, with new ones then built on top; here there are at least 12 levels of housing. The eastern tell shows occupation from 9,400-8,000 years ago, the western just 8,000-7,700, after which it seems the site was abandoned. A fairly large area was excavated 'by pick and shovel' under Peter Mellaart in the 1960s, producing many exciting discoveries. The current excavations since 1993, under Ian Hodder, cover a smaller area but have been conducted with more care. 'Exciting' finds may be less common but, of course, this approach is producing much more detailed information. It would, though, probably take centuries to excavate the whole site.



Today's excavations are covered by large canopies, with walkways inside. This is partly for visitors, but particularly to protect the excavators and the remains from the hostile climate; Peter told us that Çatalhöyük is an awful place to live and work! There are constant winds and it is very dry; finds have to be recovered and removed rapidly or they desiccate and crumble. It does, though, seem that the climate was much better and, of course, conducive to farming, when the town was occupied. The houses used a good deal of wood in their roof beams, so decent-sized trees must also have grown.



The Çatalhöyük settlement consisted of densely packed, contiguous rectangular houses of mud brick with flat roofs. There were no roads or streets, no doorways and no windows, and the houses were entered by ladder from above. They must have been dark, as the only light came from the entrance hole and no evidence of artificial lighting has been found. Open areas between buildings were actually middens rather than gathering places; in fact, there is no evidence of public buildings or spaces. It does, though, seem likely that sheep or goats were penned in the midden areas. Indeed, the middens show evidence for agriculture in



the huge numbers of animal bones excavated, which also included wild animals like deer and aurochs (large, wild cattle that are now extinct).

It appears that much of people's lives must have been spent on the roofs, where there were pathways allowing them to move around. Inside, houses typically had only one 'living' room (fairly small at around 10m²), often with smaller side room(s) for food storage. The oven and hearth were positioned beneath the entrance hole. There was a raised platform in the corner decorated with aurochs' horns. These fairly cramped rooms would,



to us at least, have rapidly grown noxious and very smoky with the cooking taking place there, but perhaps the outside wouldn't have been much better with the middens nearby. The buildings were also quite dangerous if the fairly widespread evidence of fire is anything to go by, particularly from the beams and reeds used in roof construction. On the positive side, fires have left good evidence in the wide variety of carbonised plant remains found. The storage areas show evidence mainly of pulses, with some wild grains.

Despite the dark, smoky interiors, many houses were decorated with plaster, painted walls and wall reliefs. There are many pictures which relate to everyday life – of people, one apparently with a leopard skin around his waist (a wall relief also shows leopards), what appears to be an aurochs hunt and an animal that seems to be a horse. Other decoration includes wall panels with incised geometric designs and a relief of a face. Some houses had more complex furnishing and were described as shrines by Mellaart, though this may be pushing the evidence too far. Renovations occurred when roofs and walls deteriorated in the rain or because of fire: an examination of the clay floors often shows multiple layers (this may also have helped to improve the atmosphere!). It is likely that the wall paintings were only properly seen (and perhaps were created) when new walls or roofs were built.



The inhabitants of Çatalhöyük were people in close communion with their dead, who were buried inside the houses below the raised platforms where the aurochs' horns are displayed. Burials were



often in significant numbers, and were not very deep, generally only 40-50cm for the deepest ones. The platforms, perhaps 1.5-2m on a side, would typically have around 15 burials under them. Clearly, this was unlikely to improve the atmosphere in the room! It seems likely that the occupiers knew who was buried and where, as, even in this limited area, they often avoided previous burials; in other cases it seems that earlier bones were moved deliberately. It is, of course, likely that those buried in a house were related to the occupants, but DNA has proved very hard to recover from the remains



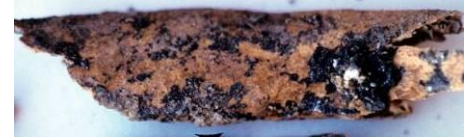
so that relationships generally remain uncertain.

Peter's knowledge and expertise came to the fore in describing the varied, and often puzzling, burial practices in Çatalhöyük, which do seem to have changed over time. The primary burials under the platforms followed a fairly standard approach, with the body tightly bound in a crouched position to take up less space. Some may have been placed in baskets. Phytoliths, i.e. the remains of plant fibre, have been found on 56 of the burials – no doubt from the materials use to hold the body together or to decorate it. Quite often, these primary burials were furnished with grave goods.

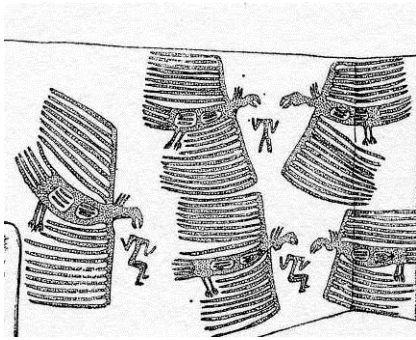


Some primary burials were made under the side rooms, the vast majority of which were neonates (i.e. at birth or within 4 weeks). From their treatment, it seems that neonates were generally considered less significant – perhaps not surprisingly as infant mortality would probably have been very high. In fact, the very young also dominate the fairly small number of burials found outside the settlement. Some primary burials were disturbed by later graves,

perhaps unintentionally, and the bones then reburied, though in many cases only a part of the skeleton was reinterred. 6 of the 8 oldest people found so far had carbon tar on the inside of their ribs – the result of living for a long time in a very smoky atmosphere.



Secondary burials, where there was a significant period after death before burial of the remains, or the remains had been relocated, are in some respects more interesting. Those found are only a small proportion of total burials, though there may well be large numbers outside the settlement that have not been found. A high percentage of these secondary burials were subject to excarnation, or 'sky burial', i.e. they were left to decay and for animals to eat and disturb, before the remaining bones were buried. Here, the majority of bones are ribs and vertebrae, since these are the most likely to survive animal disturbance. There are wall paintings of vultures along with headless skeletons that no doubt refer to 'sky burials'.



Some of these bones were brought back to the settlement and buried under the platform, usually at shallow depths. There are many theories as to why this practice, which was common in a variety of places and cultures, took place. For example, it may be preferred for those who died outside the settlement; there is one burial which appears to be the remains of 4 individuals who met with grief whilst out hunting or foraging. Another view suggests that the people were 'given to the gods', and the remaining bones were those which the gods had chosen to leave. Perhaps those brought back to the settlement were more important, and less care certainly seems to have been taken with burials outside the settlement.

Even more enigmatic are other burial practices. For example, bodies have been found which were thickly painted before burial, inhibiting decay. In other cases skulls were removed and taken back to the settlement, but usually cut at a very high vertebra which wouldn't be possible until the body had decayed. There are a few instances of skulls partly covered with plaster and a few more of skulls with coloured areas.

A wide variety of artefacts have been found, showing a good deal of sophistication. Some might be considered as works of art in their own right and were often buried for storage, safe-keeping or perhaps for ritual purposes. Sculptures have been found of animals such as bears, as well as a number of so-called 'Mother Goddesses', perhaps having religious or ritual connotations, mostly having lost their heads (that in the picture has a restored head and it is quite likely that the original head was actually of an animal). Tools were made of flint, bone and obsidian, the obsidian showing that the people traded over long distances as this 'volcanic glass' is not found nearby. It's possible that obsidian acted as a kind of currency as it is often found buried, particularly roughly shaped pieces ready to be finalised as tools. There is even an obsidian mirror in which it is possible to see yourself, if not all that clearly. Beads were the main items of personal adornment e.g. in a cleverly designed string of interlocking bone beads, in shell and multicoloured soft stones. Remarkable survivals include fragments of textiles, probably of flax, and a plain weave hemp linen used as a shroud.



It seems likely that social organisation was a chiefdom, but the area excavated so far is too small to draw firm conclusions. Certainly there seems to have been the beginnings of some form of class system in that some houses are noticeably larger than average, although these don't seem to have higher than average levels of decoration in the form of reliefs or paintings. The copper objects found show a good deal of skill and knowledge in metal-working (as one of our members pointed out, you can't just beat out copper into a sheet and roll it as it becomes very brittle and breaks), yet the Chalcolithic Period (or 'Copper Age') isn't really found here until nearly 2,000 years later. This does suggest the development of task specialisations and some form of industry although, again, how far this went remains uncertain.



Despite the uncertainties, development appears very advanced for such an early period. As ever, though, the

excavations done so far raise many questions to be considered as work continues. Çatalhöyük is clearly a very important site, and the high level of interest Peter had generated was very obvious from the number of questions people asked at the end of his talk. We're grateful to him telling us of this fascinating and, in many respects, enigmatic site at the dawn of humans gathering together in serious settlements.

Geoff Taylor

DRUCE ROMAN VILLA EXCAVATION

Work at the villa site will start on Tuesday 5th May and will finish on Friday 18th September.

We meet up around 10am and set off for home around 4pm. This will be the final year at the villa, there is a heavy work schedule and we are looking for experienced excavators who can work without too much supervision and who can give some regular time to the excavation. Finds washers are always welcome.

Contact **Lilian Ladle** at lilianladle@hotmail.com or 01929 553144 for more information

WORTH MATRAVERS EXCAVATION MONOGRAPH

Many of you will remember spending many days working on the very important rescue excavation on a site at the Football Field, Compact Farm, owned by EDAS member Bob Kenyon, just north of Worth Matravers. The site was exceptional in that within a small area we uncovered a Roman building (possible barn); a Late Iron Age round house; a very significant midden site specific to the transitional period between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age; post holes of a Late Bronze Age round house; and a section of a Neolithic ditch. Not forgetting a post-Roman cemetery with 26 inhumations. This is not hyperbole, several national experts, namely Professors Niall Sharples, David Hinton and Tim Darvill, have provided written testaments supporting the significance of the site.

We plan to publish the monograph in late 2016.

MINCHINGTON ROMAN VILLA REPORT

Some of you may also remember working on the Roman Villa site at Simon Meadon's farm between 1997 -2003, when Time Team spent a few days sorting everything out! Well, the report of the excavation has not been forgotten, and Christopher Sparey-Green is working hard to complete the document. This is made more difficult because over time some of the finds have been dispersed and used by different museums and need to be identified, analysed and included. We have an agreement in principle that, based on Christopher's estimate of the size of the document, we will have it published in the DNHAS Proceedings in 2016.

EAST DORSET PLANNING AND HERITAGE ADVISORY GROUP

The group has been formed, with a small number of enthusiastic volunteers. We have started to review planning applications from EDDC and we are coming to terms with the challenges of the task.

It is still early days and anybody with an interest in the exercise, whether to join us or with some practical experience that they would like to share, is encouraged to attend our next meeting which will be held at: **The Priest House Museum, Wimborne, the Learning Centre, at 2pm on Friday 8th May.**

For further information please contact Andrew Morgan andrewmorgz@aol.com

A CANAL IN DORSET ?

With the failure of the Somerset and Dorset canal enterprise in the early 19th century it was rather surprising when an article was found in the Dorset Chronicle dated 1831 reporting the grand opening of a canal linking the clay pits at Hamworthy to Lytchett Bay, part of Poole Harbour.

The canal is described as 10 yards wide and 700 yards long and was instigated by William Thompson, Clay Merchant who lived at Lake, but his acquisition of the land at Lytchett Minster which included Yarrells, appears to have been by auction in 1830 and the canal is in the parish of Lytchett Minster, just outside the Poole boundary. Shipping the clay down to Poole Quay was easier by barge than by the cart load so this must have justified the construction of the canal.

Exactly when the canal became out of use is uncertain, but with the railway line extension in 1846 to Holton, with a bridge over the mouth of the bay at Rockley, access to it would have been difficult, also rail sidings at Upton and Hamworthy would have given better access to a wider market. Notice of Sale of the Estate by an auction in 1842 would suggest that Mr Thompson sold up and he ended his day in Weymouth.

Lytchett Bay today is a shallow backwater of the harbour skirted by reed beds and it took many visits to locate what remains of the canal. More features possibly related to the infrastructure of the clay and brick works in the area have been recorded but others still to be found are recorded in those early newspaper reports, so the search continues.

The naming of the canal has to be decided but now favoured as the 'Thompson Clay Canal'.

Newspaper Research by Bryan Gambier, Poole History Centre

Field work by Keith Jarvis and Alan Hawkins.

DNHAS YOUNG ARCHAEOLOGISTS' CLUB (YAC)

This well established club is urgently looking for volunteers to carry on the great work undertaken for several years, introducing the pleasures of archaeology and heritage to the youngsters in the Dorchester area. There are currently 25 club members.

The club meets on the first Saturday of every month at the Dorset County Museum, 10.30am-12.30pm and is open to children between the ages of 8 and 17 years. The activities are fun and educational, such as museum-based workshops in which the children will investigate the collections and learn a wide range of new skills. Currently there are 25 members.

If you would like to get involved in this very rewarding activity please contact Emma Talbot, DNHAS Education Officer at: education@dorsetcountymuseum.org

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2015
13th May 2015	EDAS Lecture – The Portable Antiquities Scheme and the Treasure Act, with Ciorstaidh Hayward Trevarthen, Dorset Finds Officer
14th to 19th June 2015	EDAS Field Trip – Bury St Edmunds area. Led by Keith and Denise Allsop.
19 th September 2015	Council for Independent Archaeology 2015 Conference, to be held at the East Dorset Heritage Centre, Wimborne

Note: unless otherwise stated all lectures start at 7.30pm and are held at **St Catherine’s Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.**

The 2015-2016 Programme, prepared by Steve Smith

Date	Speaker	Title
Wed 9th Sept 2015	Philip Beale FRGS	“The Phoenicians: First to circumnavigate Africa and reach the Americas? The Phoenicia ship expedition as an adventure in experimental archaeology”
Wed 14th Oct 2015	Donald Henson, University of York	“Between the lake and forest: Early post-glacial settlers at Star Carr”
Wed 11th Nov 2015	Martyn Barber, English Heritage	“The Battle for Stonehenge: the aerodrome, the monument and the landscape”
Wed 9th Dec 2015	Prof Tony King, Winchester University	“Two villas in Somerset and one in Hampshire: excavations at Dinnington, Yarford and Meonstoke and their contribution to Romano-British archaeology”
Wed 13th Jan 2016	Stephen Fisher Maritime Archaeology Trust	“Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War”
Wed 10th Feb 2016	Dr. John McNabb, Southampton University	“New Insights into Human Evolution”
Wed 9th Mar 2016	AGM	Members evening
Wed 13th Apr 2016	Jane Ellis-Schön Salisbury Museum	“Finding Pitt-Rivers”
Wed 11th May 2016	Dr Alex Langlands, Winchester University	“Mapping the Genius Loci: Exploring the Character of Space and Place in the Ordnance Survey”