

In my work at Çatalhöyük's Finds Lab this summer, hundreds of Neolithic artifacts passed through my hands every day. My favorite one was a scrap of clay, which had been compressed between fingers and palm, then discarded, but luckily not overlooked by archaeologists. You could fit your own fingers into the indentations that had been made almost ten thousand years ago, and literally try to get a hold of the depth of time – more than I think you can than with the fine obsidian tools, or even the skeletons. Once a densely occupied settlement in Turkey's Konya Plains, Çatalhöyük reveals human society at an early moment in the domestication of not only wild species, but also themselves. As someone who pursued North American and Western European historical archaeology almost exclusively during undergrad, Çatalhöyük initially captured my imagination because the site's fundamental questions are the same as the ones that I want to investigate in more modern urban contexts. Why did people come to live together in this place? How did material culture define their changing relationship to the environment and each other?

At Çatalhöyük I was able to consider these questions within a totally different framework than I was accustomed to, gaining my first field experience as well as exposure to many new methods and practice. My time on site was split into two parts. The first month I spent excavating the East Mound with the Stanford field school under Dr. Ian Hodder. For the second month, I was engaged in collections management as the Assistant Finds Officer. Each period provided a different kind of introduction to the massive workings of the Çatalhöyük Research Project. While excavating, I gained hands-on familiarity with one context; in the Finds Lab I gained a unique overview of the project as a whole.

Çatalhöyük's myriad layers of plaster and floor gave me a deep love of wrestling with stratigraphy, the dynamic nature of which I'd never realized before seeing in the ground. Along with an excavator from Sweden, I worked inside Building 96, a house that dates to about the middle of the site's occupation period. The house contained many features classically Çatalhöyük, including a wall painting and a number of burials

underneath the platforms. Over the course of the season, we excavated several wall, platform, and floor features, as well as several burials. With five individuals exposed this season, and six others excavated in years previous, it's possible that Bldg. 96 may be eventually characterized as a burial or "history" house," the latter term which Ian Hodder has used to describe houses that were important in mediating the continuity of cultural practice.

Besides the burials, we did not have a finds-rich season. Bldg. 96 been cleaned carefully before it had been abandoned. When we came across cultural artifacts, they were small fragments of obsidian, stone or bone swept into a corner or folded into fill. The only exception was the midden fill of a recess in the western wall, which was stuffed with fragments of faunal bone. First interpreted as a storage niche or crawl hole, its irregular contours led us to conclude that it was more likely a scar from the removal of a large item, i.e. bucrania. The truly lumpy base of the removal scar, where it damaged and disturbed backing wall bricks impressed upon me that archaeological depositions rarely come in regular dimensions. Some our initial trouble confusion in interpreting the context had to do with the fact that I was digging as if I expected the space to be perfectly rectangular! I've learned to discuss and re-approach my excavation choices as I make them. This is something learnt fast at Çatalhöyük, where many forms of dialogue are encouraged between the 100-plus excavators, lab technicians, and outside researchers who occupy site at the height of the season.

The research community on site also challenged to think about the archaeological divisions of space and time in excavation models: the first represented in plan, and the second through the abstraction of Harris matrices. I had the opportunity to help with the GIS work for an ongoing project that is unifying the site's spatial and temporal records. Digitizing and georeferencing unit plans allows for the creation of layered sequences of excavation that are linked into the site's master Harris matrix and excavation databases. A model like this allows phases of excavation and occupation to be easily queried and defined. Helping to build this interface was a great way to start to think about the entire site, rather than just my small part of it.

However, my time in the Finds Lab was the most valuable for learning about the site and its history. Particularly because the history of Çatalhöyük is as much about how

data has been recorded and interpreted as what has been found. The Finds Lab is the central processing point for all excavated artifacts from the current season and maintains the collections stored on site. In addition to physical storage, this involves a lot database management, on the least sexy parts of archaeology. But that may be the most valuable skill I learned during the laboratory part of the season. Çatalhöyük has gone through a number of experiments in data recording, and it occasionally requires some creativity to make connections between different sections of the database. Managing—and making accessible—data and collections post-excavation is work I'm continuing to do in my new job with the public-facing archaeology program of the Presidio San Francisco. I have already used my single-context excavation experience to jump into the end of this year's fieldwork in the park, and I am certain that will continue to apply everything else that I've learned at Çatalhöyük. This winter holds graduate school applications, and I'm deeply thankful to the American Institute of Archaeology for helping to provide me with my first field experience as I begin to think about designing my own projects.

### **Use of grant funds**

Travel - flight home from Turkey: \$657.79

Turkish residency permit: \$90.44

Tent and sleeping bag: \$279.50

Excavating in Çatalhöyük's South Shelter



In front of the Faunal Lab during Community Day



My excavation partner above and to the right of Building 96

