

The excavations of the East Area in the 2018 season
2018 Kazı Mevsiminde Doğu Alanındaki Kazılar

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Introduction

The 2018 excavation season brought about a commencement of the work in the new and previously unexcavated part of the East mound at Çatalhöyük, referred to as the East Area. Eastern part of the East mound is relatively flat and even and covers around 50 per cent of its entire surface. The only distinct element in this part of the settlement is a circular eminence located in its westernmost section, very close to the main part of the settlement, made of distinct south and north eminences. The eminence has a form of circular and regular mound, which is ca. 50 m in diameter. It has never been investigated and its character remains largely unknown.

Contrary to a common preconception portraying the East mound at Çatalhöyük as one big and homogenous höyük, its topography is much more diverse with three distinct parts in the form of a tell-like eminences. Its major and best known eminence makes southern part of the East mound. It is oval in shape and distinctively dominates over other parts of the mound. It was intensively researched within two large research projects. It was first investigated by James Mellaart in the years 1961-1965. Spectacular discoveries in this area made Çatalhöyük one of the most important Neolithic sites in the world (Mellaart 1967). This part of the mound was then thoroughly investigated in the excavation zone known as South Area by the Çatalhöyük Research Project led by Ian Hodder in the period 1995-2017 (e.g. Hodder 2014). The uppermost levels on the East mound were excavated in the years 2001-2017 by the team led by Arkadiusz Marciniak (and in the first period also by Lech Czerniak) in two zones known as TP and TPC Areas (e.g. Marciniak 2015). The northern eminence is another distinct part of the settlement. It is oval in shape but is significantly lower than the neighboring southern eminence. The excavated part labeled the North Area was excavated by the Çatalhöyük Research Project in the period 1995-2017 (e.g. Hodder 2014). These two eminences are separated by a distinct gully indicative of an independent formation of these two constituent elements of the settlement, at least in the latest phase of their occupation. Stratigraphic relations between these two eminences are difficult to specify as the gully was intensively used as a local road in recent times. Further difficulties in this respect caused denudation processes on both eminences resulting in the accumulation of a thick layer of washed out materials.

The new project on the East Area initiated in the 2018 season has a number of intertwined objectives: (1) to recognize the character of occupation in eastern zone of Çatalhöyük settlement, (2) to recognize the character of dwelling structures, special purpose buildings, burial practices and diachronic changes in their character in this area, (3) to compare the settlement layout with the occupation of North eminence, both in the North Area and the zone subjected to scraping prior to commencement of the excavation works in early 2000s, and (4) to recognize the abandonment of this part of settlement in relation the abandonment processes in the North Area as well as overall demographic processes in the second half of the seventh millennium BC.

An ultimate objective of the 2018 season in East Area was to expose the settlement layout in order to define an area to be excavated in the coming years. Accordingly, a strip 10x50 m of E-W alignment, crossing out the entire length of the mound, was unearthed. It was arbitrarily divided into five 10 x 10 meters Squares, labeled from 1 to 5, as seen from the west to the east (Figure 1). The area stretches from the bottom of NE slope of south eminence and the slope in the west to the arguably modern field boundary in the east. The work involved a removal of top soil on the whole area. It was followed by the excavation of arbitrarily defined layers of ca. 10 cm deep from the entire targeted surface leading to the exposure of numerous Neolithic and post-Neolithic features and deposits (Figure 2).

The previous work in eastern part of the East mound

The East Area, along with the entire eastern part of the East mound, has never been excavated. However, it has been subjected to a range of non-invasive methods related to the beginning of the Çatalhöyük Research Project in the years 1993-1995 and the geophysical survey from 2012.

The scraping project was carried out in selected parts of the East mound. Two squares were investigated in the area directly next to the East Area (1090/1040 & 1040/1040). The unearthed Neolithic features comprised east-west walls constructed of large fine textured, pale orange bricks, some over 1 m length, as well as a semicircle of laid bricks. In addition to Neolithic structures, a large number of post-Neolithic pits, some of them likely to be burials, along with scattered heavily burnt deposits, were also found. One burial in northwestern part of square 1090/1040 was fully excavated. The burial of a small infant without grave goods was capped by two terracotta tiles (Matthews 1997: 88).

The pottery survey on the East Area from the early 1990s resulted in discovery of the big amount of Neolithic and Late pottery. However, considering the late architecture and depth of topsoil covering the Neolithic features, Jonathan Last (1997:139) argued that most likely the material originated from upper parts of the tell and was washed down to the East Area.

The geo-survey conducted in 2012 did not reveal many features in eastern part of the tell. In the East Area and its vicinity, it exposed some rectilinear structures, which may be interpreted as Neolithic walls. Furthermore, a positive linear anomaly cuts across the mound from north-east to south-west for a distance of 53 m, which runs through the very eastern part of East Area. In western part of East Area and west to it there were registered numerous positive linear and discrete anomalies and faint traces of structural remains (Campana *et al.* 2012:112-113)

The East Area stratigraphy

The work carried out in the 2018 season made it possible to recognize stratigraphy of the uppermost levels of the East Area. Square 1 is located in the westernmost part of the scraping area and borders with NE slope of south eminence. Its western sections were covered by a homogenous layer of greyish salty sand, most likely as a result of washing down the material

from a steep slope of southern eminence. The denudation processes were extending over time following the abandonment of the Neolithic settlement and continued until recent period. Hence, a stratigraphic situation in the part of the area is significantly different than in its remaining sections. Considering a significant depth of these deposits, an exposure of underlying features proved to be impossible.

The depositional history in eastern section of Square 1, as well as in the following Squares 2 and 3, was different. It is as a result of slow accumulation of surface material building up a relatively shallow top soil level. Both Neolithic and post-Neolithic deposits were revealed ca. 10-15 cm below the surface. In general, this part of the excavated area is split up into two parts: (i) northern made up of a sequence of buildings and (ii) southern characterized by a solid midden layer (Space 669). This midden has been deposited against eastern wall of B. 173 and most likely against southern wall of B. 175. However, the latter relations are not straightforward due to a considerable destruction of southern parts of B. 175. However, considering a very distinct difference between deposits in northern and southern parts of that trench, this interpretation is viable (see more below). Another midden, albeit much less distinct, seem to be placed above the Neolithic structures in Squares 2 and 3. If this is the case, there were two superimposed midden deposits in this part of the excavated area. Their extent and character is difficult to discern due to their similar color and character. A large number of x-finds were found in the midden, such as a spectacular human face relief (Figure 3), a pot fragment with relief bucranium, worked bones, and worked stones, including two complete stone axes and a big fragment of grinding stone.

The Neolithic occupation zone from Square 1, 2 and 3, made of houses and midden deposits and covered by homogeneous accumulation deposits, continues until the easternmost section of Square 3. A well preserved part of the Neolithic settlement, made of four distinct buildings and accompanying features (see below) was located in Square 1 and in northern sections of Squares 2 and 3.

Squares 4 and 5 are devoid of any Neolithic deposits. They are covered by very homogeneous light brownish/beige sandy layers. The border between these two distinctively different types of deposits cannot be fully recognized and specified at this point. It is ca. 2 m wide and stretches out throughout the entire width of eastern part of Square 3. No feature of any kind was found in this transition zone. It is most likely that this zone marks eastern boarder of the Neolithic settlement, at least in this part of eastern eminence. A distinct midden from southern parts of Squares 2 and 3 was most likely are place beneath the light brown/beige layers from Square 4, indicating that the latter deposits were accumulated later than the midden itself. However, it cannot be ruled out is that these deposits comprise the edge of alluvium deposited after the abandonment of the Neolithic settlement that started to systematically cover the Neolithic deposits. If this interpretation is viable, the exposed edge of Neolithic deposits may not be the genuine eastern edge of the Neolithic settlement but rather western edge of a big alluvium. This needs to be clarified in the next field seasons.

A large number of burials, ovens, and pits of different character were scattered throughout the excavated area. They formed two clusters in Square 1 and Square 4. A few features were also revealed in Squares 2 and 3, but were they were not present in Square 5. Stratigraphic relations between these pits and the Neolithic structures in western section of the excavated area, clearly indicate that these are all post-Neolithic in date.

The Neolithic occupation of East Area

A significantly distinct Neolithic occupation was revealed in the 2018 excavation season. Its major elements comprised four Neolithic buildings and associated midden deposits as well as unspecified dwelling structures (Figure 2). They were revealed in Squares 1, 2, and 3.

Altogether, they represent at least three phases of the Neolithic occupation: (i) four regular buildings: B 172, B. 173, B. 174, and B. 175; (ii) a special purpose room inserted into B. 173 (Space 668); (iii) four unspecified structures made of white regular bricks: Sp. 672, Sp. 674, Sp. 676, and Sp. 677.

The earliest phase is represented by four buildings: B 172, B. 173, B. 174, and B. 175. B. The two former are located in Square 1 while two latter are in Squares 1 and 3.

B. 172 (Space 666) is a solid mudbrick structure located in northern part of Square 1. Only its southernmost section is placed inside the trench, while its major part is located directly north of northern edge of this Square. As northern part of the building is beyond the trench, it is impossible to estimate its size. The part of the building in the trench has ca. 20 m². The walls are clearly distinguishable: (F.10002 - southern; F.10003 – western; and F.10004 – eastern). Southern wall (F.10002) is parallel to northern wall of B. 173 (F.10005). The walls were made of orangish homogenous bricks, which makes the structure similar to B. 175 from Square 2 (see below). Southern part of the building is divided into two rooms by a double wall (F.10001), placed closely to its western wall. The western room within the trench has 3.8 m², while its eastern counterpart has 9.5 m². Southern part of that wall was later truncated by a pit, most likely burial (F.10028). A small fragment of perpendicular wall was recognized against northern part of eastern wall. As the observation within the trench was very restricted, it is difficult to specify whether this is a fragment of northern wall of the building or a fragment of W-E partition wall. Accordingly, it proved impossible to detect whether these two walls were bonded. It is most likely that the deposit within the walls of the building represents a room fill.

B. 173 (Space 667) in Square 1 is a rectangular mudbrick structure with an interior surface of ca. 40 m². Almost entire building is located within the excavated area except for its southmost part. Both northern (F.10005) and eastern (F.10006 & F.10007) walls are made of light brown bricks. As only the uppermost course of these walls was preserved, neither their size nor shape got recognized at this point. Central part of eastern wall of the building is missing as it may have been truncated by yet unrecognizable cut or eroded away. Western wall of the building has not been discernible at the level exposed this season. Southern wall of the building appears to be beyond the edge of the trench. As only the uppermost parts of the building were unearthed in the 2018 season, and considering later intensive occupation of this area, mostly from the post-Neolithic period, neither in-built structures nor internal space divisions have been recognized to date. The stratigraphic relations between these two dwelling structures in not certain but most likely B. 173 is earlier than B. 172.

Of a similar chronological position is B. 174 (Space 673) in NE part of Square 3. It is almost entirely located in the excavated area except for a small part of its NW corner. The building is rectangular in shape and is ca. 6 m long and 5 m wide. Its inner surface has ca. 31 m² while the outer surface has ca. 40 m². Its single walls were made of brown bricks. Only the uppermost courses of bricks were unearthed in the 2018 season. Due to a significant erosion, size of the

bricks cannot be recognized at this point. Three walls were unearthed in its full extent: F.10035 – northern, F.10036 – eastern, and F.10037 - southern. Northern wall goes partly beyond the extent of the trench. The inner surfaces of all three walls are plastered over and the plaster is particularly distinct in NE corner of the building. The deposit within the walls of B. 174 is characterized by brownish silty sand, indicative of the room fill debris. The deposits beyond the extent of the building are characteristic for midden.

The fourth dwelling structure of a similar character was unearthed directly to the west of B. 174. Building 175 (Space 675) was identified on the basis of its eastern (F.10046) and western walls (F. 10047). A particularly distinct was eastern wall made of a good quality orangish bricks of similar size. A very small fragment of southern wall in its SE section was also discovered. Its remaining part, however, is missing. It has either been destroyed or the uppermost course of bricks is beneath the level exposed this year. The well-preserved western wall of the building wall was also made of regular orangish. Interestingly, both inner and outer surfaces of the wall were plastered over, which may imply a presence of yet unrecognized building directly to the west, between B. 175 and B. 172. Northern wall of the building is located outside the trench. An inner surface of the reconstructed part of the building has ca. 21 m², while the outer surface has ca. 28 m². The deposits between the walls of B. 175 are indicative of the room fill. These are composed of a mixture of sandy material with a lot of silt and bricky rubble. The type of deposit seem to continue to the edge of the supposed southern wall. A midden layer is deposited directly south of this line.

A pretty unclear situation is directly west of western wall of B. 175 until eastern wall of B. 172 & B. 173. The deposits in this area appear to be similar to the room fill of B. 175. This seems to be an indirect indication of the presence of yet unspecified building. The function and stratigraphic position of this area need to be clarified in the coming season.

The next phase of occupation is marked by a kind of special purpose room of yet unspecified character that was clearly inserted into SE part of B. 173 (Space 668). The room has ca. 4 m². Its walls (F.10008 – northern; F.10009– eastern; F.10010 – southern; and F.10011 – western) are made of yellow mudbricks and are very well preserved. The inner surface of the walls were plastered over, particularly well preserved plaster is present on eastern and southern walls. The less distinct is western wall, where arguably there is a kind of doorway cutting through this wall. The character and function of this room is to be specified during next excavation seasons. The infill deposits seem to be well preserved as there was no post-Neolithic destruction of the room area except for an unspecified pit (F. 10013) that truncated its SE corner. This room is an example of a typical Late Neolithic practice of inserting later structures into existing architecture with parallels from TP and TPC Areas. The most distinct of them are two burials chambers from TP Area – Sp. 248 and Sp. 327 as well as a grain storage room (Sp. 493) inserted into B. 122 in TPC Area (see e.g. Marciniak 2015).

The latest Neolithic phase is represented by four largely destroyed structures made of white regular bricks (Figure 4). They were constructed after the abandonment of B.172, 173, 174, and 175. One of such unspecified rooms/buildings is located in the northernmost part of B. 172 in Square 1 (Space 672). Fragments of its three walls were preserved (F.10030 – western; F.10031 – eastern; and F.10032 – southern), while northern wall is placed outside northern edge of the trench. Southern wall is badly destroyed by the post-Neolithic occupation in the form of truncation by three alleged burials (F.10016, F.10028 and F.10029). The room was certainly

inserted into earlier B. 172, which is a reminiscence of the practice typical for the Late Neolithic. Small fragments of a very similar structure were also found in central-eastern part of Square 1. It is represented by two short walls (F.10033 – northern; F.10034 – western). This room was certainly built against eastern wall (F.10006) of an earlier B. 173 and was also inserted into it. Due to a considerable post-depositional destruction, functional and structural relations between these two rooms (?) of Sp. 672 are very difficult to specify and can only be tentatively reconstructed.

A similar structure was revealed directly to the east in Square 2 (Sp. 676), while the third structure (Space 674) was found in SE part of Square 2 and SW part of Square 3. Fragments of all four walls of Sp. 674 were identified. Northern wall (F.10038) was built against southern wall of B.174 (Sp. 673), located directly to the north. However, only western parts of this wall got preserved. Due to a significant destruction of NE corner of the building, its size remains unknown. A significantly destroyed is also western wall (F. 10039) of this structure. Remains of two fragments of some kind partition walls (F.10041) were placed against southern edge of the trench. Due to their considerable destruction, no details of the space division of that building are available. All bricks were made of the same whitish clay and seems to be very standardized. The character and origin of the deposits within the walls of Sp. 674 are difficult to specify. Most likely, this is rather a midden than the room infill. Hence, the building might have been constructed after the process of midden accumulation ceased. From the stratigraphic standpoint, however, it is clear that the building was constructed deliberately against southern wall of B. 174. As this building is Neolithic in date, it is clear that the structure Sp. 674 must have been built while B.174, or its remains, was still standing.

Considering striking similarities in the constructional materials and shape of structures Sp. 674 and Sp. 676, they appear to be contemporaneous. Due to severe destruction, the character and function of these structures are very difficult to discern and reconstruct. Hence, it is very unlikely than any of the room fills or floors have been preserved.

It has to be mentioned that fragments of a similar structure (Space 677) were also found in NE corner of Square 2. It is represented a small section of yet unspecified room while its remaining parts are beyond northern edge of the trench. Its southern wall (F.10048) is made of the course of white and regularly formed and very well preserved bricks. Western wall (F.10049) is equally well preserved and it is clearly visible in northern section of the trench.

The post-Neolithic occupation of East Area

The 2018 season brought about a recognition of numerous features that are post-Neolithic in date. These comprise pits of difficult to specify character and burials. The contemporaneity of these features is difficult to establish and confirm. Altogether, 24 features of this kind were discovered in the 2018 excavation season.

The earliest post-Neolithic phase is represented by a range of pits and ovens. None of them was excavated in the 2018 season. A cluster of ovens in Square 2 (Space 677) is represented by two oval ovens with a solid clay superstructure around its circumference. One of the ovens (F. 10054) is located in its NE part. It truncated two parallel walls – western wall of B. 174

(F.10045) and eastern wall of B.175 (F.10046). Northern section of the oven is clearly burnt, so are southern edges of both walls. The other oven (F.10053) is located close to northern edge of this Square (Figure 5). It truncated southern wall (F.10048) of Sp. 676. Both ovens seem to have the same form and function and most likely belong to one occupational phase. The function of the remaining feature (F.10055) in eastern part of Square 2 remain in dark. This is an irregular oval pit. It is certainly post-Neolithic in date, as it truncated western wall of B. 174 (F.10045). The shape of the pit seems to be distinctively different than that of the burials and it is later than the adjacent burial F.10052. One cannot rule out that it may belong to the same phase as two ovens in northern part of the trench (F. 10053 and F. 10054). Hence, it got tentatively attributed to Space 677.

Two pits of a considerable size (F. 10026 and F. 10027) were revealed in northern part of Square 4. These are oval in shape and are distinguished by a distinct fill made of brown sand, which is significantly looser as compared to deposits making up the trench. Another pit F. 10028 is more problematic. These pits somehow remind post-Neolithic pits from TP and TPC areas (Marciniak 2015).

The last phase of the East Area occupation is represented by a burial ground of yet unspecified chronological position. Altogether, eighteen burials were unearthed and three of them were excavated. The most distinct are four burials with stone superstructures (F.10022, 10023, 10024 and 10025) (Space 671) located in Square 4. The fully unearthed are burials F. 10023 and F. 10024.

Burial's (F. 10024) superstructure is made of a cap stone lying on six vertically placed stones around the burial cut (40029). The size of semi-rectangular stones ranged from ca. 0.14 m to 0.20 m in width; ca. 0.9 m. to ca 0.24 m. in length and between c. 0.06 m to c. 0.11 m. in depth. The cut was filled by silty sand, compact light grayish-brown on the top and loose darkish-brown at the bottom. Despite a close resemblance of burial, no skeleton was found. However, a number of fragmented human bones, including long bones from upper and lower limbs, belonging to two different individuals, were unearthed in the burial fill.

Another burial (F.10023) had a distinct superstructure made of a cap stone laying down upon 12 vertically placed standing semi-rectangular stones. They were different in size ranging from c. 0.06 m. to c. 0.61m. in width; c. 0.05 m. to c. 0.36 m. in length and between c. 0.06 m. to c. c. 0.27 m. in depth. Fragments of horizontally placed stone tiles were placed beneath a cap stone. The burial cut (40029) was sub-ovoid (0.70 m x 0.48 m) and was 0.08-0.12 deep. It was backfilled with the light-brownish silty sand layer on the top and the darkish-brownish layer at the bottom. The burial contained one primary disturbed fully flexed fetus individual (40028) (Figure 6). The individual was lying on the right side. It was nearly complete with articulated upper and lower limbs. Due to bad preservation and small size of skeletal elements, it was impossible to identify remaining elements, such as: mandible, some of the cervical vertebrae, parts of hands and feet. A worked animal teeth (x1) was deposited next to smashed cranial elements.

Of similar character is burial F. 10025. However, it has not been unearthed to the full extent. The most problematic in this burial cluster was F.10022. Its function remains unclear and it is possible that this is also a burial. The feature is made of six stones placed in a row in an undoubtedly deliberate manner. Two other stones were placed to the south of this stone row and were most likely functionally related to it.

Another distinct cluster of burials is placed in Square 1 (Space 670). It is represented by four features: F. 10014 (Figure 7), F. 10015, F. 10016, which are longitudinally rectangular constructions with distinct stone superstructures. The stones cover the entire extent of the burial, and seems to be placed in a slightly diagonal manner. The other three burials (F. 10019, F. 10020, and F. 10021) in western part of Square 1 are irregularly oval in shape and have some striking similarities to F.10023 and F.10024 from Square 4, who were excavated in the 2018 season and proved to be inhumation burials. The other three pits in the same Square are also most likely burials (F.10018, F. 10028, F.10029). These are regularly longitudinally rectangular pits of different lengths and all of them are placed in W-E alignment. No superstructures of any kind have been discovered at the current state of the trench recognition. The remaining pit (F.10013) has irregularly oval shape and reminds more a storage pit than burial. One has to stress that many of these features truncated different elements of the previously described Neolithic structures, which is clearly indicative of their chronological position.

Three features exposed in Square 2 may also be burials. One of them in its southern part (F. 10050) is oval in shape, with distinct cut and superstructure made of six stones appearing to be placed along the burial circumference. Two other alleged burials (F. 10051 and F. 10052) are located in northern part of the Square (Space 670). They are rectangular in shape with oval edges and placed in W-E alignment. They do not have any stone superstructures. They very much resemble similar features located in Trench 1 (F.10029 and F.10017). The character and function of these features can only be revealed during excavations.

A considerably different situation was discerned in Square 5, which is the easternmost part of the excavated area. Its western part covers eastern slope of eastern eminence while its eastern part is placed on yet unspecified plateau directly east of this eminence. The easternmost parts of eastern eminence differs significantly from the deposits from its top and more western sections. The deposits in question, right beneath the 10-15 deep topsoil layer, are homogenous and made of brownish/beige sandy deposits with a lot of silt. They seems to be formed as a result of denudation processes and accumulation of deposits washed away from the top section of this eminence. The character of these deposits is also indicative of existence of a distinct occupational zone, most likely related to the post-Neolithic history of the mound. This is additionally corroborated by a significant number of post-Neolithic pottery and fragments of roof tiles.

The area between these two topographic elements was truncated in modern times by the N-S ditch (F.10000), which is defined by geophysical prospection as a field boundary (Campana *et al.* 2012). This has most likely to do with the process of agricultural industrialization of the Konya Plain in the first half of the twentieth century, involving the construction of canals and development of the watering system. It is likely that the easternmost area of the East mound may have been used as agricultural fields, which is indirectly indicated by the results of geophysical prospection carried out in the 2012 field season. The ditch was pretty shallow with ca. 10 cm in the north to ca. 30 cm in the south and was regularly bottomed-flat. The edge of this truncation from the west was diagonal and seemed to follow a contour of eastern slope of eastern eminence. The shape of the truncation from the east was more difficult to define due to a largely indistinct character of deposits making up the ditch in relation to deposits of the plateau. More importantly, however, the ditch truncation did not go through an entire extent of these homogenous brownish/beige deposits making up its uppermost part, as mentioned above. Hence, it proved impossible to reach the Neolithic strata, most likely placed beneath these deposits.

Final remarks

The work in the next excavation season will concentrate on Squares 1, 2, and 3. It will aim at excavating all post-Neolithic features in this part of the East Area and start excavating remains of the Late Neolithic occupation, including both dwelling structures made of white bricks as well as a cluster of well-preserved buildings from earlier phase of the Neolithic occupation. Ultimately, the work next year will also be aimed at clarifying stratigraphic relations between unearthed structures and providing the first examination of the East Area stratigraphy and its relations with both South and North Areas excavated in the past years. Considering a significant depth of post-Neolithic deposits in Squares 4 and 5, a lack of Neolithic occupation, and taking into consideration overall objectives of the work in the East Area, these two Squares will not be subjected to further work.

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