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Changing Materialities at Çatalhöyük

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Changing Materialities at Çatalhöyük: Reports from the 1995–99 Seasons. Edited by Ian Hodder. Çatal Research Project, vol. 5. McDonald Institute Monographs, British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) Monograph No. 39. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2005. Pp. xviii + 395 + 375 figs. + 246 tables. \$120. REVIEWED BY MARCO IAMONI, *Università degli Studi di Udine*.

This is the fifth report of the excavations at the site of Çatalhöyük from 1995 to 1999. It focuses on the analysis of the material culture of the site as discovered in the new excavations. The old data are frequently integrated with the new, thus providing, in many cases, exhaustive investigations of each subject. Further, the book deals with a wide number of categories of artifacts and provides, in most cases, not only a detailed study of the objects, but an interpretation of their occurrence in the Çatalhöyük horizon, throughout a time span that stretches from the middle of the eighth to the second half of the sixth millennium B.C.

In chapter 1, after an accurate description of the methodology adopted to record the archaeological evidence, Hodder introduces in broad terms the target of this report: the analysis of the material evidence of Çatalhöyük, not only as the tangible trace of human activity on the site, but also as a reflection or consequence of the complex level of Çatalhöyük society throughout the period under examination. In other words, the changes in the material culture are taken as a paradigm through which to analyze the evolution—that is, the different responses/reactions of the society to different periods and conditions, without implying any judgment regarding improvement—of the society at Çatalhöyük.

The basis for this investigation developed from Renfrew's idea of symbolic material culture, according to which objects represent concepts and thus, together with the human mind, are part of an active process (defined as “substantialization”) that generated, for the first time in the Neolithic, significant social/economic changes. Starting from this, Hodder attempts to explore, in more detail, the changes that occurred within the concept of materiality, and its symbolic impact during the Neolithic. These efforts represent the backbone of the volume, since almost all of the different sections examine specific classes of materials (pottery, clay objects, terracotta, seals, etc.) according to their symbolic influence as social engines.

Hodder's point is that the more complex the “entanglement of materials,” as he defines it (chap. 1), the more it encourages complex social relations. Ex-

amples of the latter are the creation of social memories attached to the physical essence of each artifact, or the necessity of craft specialization to support the production of increasingly refined objects. Particularly noteworthy is the discussion of “material object temporality.” This is a concept that determines not only the above-mentioned social memories but also the making of “histories,” which shape tradition and, consequently, the identity of Neolithic Çatalhöyük society. The degree of change in the material culture is seen as a reflection of major or minor continuity and innovation: house rebuilding, pottery changes, lithic traditions all become possible sources of information by which it is possible to single out variations in the social structure. It is the impact of objects on daily life that is, in Hodder's mind, the key to understanding social evolution on a daily basis, which, as such, is very gradual and thus hardly perceptible. Hodder states (p. 21) that as objects become more widespread, people become more dependent on them and on all the consequent implications (dependence on other people and the consequent generation of a more sophisticated social structure). The “objectification of human agency” subsequently becomes the keystone to understanding human interactions in an endless process of cause and effect (i.e., human complexity produces objects that in turn produce more complexity).

Particularly interesting is the section on the pottery from the east mound, in which Jonathan Last provides detailed quantitative analyses of an extensive ceramic study that ranges from the origin of pottery at Çatalhöyük (contextualized in the ancient Near East) to the impact of different ceramic technologies (for example, mineral or organic tempered ceramic pastes) and to vessel function. All these data are then reanalyzed in view of their possible implications on broader issues such as tradition and the meaning of the pots (and sherds, a body of data frequently underestimated by archaeologists).

Further analysis concerns clay objects, with a focus on clay balls, and an assessment of their possible function through ethnographic parallels. Stamp seals are discussed through contextual as well as typological

and functional analysis. Figurines are examined by Naomi Hamilton (who also analyzes the beads in chap. 14) with a detailed study on context, material, typology, and function. Noteworthy is her conclusion about sex and gender, where she points at a sexless original production—evidence that, as the author says, changes the common perspective of an original female-predominant production. This female-predominant production, according to Hamilton's view, would have been prevalent only after level VI of the Çatalhöyük stratigraphy, which, in light of the new absolute dates provided in chapter 4, should span from ca. 6500 to ca. 6300 B.C. (p. 76, table 4.2).

Further analyses concern chipped stone, basketry, heavy and organic residue, mud bricks, obsidian, stone artifacts, worked bone, stone, raw material, and bead material. Archaeological contexts are analyzed via statistical techniques in chapter 2. The book includes a CD that contains further data on the examined subjects, such as the figurine catalog and other illus-

trations, plus some extra investigations on obsidian mirrors and the context of the stone artifacts.

The book is thus an excellent archaeological report that fulfills all the requirements of such a publication: rich in details, exhaustive, correlated with abundant figures, tables, and maps. A single criticism might be the adoption, in some cases, of extremely complicated language, which makes the reading heavy and comprehension more difficult. Though the reviewer is not a native speaker of English, the authors' search for sophisticated words or definitions is perceptible; this does not help the explanation of various concepts and has rather the opposite effect. Apart from this, the book is of extreme relevance, not only because of the key role of the site in Anatolian/Near Eastern archaeology, but also for the quality of the research itself, which has permitted a wide range of conclusions. Due to its specificity, however, it is only recommended to a specialized audience.

The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban. By Talley Ornan. *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 213. Fribourg: Academic Press / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005. Pp. xii + 284 + 219 figs. 87 Swiss francs.

REVIEWED BY DAVIDE NADALI, *Università di Roma "La Sapienza."*

This study by Talley Ornan is divided into seven chapters. Each is devoted to the analysis of both anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic depictions of Babylonian and Assyrian deities in the second and first millennia B.C., considering, in particular, depictions and glyptic on stone monuments. The author compares Babylonian and Assyrian divine representations with those found on contemporary Syrian monuments and in Syrian glyptic. A rich and clear appendix of 220 figures (all drawings of stelae, reliefs, and seals) completes the volume.

Ornan's main thesis consists of investigating a progressive shift in second and first millennium art from anthropomorphic to non-anthropomorphic representation of gods on stelae, reliefs, and seals. In her opinion, this progressive change in Mesopotamia inspired the biblical ban on images, where, while God was perceived as human (like Mesopotamian deities), he was not depicted as a human being. As she points out, however, the biblical image ban reflects only the cultic layer and not the belief: God was not worshipped through an anthropomorphic image, but was perceived as having a human shape. According to the author, in

the Mesopotamian tradition "divine anthropomorphic representation was articulated mainly on objects that belonged to the sacred area or were used as temple paraphernalia. When conversely, anthropomorphic-perceived divinities were articulated on artifacts that did not relate to the temple locality, their human-shaped articulation was usually eliminated" (p. 72). The progressively non-anthropomorphic representation of gods, however, is probably due more to the political and religious purpose of images rather than to the location and use of the artifacts. Considering, for example, the Victory Stela of Naram-Sin, which was presumably set up at the Temple of Shamash in Sippar, the deities are represented as symbols in the upper register of the monument because the main protagonist is the Akkadian king, himself, depicted as a god. This same characteristic can be recognized in Neo-Assyrian monumental art: royal stelae, rock reliefs, and palatial reliefs are monuments devoted to the representation of the king who is the sole subject represented. The surface of rock reliefs and royal stelae is entirely occupied by the image of the king, and, as on Naram-Sin's stela, the gods are symbolically con-