

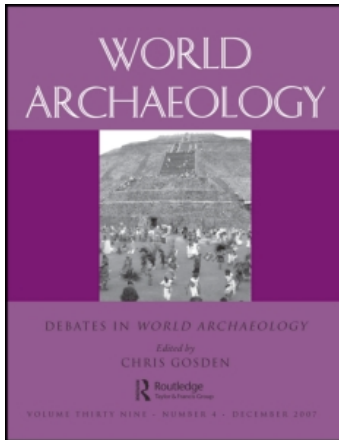
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### The nature of the beast: curating animals and ancestors at Çatalhöyük

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# The nature of the beast: curating animals and ancestors at Çatalhöyük

Lynn Meskell

## Abstract

Taking 'tradition' as the process of 'handing down', which encompasses the ideas of duration, continuity, practice and ritual, this paper examines the Neolithic lifeworld at Çatalhöyük with particular attention to the figurine corpus and plastered installations. Specifically, I focus on two material preoccupations that have intense signification across various media, are repeated in different scales and occur over many generations at Çatalhöyük. The first is termed headedness or a particular tension surrounding heads, head removal and circulation, and the post-cranial body, that applies both to humans and animals. The second is the desire for embedding and re-fleshing the remains of animals and ancestors. I argue that both themes are connected to desires about permanence, restoration and ultimately improving upon the fragilities of fleshed matter through a focused curation of the skeletal elements. Both of these material concerns had salience across domains from living bodies to aesthetic renderings, traversed both animal and human worlds, connected generations together, occurred at different scales and had resonance beyond the site to wider Neolithic traditions.

## Keywords

Neolithic Çatalhöyük; figurines; embedding; enfleshing; headedness; animality; materiality.

New finds at the site of Çatalhöyük have challenged the old narratives of Neolithic goddess worship and matriarchy and, coupled with imagery found in the recent excavations at Göbekli (Schmidt 2000, 2002, 2006) and Nevali Çori (Hauptmann 2007), both dated to the tenth millennium BC, have given the Neolithic lifeworld a rather more menacing complexion. The monstrous images at Göbekli, replete with dangerous animals in aggressive, ithyphallic postures, suggest an altogether different set of relationships with the world outside human settlements. Threads of continuity link these earlier sites to Çatalhöyük (7400 to 6000 cal. BC), with its own remarkable traditions of house construction, repeated practices around bodies and burial, and figural connections cross-cutting media, including wall painting, plastered features, figurines and modifications to

both human and animal skulls. The root of the word ‘tradition’ is *to hand down* and, if we take the term to include duration, continuity, practice and, in some cases, ritual, then the repetitive suite of discursive actions and images we see at Çatalhöyük is indeed telling.

In this paper I want to tease out a few material preoccupations that have intense signification across various media, are repeated in different scales, and occur over many generations at Çatalhöyük. The first is the propensity for headedness: a particular tension surrounding heads, head removal and circulation, and the post-cranial body, that applies both to human heads and to those of cattle and, to a lesser degree, of animals such as the fox, boar, vulture, bear and weasel. The second is the desire for embedding and re-fleshing the remains of animals and ancestors, a preoccupation present in the plastered forms, burial tradition and figurine corpus. Both themes are likely to be connected to desires about permanence, restoration and ultimately fortifying or improving upon the fragilities of fleshed matter through a focused curation of the skeletal elements. My aims are to disentangle this knot of significations between particular humans and animals, to examine sites where social memory might be produced and handed down and, in doing so, to inch us closer to the concerns of the Neolithic lifeworld.

### Co-producing Çatalhöyük

Some two- and three-dimensional images at Çatalhöyük partake of familiar taxonomies, whether humans or animal, while others push our known classificatory boundaries so that we often position them as hybrid or monstrous. Both the presence and depiction of teeth, fangs, claws and animals with erect penises imply an attention to aggression and maleness, but the exact nature of the beast itself is unclear to modern eyes. The same is often true of the more domesticated renderings at Çatalhöyük, such as figurines. Carolyn Nakamura and I (Meskell and Nakamura 2005; Meskell et al. 2007, 2008; Nakamura and Meskell 2004, 2006) have previously suggested that ‘species specificity’ in the figurine corpus is a preoccupation of scholars rather than of the producers themselves. A propensity for malleability attaches to the three-dimensional form, which has the potential for shifting classifications and significations. Anthropologists like Bruno Latour have been critical of so-called common-sense or rational taxonomies and have called for a collapsing of our categorical distinctions between objects, subjects, societies and cosmologies. In our own culture we continually identify with Enlightenment thinking that proposed the separability of the human and nonhuman. Our own anthropocentrism, moreover, dominates our understandings of ancient societies. Latour asks: ‘if religion, arts or styles are necessary to “reflect”, “reify”, “materialize”, “embody” society ... then are objects not, in the end, its co-producers? Is society not built literally – not metaphorically – of gods, machines, sciences, arts and styles?’ (1991: 54). We might argue that the fabrication of figurines and plastered images at Çatalhöyük was a work of ‘translation’ (in Latour’s phraseology), namely the creation of new types of beings or hybrids and material traditions that blend nature, culture, things, monsters and so on. This work of translation then might constitute the invention of traditions at Çatalhöyük – figural traditions that were then handed down over generations.

Since materiality is not reducible to a set of given conditions or practices common to all cultures and all times, it is necessary to undertake study of specific cultural moments to understand particular contextual notions of the material world and its propensity to forge, shape, interpolate and even challenge and undermine social relations and experiences (see Meskell 2004). What I aim for is an understanding of the underlying ‘philosophy of the material’ (Meskell 2005) within the context of Neolithic Çatalhöyük. The figurines, wall paintings, plasterings and features discussed, with their significant spatial and temporal duration, must be considered in some senses society’s co-producers; their longevity and the repetition of specific things across a range of media suggest an attentiveness and preoccupation that was anything but random. Moreover, the retrieval, circulation and handing down of certain skeletal material, human and animal, hint at the importance of creating an ancestral tradition. Neolithic people intentionally collapsed the categories of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ that we find so primal and inescapable. The *unheimlich* or unhomely images of violence at Göbekli are salient examples; the splayed bear figures, vulture-human hybrids, head removals, maimed figurines and plastered remains of dangerous creatures at Çatalhöyük (Cauvin 2000; Hodder 2007) provide others from a domestic context. Each is a cultured reworking of a natural element, rather than a simple representation or replication. Each displays a mastery or competence and improves the original by rendering it permanent, embodied and constant within the fluxes of everyday life. By enhancing these subject/objects they are, in effect, co-producing the external world beyond the site. Therefore, in this paper I combine discussion of both animal and human bodies, teasing apart the specificities of each category where possible, but also considering them sometimes as overlapping taxonomies.

### Headedness and headlessness

Headless human figures, like those depicted in the Çatalhöyük wall paintings, have attracted much scholarly attention (Gifford-Gonzalez 2007; Hamilton 1996; Talalay 2004). One key example is the headless body shown in association with birds of prey interpreted as vultures (Russell and McGowan 2003). This led to the speculation that bodies were excarnated, meaning that fleshed bodies were plucked clean by vultures before final burial. Recent analysis has shown that excarnation was not practiced at the site. It is a prime example of the pitfalls of reading the images at Çatalhöyük as direct expressions of literal events. However, speculation about excarnation is understandable since Mellaart (1964: 64) found two human skulls under the platform below the painting. These data indicate a concern with the fleshing of bodies at a conceptual level and their subsequent transformations. Hodder (2006: 146) argues that a deposit of vulture, eagle and bustard wings at Zawi Chemi Shanidar (Simmons and Nadel 1998) and stones engraved with vulture images like those at Çatalhöyük from Jerf el Ahmar (Stordeur et al. 2000) indicate that ideas surrounding death, vultures and skulls belong to a set of practices and preoccupations with remarkable flexibility, endurance and socio-spatial breadth.

Whether the Çatalhöyük wall painting had didactic elements, performative value or presented a nightmarish vision, the fixation upon headlessness remained an enduring concern. A headless state loomed large in the Çatalhöyük imaginary. Many cultures

vividly portray deathly scenes involving what we would deem negative scenarios. Yet these evocations are part of a domesticated social reality, grappling with the vagaries of the past, the fear of the unknown and an attempt to control the future.

The idea of a headless body representing a deceased state of being at Çatalhöyük has precursors in the Anatolian Neolithic, specifically in the famous Göbekli stela (Plate 1), where headlessness, masculine sexuality and raptor imagery (if not vultures) appear in direct association. Uncovered recently by Klaus Schmidt (2006), a monumental T-shaped pillar (some would say phallic) divided into upper and lower registers, reveals a raptor juggling a sphere (or skull?) on the upper portion while a headless man with an erect penis adorns the lower section. The ithyphallic headless male is associated with a bird directly to his left and a series of other creatures with fangs, claws and stingers is placed above him covering the lower register. These specific creatures are redolent of danger and potential death as is the iconographic tradition at this site. While the iconography of the entire stela and its association with the Göbekli image corpus lies beyond the scope of this paper, the tension around headlessness and headedness was certainly a long-lived and geographically broad social phenomenon in the Anatolian Neolithic. One could make broader linkages to Levantine examples of skull plastering at Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites like 'Ain Ghazal (Bonogofsky 2005; Kuijt 2000, 2008; Rollefson 2000), but this would require further investigations, more contextual data and rigorous chronologies, which are beyond the limits of this paper.



*Plate 1* Göbekli stela (courtesy of Professor Klaus Schmidt, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut).

What we might be witnessing, however, is a concern for the processes of bodily articulation or disarticulation (see also Bailey 2005; Chapman 2000; Daems and Croucher 2007; Nanoglou 2008; Talalay 2004). The practice of removing, circulating and passing down of heads is something we have observed across media, from the wall paintings and burials to the figurine corpus, and is part of an enduring set of concerns. For example, heads of animals in the forms of skulls (bulls, vultures, goat, wild boar jaws) were attached to walls and embedded and ‘re-fleshed’ with wall plaster in houses and this may be related to the practice, and there is one unclear example of a wall painting showing a headless animal in a hunting scene. Returning to the plastered features in Çatalhöyük houses, what is notable is their very lack of movement or circulation. Rather, these examples are permanently fixed to walls, benches and pillars (bucrania) and parts of skulls (boar jaws) are embedded within plaster, within the lifecycle of the house (Plate 2). Russell has noted instances of plastered animal skulls both with plastered horn cores (suggesting more decomposition) and non-plastered horn sheaths (less decomposition). These treatments might indicate different levels of enfleshment; horn sheaths would eventually deteriorate and it is possible that, after this happened, people would then plaster and ‘rebuild’ the remaining horn core to achieve a similar effect (Nakamura and Meskell 2006). Within the house there is a clear focus on animal heads, rather than other body parts, within the most dramatic plastered features and, importantly, there are no human heads or body parts incorporated into this tradition. While animal heads and parts thereof were fixed to walls and features, human skulls and body parts remained detached, circulating and more likely to move from one special deposit to another.

If we take a longer view that spans the generations we can observe a longer-term tradition of circulation and handing down of objects. At various stages after the end of the house cycle, the impressive plastered elements of animal heads and horns were often removed and/or retrieved and potentially reused in other structures. Their retrieval suggests their potent or salient status in many, but not all instances. We should remember



*Plate 2* Horn Room Building 52, Çatalhöyük (photograph: author).

too that plastered anthropomorphic features, like the splayed figures, also had their heads and hands or paws removed at closure. The discovery of plastered bear paw remains at the site (Hodder 2006: 199) further blurs both the distinction between the image and the thing itself and the neat divisions of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. This last point is reiterated by the repeated intentional depiction of navels on bear images, itself a telling humanization of the animal world (Meskell et al. 2007). Examples such as this also speak to a traditional concern for the curation, circulation, restoration and embedding of skeletal objects as mnemonics for beasts spanning the generations.

Hodder claims that, while things such as bear paws may have been retained simply because of a need for the materials, it is also ‘possible that such retentions and retrievals created links with past events. It is possible that animal heads commemorated events such as feasts or initiations or other rituals that were important in defining the house-based group. The retrieval may have allowed links to particular pasts’ (2006: 146). Plastered animal heads and human plastered skulls (see below) may share this facility for monumental treatment, for retrieval, circulation and sharing, for memorialization through time and over generations, which is itself one definition of tradition. However, thus far we lack separate zoomorphic heads and bodies with dowel holes and attachments in the figurine corpus to parallel the anthropomorphic examples, implying that there was not a complete overlap in treatments or significances, but rather a subset of shared techniques, practices and potential associations. Perhaps the animal world was characterized by greater fixity and was less open to transformation and identity change; certainly it might be less individuated than the world of people. This might also account for the lack of human skulls embedded into the fabric of dwellings, as opposed to their animal counterparts, as outlined above.

The head is a very obvious locus of identity, so the ability to remove and replace certain heads might allow for multiple identities and potential narrativization (see Nanoglou 2006, 2008; Talalay 2004). Hamilton argued that detachable heads at Çatalhöyük (see Plate 3) ‘were used to portray a range of emotions, attitudes or states of being’ (1996: 221). In our



*Plate 3* Figurines showing dowel holes for removable heads and two heads (left) with corresponding holes (courtesy of the Çatalhöyük Research Project).

analyses, Nakamura and I (2006) have identified more bodies with dowel holes than heads made for attachment, which could suggest that the head is more determinative and the bodies are deemed more generic, although this may not imply a hierarchy. The pairing of heads and bodies may suggest that the act of combining or manipulating is the significant aspect and that this ‘bringing together’ might refer to social factors such as different genders, identities, kin, groups, ritual groups or the like. At other Neolithic Anatolian sites such as Höyücek (Özdoğan and Başgelen 1999) there is additional evidence of detachable heads. Ethnographically, several southern African groups use the iconography of discrete heads and post-cranial bodies to denote the blending of male and female kin lines at the point of marriage, specifically when a woman enters the household of her husband. Imagery on headrests, for example, plays on the notion that the locus of female identity rests within the body, whereas maleness is located within the head (Leibhammer 2007). While not suggesting a Neolithic parallel, I would argue that heads and post-cranial bodies as discrete material entities probably had symbolic referents that modern interpreters can appreciate, even if they cannot uncover the emic understandings. It may be the *process* of separating and reconnecting heads and bodies that was considered salient or powerful – the facility for such combinations, rather than the final states themselves, which we as outsiders tend to privilege. I would suggest that such manipulations apply equally to fleshed human bodies as well as malleable, clay bodies and perhaps shared a similar symbolic substratum.

At Çatalhöyük there is evidence for the intentional severing of heads in the figurine corpus (12102.X1) as well as in the mortuary data, although the latter has been demonstrated to occur after death rather than being causal. In the case of human bodies, only a few individuals were treated with head removal. In the two cases uncovered by the current excavations cut marks were present and the heads were probably cut off some time after initial burial. Building on his ideas around memory and ancestors, Hodder (2006: 146–7) argues it would have been necessary, at least in some cases, to remember the exact location of a specific burial or skull. This reveals attention to history-making, a focus upon ancestors and a material tradition of specific bodily treatments around headedness and headlessness. The headless body in Building 6 (Plate 4) was uniquely arranged with



Plate 4 Burial Building 6 (courtesy of the Çatalhöyük Research Project).



splayed legs and a cloth and wooden plank covering the torso, demarcating a special treatment. Following removal, human skulls may well have circulated for some time before final interment in specific abandonment or foundation contexts. In 2004 the plastered skull of an adult man was discovered held in the arms of a woman who had been buried in a pit as part of the foundation of a new building: it is the earliest example of a plastered skull recovered from Anatolia (see also Plate 5). These particular treatments and actions appear to be directed at certain individuals – possibly deemed as revered ancestors – not to collectivities of people, although social groups may have witnessed, or interacted with, curated or plastered skulls. Apart from the example at Çatalhöyük, plastered skulls have been discovered at Kösk Höyük in Anatolia and six Levantine sites (Bonogofsky 2005; Verhoeven 2002), suggesting again a long-lived and shared set of bodily practices. Bonogofsky rules out plastered skulls as evidence for ancestral practice on the basis of a single plastered child's skull excavated at Kösk Höyük. To dispute that children could possibly be considered as ancestors in the Neolithic seems short-sighted and does not take into account the many ritual contexts where children are revered individuals or embodiments of deities and spirits. The tradition of strictly biological descent from adults is probably only one, very modern, understanding of what constitutes the ancestral.

A striking parallel for the severed heads we find in the burial record can be found in the figurine assemblage (see Plate 6). Of particular import is an example (12102.X1) from the 2005 season that derives from a midden context in the 4040 Area. Carved from stone, what remains is a solid rounded base extending up to a wide horizontal groove indicating a waist then the upper torso. The neck and head have been removed, most likely with obsidian and other stone tools, and the surface appears to have been polished after removal (Karen Wright pers. comm.). We have since found several obsidian tools with wear patterns consistent with grinding stone surfaces. Another example of a removed limestone head occurs with a figurine now in Ankara (79-8-65) and indeed many stone figurines from Mellaart's excavations are without heads. In 2004 the team uncovered a complete stone figurine (10475.X2) very similar to 12102.X1, but this example retains its disproportionately long, rather phallic, head and neck. Here we might ask: what is the significance of head removal with this particular technique of stone manufacture, itself a more labor



Plate 5 Plastered skull with female burial (courtesy of the Çatalhöyük Research Project).



Plate 6 Severed head figurine (photograph: author).

intensive and difficult task than fabricating clay figurines, with or without heads. It is perhaps the process of severing, the action of separation of head from lower body that remained salient and connected most closely to the practices (probably rituals) that accompanied the parallel events surrounding human bodies and head removal and circulation.

Within the clay figurine assemblage there are various headless bodies that have dowel holes in the neck and also heads with corresponding holes at the base (see Plate 3 above). Certainly, there is the technological consideration that forming the head and body separately is easier for those less skilled in figure modeling. The figurine team found this to be the case in our experimental work with fashioning figurines. But, given the presence of dowel holes that facilitates the easy removal and exchange of heads and evidence for the intentional removal of heads across the site, figurines might similarly have been involved in activities of narrating histories, myth and storytelling. Figurine worlds may have provided a rich vehicle to explore narrative and transformative experience – the exploits of individuals, encounters with animals, mythic and historic. The ability for figurines to change identities through the transfer of heads (or change of viewing angle), leads us away from static forms into the notion of figurine as process (see discussion below).

### Enfleshing and embedding

Materially connected to the enduring traditions of curating and circulating heads at the site – both animal and human – was the material preoccupation with enfleshing and embedding skeletal remains. Such material strategies acknowledge that the ‘reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors. Human life, in so far as it is world-building, is engaged in a *constant process of reification*’ (Arendt 1958: 95–6). At Çatalhöyük these concerns for reliability and permanence are reflected in the repetitive practices of embedding, curating and durability that traversed both human and non-human domains and moved between real individuals and object worlds.

As discussed above, the plastering (and sometimes painting red) of particular human skulls and their circulation after death is testament to a material concern for co-producing and rendering permanent ancestors by improving upon the frailties of flesh. During Mellaart's 1960s excavations a red-ochre coated skull with two cowrie shells was discovered (Shrine VII.10), and in the same building sequence at earlier levels both a headless burial (Building 6) and a skull deposited from a post pit (Building 17) were recorded by the current team (Hodder 2005). The villagers of Çatalhöyük regularly saw human skeletons as they dug down to retrieve skulls and objects from burials (Hodder 2006: ch. 6) and were intimately familiar with the dual processes of fleshy decay and skeletal durability. It is tempting to see another process of translation here, between so-called natural remains (bone) and cultural embellishments (plaster, paint, labor) which, taken together, co-produce another type of thing altogether, one that endures over the generations with a restored efficacy. Clays and plasters probably had a specific set of associations with bodily flesh as well, whether human or animal, as numerous examples from the site suggest. The color, texture, softness, sheen, plasticity and ability to layer and smooth must have made plaster an evocative material. Plaster may have also held resonances with bone and its visual properties.

A desire to represent the tensions of enfleshing, embedding and durability furthermore can be noted in the figurine corpus, the most dramatic instance being of hybrid or dual constitution (12401.X7; Plate 7). The front portrays the typical robust female, with large breasts and stomach with the navel protruding. From the arched shoulders very thin, almost skeletal arms with delineated fingers rest on the breasts. Alternatively, the back depicts an articulated skeleton with a modeled spinal column, a pelvis and scapulae that project above shoulders. Individual ribs and vertebrae are depicted through horizontal and diagonal scoring. A dowel hole indicates that originally the piece had a separate, detachable head and the circular depression around the dowel hole suggests that the head fitted snugly into this curved space (Meskell and Nakamura 2005). It has previously been suggested that the heads of figurines themselves, especially detachable ones, came to



Plate 7 Skeletal figurine (12401.X7), front and back view (courtesy of the Çatalhöyük Research Project).

represent real plastered skulls with their high foreheads and smoothed, minimal facial treatment, minus mouths and detailed features (Meskell 2007). The world of figurines could materially emulate Çatalhöyük burial traditions in its attention to particular human bodies and their detachable heads. The skeletal representation has no exact parallel from the site, although one fragment (14314.X6) bears a strong resemblance, but there are numerous examples at Göbekli, specifically in the carvings of beasts with bared fangs and claws attached to the large stone pillars described above. Several of these beasts, some still attached, others cut and removed in antiquity, have this same skeletal detailing on the back, while retaining a fully fleshed belly and underside. Several examples show an erect penis underneath, even when it would have been difficult to view. All could be described as monstrous and aggressive beings that defy modern species identification but certainly resemble boars and other wild animals. Species specificity is our preoccupation, but there might have been an additional power in the potentiality of a hybrid, cross-species being.

Like the Göbekli beasts, the Çatalhöyük figurine reveals the bony, skeletal part of the body that survives death (and interment) and explores a tension between embedding, enfleshing and revealing. As with the embedding of real animal parts, this figurine traverses the depiction of embedded bony human parts with a shaped, fleshed, living human body. Each is a form of hybrid that effectively collapses the nature-culture bifurcation. Here the analysis might also extend to non-humans and the proliferation of their images in what Latour (1991: 7) calls a seamless fabric of nature-culture, in which each trait, thing or practice is simultaneously real, social and narrated. This figurine example also challenges temporal fixity, possibly relating to different states of bodily being, tensions between fleshed and unfleshed forms, living and deceased moments, and perhaps living and ancestral modes.

In this vein there is significant blurring between the bodily treatments of the remains of particular persons and certain animals. It should be said, however, that the majority of individuals in both of these categories were dispensed with rather differently and expediently. For example, the burials located under house platforms probably represent only a portion of the population and, within those, only a few were selected for special treatment. Similarly, the majority of faunal remains have been uncovered from midden- and house-fill contexts across the site, rather than being singled out for further curation. In these special circumstances, the skeletal and durable elements from certain boars, vultures, goats, bulls were embedded into the very fabric of Çatalhöyük dwellings by being stuck into walls and reliefs which were then molded and coated in plaster; others were attached to pillars or other architectural forms. In Building 52 (see Plate 2) excavators located a bench with attached horns down one side facing another installation of a bucrania that would have been attached to the wall. Directly above the bucrania, and on top of the later wall collapse, a cluster of horn-cores and fragments of cattle skull was deposited (Bogdan 2005). Productions such as these evoked a life-like quality for perpetuity with the addition of plaster and shaping; others remain lumpy and hidden. Parts of animals were deposited when houses were abandoned, buried in foundation trenches or placed in middens or fills. According to the most recently published data (Russell and Meece 2006), cattle horns were used in installations and special deposits three to four times more than the next category, which was boar skulls, then goat horns and sheep horns. Of course a wide range of animals

were also the subject of various two- and three-dimensional renderings and a fuller analysis is provided elsewhere (see Meskell et al. 2008).

Religion is constituted from people's attitudes, beliefs and opinions concerning existence and nature. Representing and engaging with animals through a tradition of personifying or individualizing cattle seems to have occupied a central role in the Çatalhöyük lifeworld, extending to social, economic, historical and spiritual realms. Cattle make up 54 per cent of all faunal remains in installations and special deposits, 46 per cent of the animal reliefs and some 15 per cent of the faunal remains. Contrast this with sheep that comprise 13 per cent of faunal remains in installations and deposits, only 19 per cent of reliefs, but 56 per cent of the faunal remains and form the staple of the meat diet (Russell and Meece 2006: table 14.5). At Çatalhöyük the greatest parallels occur between humans and cattle in iconographic traditions, since they occupy the most attention, are shaped, modeled, painted, in both two and three-dimensional media. Perhaps the most evocative materialization of this connection is demonstrated by one remarkable ceramic vessel that was finally assembled in 2007 (Plate 8). Here molded and incised human and cattle heads mutually constitute each other: the horns of the bull evoke the brows of the human faces, while the human ears can also form those of the bull when the vessel is turned.

Cattle are the most obviously identifiable species in the figurine repertoire because of their horns and they number well into the hundreds. Moreover, it appears that the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük also modeled separate horns as natural/cultural objects in and of themselves. Domestic cattle are given individual names in various cultures, are anthropomorphized in others, so that one possible interpretation is that ancestors or sacred beings were perhaps mediated through the animals, as they are through cattle in rural Zulu communities today (Berglund 1989; Huffman 1990). In the South African case it is not that the specific animals are in any direct way the ancestors in question, but they are the embodied medium through which they can be contacted. The material parallels between the treatment of humans and cattle, coupled with ethnographic inferences, potentially moves interpretations in different directions from the older notions of goddess worship and bull/consort veneration that Mellaart proposed (1967, 1975).

The inhabitants at Çatalhöyük had a great penchant for embedding and caching things, whether clay balls, obsidian, shells or bone. Yet we have maybe only one or two examples in this vast dataset that relate to the intentional deposition of figurines. Examples of



Plate 8 a–c The so-called ‘face pot’ from Çatalhöyük detailing human faces on two ends, parts of which form the image of a cattle bucrania on either side (courtesy of the Çatalhöyük Research Project).

plastered bundles of animal bones from the nearby site of Pinarbaşı dated to the seventh millennium BC echo this set of significations. Unlike the species represented in the Çatalhöyük assemblage, these plastered examples encase the most common species at the site including herded sheep as well as hunted aurochs and equids (Baird 2007: 305). At Çatalhöyük, the practices of embedding certain animal parts and collecting others for special deposition traditionally focus upon the heads, horns and scapulae which feature most prominently, especially in the more visible displays (Russell and Martin 2005). Within those species selected for special curation cattle predominate, followed by boar, sheep and goat. The animals regularly consumed at the site were sheep with notably fewer cattle and goat and very little boar. On this pragmatic level, one might also deduce that the vast majority of forms represented among the zoomorphic figurine corpus pertain to meat-producing animals: cattle, sheep/goat and boar. This fits well with the stab marks that we see, often in strategic points on the body, which would kill or potentially immobilize the animal. The parallel of South African San rock art, would suggest that the notions of social significance and meat provisioning are not necessarily mutually exclusive. San hunters killed and consumed the eland, for example, but simultaneously venerated it as a source of potency and as the creator's favorite animal (Blundell 2002, 2004). Ancient Egyptians also managed to venerate animal-inspired deities and consume their more mundane counterparts on a regular basis with little ideological conflict (Meskell and Joyce 2003). At Çatalhöyük we could be witnessing a different set of potentially reconciled tensions around the celebration of wild beasts and of the hunt as a particular event, recognition of (male) hunting prowess, memory and veneration, even possibly ancestral, gendered or individual associations with specific animals or species.

### Final thoughts

Presaging the concerns of contemporary materiality studies, Arendt wrote that:

it is this durability which gives the things of the world their relative independence from men who produced and use them, their 'objectivity' which makes them withstand, 'stand against' and endure, at least for a time, the voracious needs and wants of their living makers and users. From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life.

(Arendt 1958: 137)

These common concerns with duration, continuity and resilience are how I understand 'tradition' at Çatalhöyük, and yet the repetitive practices we see enunciated were inherently social, with shifting and intensely personal understandings for the villagers through some 1400 years of occupation. While I would argue that we can inch closer to the Neolithic lifeworld through attention to their material *habitus*, I would not advocate a static or conservative perspective, despite the fact that there may be outward congruities or visual similarities between materials and/or practices.

Of the many themes one could have chosen for Çatalhöyük, I chose two that had salience across domains from living bodies to aesthetic renderings, traversed both animal and human worlds, connected generations together, occurred at different scales and had resonance beyond the site to wider Neolithic traditions. The first topic was the material preoccupation around headedness and headlessness which was understood as a particular tension surrounding heads, head removal and circulation, and the post-cranial body that referred equally to human heads and animal heads, particularly cattle. The second theme, often deeply entwined with the first, was the desire for embedding and re-fleshing of the remains of animals and ancestors. Like the concern for curating the head, this material preoccupation was made manifest in the plastered forms, burial tradition and the figurine corpus. I suggested that such concerns to co-produce and manage these nature-cultures reflect and instantiate Neolithic desires about permanence, restoration and improving upon the fragilities of fleshed matter through manipulation and curation.

Keeping the dead close by and physically enduring (at least through living, generational memory) was made possible through this tradition of embedding and enfleshing, whether burying individuals under platforms and plastering over them, plastering certain skulls and burying them with descendants, or embedding the bony parts of animals as plastered protrusions, or perhaps even making clay images of the human form with protruding skeletal elements. These long-lived traditions were attempts to transform, display and render permanent the iconic and durable elements of human and animals. Duration is a recurring theme in a great many human societies, both ancient and modern and it would not be inconceivable to envisage that the Çatalhöyük residents were concerned with their own sense of history and memory (Meskell 2007). That making of history applied equally to the embedding of specific animals as well as people, to the rendering permanent of particular individuals, possibly even events such as the capture and killing of certain beasts. The materialization of history and memory might not have been focused solely upon human beings, but upon animal and other beings, all understood within the nature-cultures of the Neolithic lifeworld.

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