

Magical deposits at Çatalhöyük: A matter of time and place?

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When is magic? That is, when does an act or thing become magical if it does so at all? Derek Collins (2000) poses this astute question in his recent discussion of Greek magic,¹ and the question seems requisite for any study of magic in the Neolithic as well. Asking *when* as opposed to *what* complicates any perfunctory characterization of magic that reinstates simplistic distinctions of symbolic versus pragmatic, ritual versus everyday and natural versus supernatural. Asking *when* underscores the nuances of context and attributes to prehistoric persons a complex range of motivations, strategies and desires that may have imbued certain moments and activities with a sense of what we might call ‘the magical’. Asking *when* is infinitely more apt for examining the potential indicators of spirituality at Çatalhöyük, a site where discrete forms of religion and magic remain distinctly beyond archaeological perception. Similarly, it also seems appropriate to ask: *where* is magic at Çatalhöyük? If practices and things become magical at particular moments, they do so in particular spaces. If there is any ‘evidence’ of magic at Çatalhöyük, it will reveal itself, not as a ready-made or petrified cultural form, but more furtively at specific times and places.

It is impossible to deny that the Neolithic community of Çatalhöyük engaged some kind of concern with a world or force beyond that of the living human population. The plastering, circulation and installation of human and animal skulls, and the depiction of humans and animals in wall

¹ Following Goodman’s approach to art (1976), Collins focuses on the ‘when’ rather than the ‘what’ of magic in order to sidestep the myopia of philological debates that focus on specific terms and definitions of Greek magic at the expense of illuminating the ‘conceptions of causality and agency implied by the magical practices and objects themselves’ (2000: 20).

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

301

painting and modeled media, suggest that certain animals and the dead were likely imbued with some kind of power in the socioreligious sphere. Moreover, the specific and sustained attention given to some houses, which sometimes persisted over several generations, indicates that the house itself played a central role in spiritual life at Çatalhöyük (Hodder 2005b, 2006b). In the past, some have treated the archaeology of certain evocative things – namely, figurines, burials, wall paintings and plastered sculptures – and their interpretation somewhat carelessly, giving them borrowed life through compelling, yet ultimately prefabricated narratives of spirituality, religion and art (Gimbutas 1974; Mellaart 1967). Certainly, this tendency in part reflected the interpretive habits and ideals of those times, but we are now dealing with a remarkably transformed archaeological record and set of standards. Accordingly, not only have the questions concerning religion and spirituality changed, but so also have the ways in which we can investigate them archaeologically.

Leaving the difficult discussion of what constitutes the religious or spiritual at Çatalhöyük to the other contributors to this volume, I will instead focus on what might constitute the magical domain at Çatalhöyük. These two themes are, no doubt, related; and indeed, before one can look for magic, one must first have a somewhat clear idea of the material forms and practices that religion encompasses. After briefly discussing the archaeology of the religious domain, I will discuss a few possible magical valences at Çatalhöyük, focusing on certain materials and their qualities, mixed deposits and their specific locations and temporalities.

From religion to magic

Discussions and debates concerning the nature of religious and magical practice during the Middle Eastern Neolithic have only recently begun again in earnest (Cauvin and Watkins 2000; Gebel et al. 2002; Lewis-Williams 2004; Mithen 1998; Watkins 2004). Not surprisingly, most discussions focus on the symbolic and ritualistic as opposed to the more practical and instrumental aspects of Neolithic life.

While such contributions reopen a much needed conversation about religion in the Neolithic, Webb Keane rightly reminds us that there are certain consequences of parsing archaeological evidence into things that are useful (instrumental) and things that are symbolic (Chapter 8; also see

Pels, Chapter 9, and his discussion of the ‘fallacy of religion’); foremost is that the practical side of human activity becomes tacitly regarded as distinctly *not* symbolic:

This point is important because other analytical consequences follow. The putative distinction between instrumental and symbolic is the basis on which most of the theories of religion in Çatalhöyük have been based. (Keane, Chapter 8)

The symbolic materials at Çatalhöyük are uniquely evocative in their overall aesthetic, concentration and constitution, and thus are the obvious focus of discussions and theories of religion at the site. However, there is also increasing archaeological evidence from recent excavations that challenges the notion of the symbolic realm as the sole arbiter of religious practice and belief (Hodder 1996, 2005a,b, 2006a,b). Implicitly questioning the conventional distinction between instrumental and symbolic realms, Tristan Carter (2007) has argued against treating the ‘social’ and ‘technological’ as distinct qualities and categories of meaning in the obsidian industries. For instance, the caching of obsidian blanks in houses at Çatalhöyük may have served multiple purposes and intentions: for saving the material for later retrieval, for its incorporation into the house structure (Carter 2007) or indeed for making a kind of dedicatory or magical offering.

In a different way, the figurine materials also argue against the separation of the instrumental from the symbolic in spiritual life. Figurines, once regarded by Mellaart and Gimbutas as objects of reverence or worship – idols or mother goddesses – now seem to encompass a ritualized, yet more everyday and disposable kind of practice (Meskell et al. 2008). Significantly, the current excavations have rarely found figurines from primary contexts and almost never from caches (the one possible exception being 14522.X8 from Building 65, discussed later in this chapter) or platforms. Rather, these objects are most ubiquitous in midden and infill. In contrast to obsidian, there seems to be less concern for the material itself – its hiding, keeping or incorporation within the house – than for the ‘instrumental’ process of its creation, fulfillment of a purpose, wish or whim and final disposal, most often in domestic trash or room fill. Lynn Meskell and I have repeatedly argued that figurine practices seemed valuable *as a means to various ends*; they encompassed a range of practices that consistently did not include the object itself being treated with the

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

303

kind of care seen with other materials (Meskell et al. 2008; Meskell and Nakamura 2005; Nakamura and Meskell 2004, 2006). Notably, some have suggested that figurine practices are most evocative of wish-vehicles (Hodder 2006b; Voigt 2000). However, this kind of quotidian use does not preclude the possibility that figurines were involved in spiritual or ritual activities.

Marking a shift toward attending to the diverse modes of religious life, particularly centered around the house, some of the contributors to the current volume explore pragmatic, material-semiotic approaches to investigating the religious dimension at Çatalhöyük (e.g., Keane, Pels, Shults). Such approaches are particularly appropriate for prehistory, since they salvage materiality from its epiphenomenal status (especially in discussions of religion) and do not require or falsely sustain misleading divisions of sociality into discrete and purified realms.

While these scholars focus on different aspects of religion, they underscore a few cardinal aspects of the religious domain that provide a useful starting point for a discussion of magic at Çatalhöyük. Leron Shults (Chapter 3) situates religion/spirituality in terms of the ultimate limits of human engagement. He emphasizes that the religious addresses the boundary conditions of the world, or the world-constructing boundaries of a person's imaginative cultural engagement. In a similar vein, Peter Pels (Chapter 9) speaks of religion in terms of the experience of transcendence, but his unique contribution aims at articulating the transcendent in terms of the systematic study of temporalities and their overlap. These notions therefore identify and recommend the limits and temporalities of experience as practical anchors for examining religious life in the Neolithic. Shifting his focus toward human action and agency, Webb Keane further observes, 'Much of what seems to fit received categories of religion lies at one end of a continuum of forms of attention and hierarchies of value that range from relatively unmarked to marked' (Chapter 8). The idea of 'markedness of attention' here highlights various degrees of activity and effort concentrated on a certain task, material and/or moment, and draws our analytical attention to how people effectively dealt with the boundary conditions of the world they inhabited.

Needless to say, all of these points also could be applied to a discussion of magic. Magical practices also basically deal with boundaries, limits, temporal dislocations/conflations and certain kinds of 'marked' attention. Indeed, some might wonder if it is helpful or appropriate to

distinguish between magical and religious activities at Çatalhöyük and the Neolithic more broadly. While it is quite likely that magic and religion were, in some sense, inseparable during this time, most would still maintain a certain difference between the two. Most explicitly, Peter Pels considers magic to be the most everyday form of religious activity: protection and wish fulfillment (Chapter 9). Ian Hodder also speaks of certain practices he interprets as protective and apotropaic as being magical (2006b). Furthermore, there seems to be a general acceptance of acts of defacement/fragmentation, deposits of 'odd' objects, the disposability and localized burning of 'symbolic' materials and the hidden placement of objects (or bodies) in liminal spaces *as archaeological indexes* for magical protection and/or wish fulfillment. While many or all of these actions may indeed be part of a magical idiom at Çatalhöyük, their articulation as such requires further consideration both indexically and contextually. Only after such considered attention can we move closer to addressing the question of how we might speak of magic as something qualitatively different from religion archaeologically.

Broadly speaking, the analytical category of magic has proved to be a rather slippery concept that seems to come clearly into view only when it serves to oppose or subvert something else. Consider one of the most 'probative' examples of magical thought: the superstition. A tradition becomes superstitious when there is no legitimate basis for belief in it anymore. Or rather, the basis for belief has fallen out of favor or is thought to stem from a distant past or remote place. Superstitions, in a sense, are merely a trace rather than a full-fledged dogma, doctrine or belief. There is some sense that they work – that they *do something* – and one may believe in this efficacy, but one can never explain why they work. Even if an explanation exists, it has no relevance to whether one believes in the efficacy of the gesture or not; it simply does. So superstitions become such only when they are invoked in the presence of a more favored explanatory or causal doctrine.

The elusive figure of magic seems to require a structured ground (like science, religion or rational thought) for it to 'stand out' against and thus make itself known. Notably, magic as a topic of scholarly interest shares an intimate history with the development of anthropology as a discipline. Early works by Victorian scholars, James Frazer and Edward Tylor, effectively established magical practice and thought as a defining characteristic

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

305

of the Other, as a set of techniques that from a rational observer's perspective couldn't possibly work (Graeber 2001: 240). And since then, magic has yielded substantial explanatory power when deployed for debating ideas and practices that seem to confound rational thought (see debate prompted by Evans-Pritchard's 1937 ethnography of the Azande; MacIntyre 1970; Winch 1964) or as a foil for religion and science (Frazer [1890] 1957; Tylor [1871] 1977) or modernity (Benevides 1998; Styers 2004; Taylor 1989).

While notable scholars, such as Claude Levi-Strauss, Edmund Leach and many since, have astutely argued against absolute distinctions between magic, science and religion, it is, perhaps, its very capacity to provide contrast if not opposition to its kindred fields that characterizes magic in its most lucid and persistent form. Moreover, while magic often needs to push against something – a dominant order or structure – in order to be discernible, it also, rather cunningly, appears to *belong* to the very system it labors to subvert; it has been the constant companion to modernity (Pels 2003), and at various points in history has been both an ally and agitator of religion and science (Tambiah 1990).

Perhaps this is because there is something about ordered systems and rule structures that begs to be transgressed, broken or done 'otherwise'. Perhaps, as Michael Taussig (1999) imagines, such systems bear within them the very possibility of (and even demand for) events of momentary breakdown. In this picture, magic need not be an adversary or alternative to religion. Rather, it might be more complicit: a necessary, integral supplement (loophole, escape route?) that ensures the smooth functioning and persistence of religion. Following Georges Bataille, Taussig emphasizes that transgression

is not a rejection of rules that give human culture much of its form and density. . . . On the contrary, the transgressed rule is brought into ever greater relief, its power more fulsome as there is created, by means of its violation, an unresolvable negation of the negation whose sole aim and density is not resolution of contradiction but its exacerbation. (1999: 141)

Admittedly, Taussig is speaking of the more immoderate Dionysian or Rabelaisian enactments of becoming other through carnivalesque excess; but this notion of transgression still holds in less extreme conditions,

which sustain more subtle interactions and, nevertheless, are no less ‘exacerbating’.²

But transgression also points to another issue. If we recall the familiar Marxist critique of religion in which human beings are creators, religion becomes a prototype for all forms of alienation since it requires humans to project our creative capacities and agencies onto imaginary forces and beings, to which we then bow down and ask favors (Graeber 2001: 239). Here, people see their own creations as controlling them (see also Godelier 1999). Religion is therefore fetishistic in the way it locates the source of human sociality and creativity outside human action. In contrast, magic in Graeber’s assessment is never fetishistic, since

magic is about *realizing one’s intentions* (whatever those may be) by acting on the world. It is not a matter of people’s intentions and creative capacities being projected out into it and appearing to those people in strange, alienated forms. If anything, it’s just the opposite. (2001: 240; added emphasis)

To transgress religious structures (the state of alienation) means to take back the source of human creative power, if only for a moment. Magic seeks to effect direct action – through intentional speech acts (Malinowski 1935; Tambiah 1990) or acts of doing (Mauss [1950] 2001) – action that does not necessarily require an intermediary source. So magic can provide an important pathway or outlet for human agency and creativity in contexts in which religious or other social forms structure and constrain human action and belief.

Examining magical practices, then, provides a way to get at human intentionality. While it is impossible to comprehend the precise meanings that motivated the selection of certain materials and performances in the Neolithic case, it may be possible to locate specific moments and spaces that became the focus for creative human intention and action. Such acts often engender a collision of worlds – of the familiar and unfamiliar, of the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’, of the everyday and exotic. In this way, the study of the magical may also reveal aspects of the relations of human intentionality and power to the religious or other social forms.

² Hodder seizes upon a similar idea in his discussion of dangerous animal parts at the site. Following Georges Bataille and Maurice Bloch, he suggests that the symbolic incorporation of danger and violence can create moments of transcendence (Hodder 2006b: 203).

Articulating magic at Çatalhöyük

Given the real constraints of performing an archaeological analysis of magic in prehistory, we must admit a few hermeneutic concessions and assumptions. First, it is necessary to impose a very minimal ‘definition’ of magic from the outset, one that situates magic in relation to something else, in this case the religious. Second, we must imagine that it shares a distinct intimacy with such religious forms. Whether magic worked within, alongside or against such forms, it seems reasonable to assume both addressed similar concerns, albeit in different ways. I would suggest a heuristic positioning of magic as a kind of instrumental agency that contrasts or ‘transgresses’ certain normative religious patterns and ideals.³ While this move, admittedly, recalls the kind of enchanted discourse that reconstructs magic as religion’s other, it does so in a way that acknowledges how magic also belongs to religion (see Pels 2003). Moreover, this positioning has the benefit of rendering magic archaeologically legible; it allows us to focus on certain practices, spaces, materials, assemblages and temporalities that might assume more magical (contrasting) than religious (conforming) aspects. Needless to say, the departure into magic from religion at this Neolithic juncture is a highly uncertain venture. However, after pursuing this line of questioning, we should be in a better position to say whether the magical was something distinct from the religious in the Neolithic, and perhaps enrich or challenge some of the commonly accepted archaeological indices for magic noted earlier.

Commencing from this framework then, we must first establish a ground from which magic arises – namely, the religious domain as a ‘normative’ sphere of belief and practice. What experiential limits, spatiotemporal frames and forms of ‘marked attention’ constituted the religious domain at Çatalhöyük? Archaeologically, the most suggestive evidence stems from a particular focus on the dead, ancestors and wild animals (particularly bulls, but also vultures, leopards and possibly bears), all asserting a strong presence in the house (Hodder 2006b). Furthermore, we might

³ Certainly, this working definition draws from the influential ideas of Malinowski ([1948] 1992) and Mauss ([1950] 2001), whose ideas on magic as a practical act, performed as a means to an end (Malinowski [1948] 1992:70), in isolation and secrecy, often against certain organized orders (Mauss [1950] 2001: 28–9), have come to define our most common notions of the magical. These ideas generally expand and modify earlier ideas on magic (and its distinction from religion) proposed by Frazer and Tylor.

note the practical emphasis on clay and plaster. These materials were abundant and pervasive in daily life. Most utilitarian objects, including building materials, pottery and clay balls, derive from clay. Plaster covers walls, floors, platforms and features, including installations of wild sheep and cattle bucrania, and often builds up over dozens of layers. The house encapsulated the processes of both life and death. Both humans and houses were buried (houses were ‘buried’ under other houses or middens), and the particular remains of both could be retrieved, while other materials (obsidian, clay balls, remains of meals) and animal parts (mandibles, scapulae, horn cores, claws) were cached or incorporated into buildings during various stages of their life cycles (see Hodder 2005a). These events, and their consistent occurrence across the site and over time, suggest a baseline for normative ritual practices at Çatalhöyük; moreover, most of these practices are thought to have engaged some sense of exploring the limits of human experience, including life and death, wild versus domestic power and the visible and invisible.

Considered across space and time, the material record underscores a few significant themes. On the most basic level, the worlds of *clay* preoccupied daily life at Çatalhöyük. While clay-based materials and activities clearly dominated the domestic sphere, certain forms such as plaster, with its particular qualities and capacities to smooth, hide, brighten, build up or, indeed, to reflesh and enflesh (Meskell 2008), were likely imbued with symbolic power. The malleable, reusable, combinable and transformational capacities of clay more generally might also have registered on the symbolic level. As Gaston Bachelard has poetically imagined:

Clay, too, for many people will become a theme of endless reveries. Man will wonder endlessly from what mud, from what clay he is made. For *in order to create, some kind of clay is always needed*, some plastic matter, some ambiguous matter in which earth and water can come together and unite. (1983: 111; added emphasis)

Although clay was ubiquitous at the site, its abundance would not preclude it from being attributed some kind of symbolic force. Clay was the material par excellence of human creation and adaptation. Its accommodating properties allowed humans more control over their relations with the natural world and may have been associated with ideas of creation, abundance and self-preservation. The various modalities of clay (utilitarian and symbolic) sit squarely with Hodder’s ideas of entangled practical,

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

309

symbolic and ritual spheres centered on the house (2006b). Additionally, the *house* itself (made of clay) located the primary domain for religious practice, and the repeated acts of burial, memory and retrieval of certain human and animal body parts likely constituted what Keane (Chapter 8) terms ‘highly marked’ forms of attention.

Hodder has interpreted much of this activity in terms of a genealogical concern for ancestors and generational continuity. In terms of space, then, we might identify the inside of the house, ovens and horizons between successive rebuilds as ‘spaces’ marked by religious attention. The site, since Mellaart’s time, is well known for its bull imagery – installations of bucrania in rooms – which would have been an imposing presence in the house. But recent excavations also point to distinct patterns of foundation or construction/closure deposits consisting of neonate burials and animal bone deposits (particularly scapulae) (Hodder 2006b). Furthermore, there also seems to be an attention to the specific merging of houses, humans and wild animals. This idea appears in many registers, including the wall paintings with humans interacting with wild animals, burials of individuals with entire animals (e.g., F.1702) or animal claws or tusks (see units 8814, 10829, 11306, 16503), animal and human bodies (and parts) incorporated into house features and structures (both hidden and circulated) and the incorporation of pottery – a distinctly human index – with placed ‘feasting’ deposits (Russell and Martin 2005). However, this incorporation does not seem to occur at the bodily level, as there are no clear examples of animal–human hybrids at the site (although see Hodder 2006b; Russell and McGowan 2003). In terms of time, these practices suggest a concern for creating a link between the past and present – what Hodder terms ‘the invention of history’ (2006: ch. 6). Acts of retrieving human skulls and sculpture required remembering the past (the exact locations of such materials and individuals) in a specific rather than general way (Hodder 2006: 147). While the concern for a secure future may be implicit in such memorial acts, the instrumental focus of these conservative practices lies in creating material links to the past, to what was known and/or remembered.

So the house itself, the integrated matrix of house–ancestor–wild animal, powerful body parts (skulls, horns, teeth, claws, mandibles and scapulae) and memorial practices that hinge on revelation through concealment, seemed to locate a somewhat standard set of practices that gesture toward something transcendent or spiritual incorporated into daily

life. There is a sense here that such practices focused on creating and maintaining certain foundational relationships – namely, those between group and house, humans and wild animals, present and past. And there is a strong emphasis on marking endings and beginnings and on ovens and heat installations. In other contexts, where the religious domain is more specifically delineated (by textual sources), many of these practices could well be interpreted as magical (Nakamura 2004, 2005). Returning to this point later, I would first like to consider practices that might be slightly more set apart from the religious sphere at Çatalhöyük.

If we follow the idea that magic served in some way to contrast certain normal practices, our attention might be drawn to certain deposits that include some unusual materials that are not common to the daily life and practices of the site. Setting out with these vague ideas in mind, I first queried the Çatalhöyük database for ‘clusters’, an excavation unit category reserved for a group of homogeneous or heterogeneous materials that appear to be associated in space and time.

Sorting through around 250 cluster deposits, I found that a few interesting patterns stood out. First, a number of deposits included an odd object or two in a larger group of other materials; these assemblages often contained a single piece of obsidian, pottery, flint and/or stone (see Table 11.1). Second, other deposits show the repeated combination of certain materials like obsidian, antler, pottery fragments, crystal, pigment, special stones or ax heads, deposited either with other unusual finds (human skull, baby leg, fossil) or with other more common materials (animal bone, stones, ground stone, figurines). Finally, most of these deposits were found in buildings (see Tables 11.1 and 11.2; Figures 11.1 and 11.2).

These deposits raise a few compelling, if somewhat expected, possibilities. One is that certain rare and possibly exotic materials that appear in mixed deposits, such as crystal (speleothems) and pigment, might have been imbued with some kind of special power or significance. Another is that certain materials *in combination* might have had some kind of power or significance (Figure 11.3). Finally, consideration of the list of deposit descriptions in Table 11.1 suggests the frequent occurrence of these deposits in liminal spaces and moments – points of closure or transition (transformation) in the life cycle of the house such as infill deposits, floor abandonment, construction, retrieval pit or bench construction.

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

311

Table 11.1. Mixed deposits

	Unit	Area	Space	Building	Feature	Level range	Materials	Deposit description
1	1212	North	187	1	–	VII–VI	Animal bone, obsidian, shell, tooth	Infill deposit in south part of B.1
2	4210	South	117	2	–	IX	Obsidian +1 flint	Obsidian cache
3	4401	South	163	6	–	VIII	Badger mandible, tooth pendant, stone +1 flint, +1 obsidian, green rubbing stones, ax point	Scoop deposit, located under oven near south wall of building
4	4915	South	173	6	–	VIII	Clay ball, animal bone, stone, obsidian	Floor deposit in eastern side of space
5	4989	South	178	23	–	X	Mostly obsidian flakes and cores +2 burned bone +1 stone	Floor deposit associated with sequence of hearths and ovens
6	5021	South	170	17	538	IX	Animal bone (badger paw), obsidian, flint, figurine, ground stone, pottery	Fire installation in south corner
7	5022	South	170	17	–	IX	Human skull, ground stone, obsidian, clay object, animal bone	Postretrieval pit deposit, northwest corner
8	10281	4040	94	52	–	VI, V	Animal bone, shell bead, stone	Horn cores, west wall
9	10666	South	120	44	1325	?	Stone, animal bone, clay object, obsidian	Scoop deposit, rubble from oven
10	10845	South	112	50	–	VII	Scapulae (2: 1 M, 1 F) +1 obsidian	In between wall packing deposit
11	12400	IST	–	–	1980	?	Obsidian and flint	Cache in clay box
12	12401	IST	283 (252)	63	–	IV–V	Stone, figurine, pottery, obsidian	Infill deposit
13	12485	IST	301	–	–	IV, V	Animal bone (dog skull, bucrania) +1 figurine, obsidian, flint	Infill deposit in northern area
14	12516	South	257	53	–	VI	Ground stone and mud brick with 2 obsidian flakes	Possible construction deposit in northeast corner of northeast platform
15	12806	South	122	56	–	III	Phytoliths, worked bone, obsidian +1 flint	Floor deposit

(continued)

Table 11.1 (*continued*)

	Unit	Area	Space	Building	Feature	Levels	Materials	Deposit description
16	12807	South	122	56	–	III	Animal bone, stone, obsidian, flint	Floor deposit
17	13212	4040	227	58	2250	IV, III	Clay object and obsidian	Pit/scoop deposit
18	13342	South	123	56	–	III	Stone, pigment, crystal, ax head	Infill deposit (see Figure 11.3)
19	13359	South	297	65	–	V, VI	Obsidian blades +1 bone awl +1 rounded pebble	Northeast of space near pilaster (see Figure 11.5)
20	13365	South	298	65	–	V, VI	Stone, bone, obsidian, crystal, pigment	Infill deposit between wall and bin
21	13370	South	299	65	–	V, VI	Stones, bones, bone tool, crystal, phytolith, obsidian, ax head	Infill deposit behind oven back wall
22	13491	4040	278	60	2369	V, VI	Obsidian	Brick deposit
23	13640	4040	100	49	1493	VII–VI	Bucrania, grinding stone, animal bone, seeds	Postretrieval pit deposit, northeast corner
24	13937	IST	284	63	2313	IV, V	Scapula +1 pottery	Basin deposit
25	14009	South	297	65	2098	V, VI	Pebbles, bone, obsidian, bone tools, crystal	Placed deposit in bench
26	14019	South	297	65	–	V,VI	Animal bone, stone, pottery, clay object, figurine, obsidian, pigment, crystal	Construction/abandonment deposit; platform leveling/makeup?
27	14078	South	299	65	2090	V, VI	Stone, fossils, crystal, rub stones	Stone packing layer within oven, with added materials
28	14522	South	297	65	2086	V, VI	Animal bone, figurine, baby leg, stone, obsidian, crystal	Platform deposit; construction/abandonment deposit
29	14929	4040	322	55	–	Un-assigned	Cluster of stone +1 bone tool	Construction/abandonment deposit floor deposit
30	16554	South	328	75	–	V	Animal bone (scapula, mandible, skull, ribs) and stones	Pit deposit
31	17094	South	299	–	–	V, VI	Animal bone	Bone cluster (external area)
32	17097	South	299	–	–	V, VI	Animal bone, obsidian	Floor deposit

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

313

Table 11.2. Deer antler deposits

	Unit	Area	Space	Building	Feature	Level range	Materials	Deposit description
1	Un-known	TP	326	74	–	III	Antler + pigment	Infill deposit in western part of space
2	1052	South	106	MEL House 16	–	VII	Antler, bead, obsidian, figurine	Undifferentiated building fill (near west wall)
3	1350	North	185	1	17	VII, VI	Animal bone	Pit cluster
4	1889	South	117	2	257	IX	Clay balls, ceramics, animal bone, worked bone, antler, obsidian, figurine, ground stone +1 flint	Domestic dump deliberately placed over bin
5	2268	BACH	88	–	–	VII, VI	Stone, antler, cattle skull, figurines, obsidian, bricks	Abandonment deposit in room
6	3037	North	153	–	–	VII, VI	Animal bone (antlers and horn core)	Infill deposit
7	4677	South	172	18	516	X	Antler	Bin wall deposit
8	4717	South	198	–	–	X	Antler, scapula, animal bone	Horizon deposit?
9	6250	BACH	88	–	165	VII, VI	Antler, obsidian, bone tool, ochre	Platform deposit
10	10292	4040	93	52	2003	VI, V	Animal bone, antler tool, stone, obsidian	Floor deposit/pit cluster
11	10499	South	202	42	1515	V, IV	Antler tools, obsidian +1 flint	Burial tool cache
12	10602	South	–	44	–	Un-assigned	Antler	Building horizon deposit?
13	10835	South	112	50	1709	VII	Flint and animal bone (antler)	Burial deposit
14	11317	South	202	42	1515	VI, V	Obsidian, flint, antler (animal bone)	Burial deposit/cache
15	11897	IST	–	–	–	?	Animal bone (antler), stone, obsidian and pottery	Infill deposit/feast?
16	11904	4040	93	52	2004	VI, V	Antler, pig mandible, cattle hoof, goat bones and horns, worked bone, food remains +1 obsidian arrowhead; topped by 1 stalactite/crystal, 1 boar mandible	Bin in southeast corner
17	11923	4040	93	52	2004	VI, V	Animal bone, mandible, antler	Feasting deposit/bin deposit

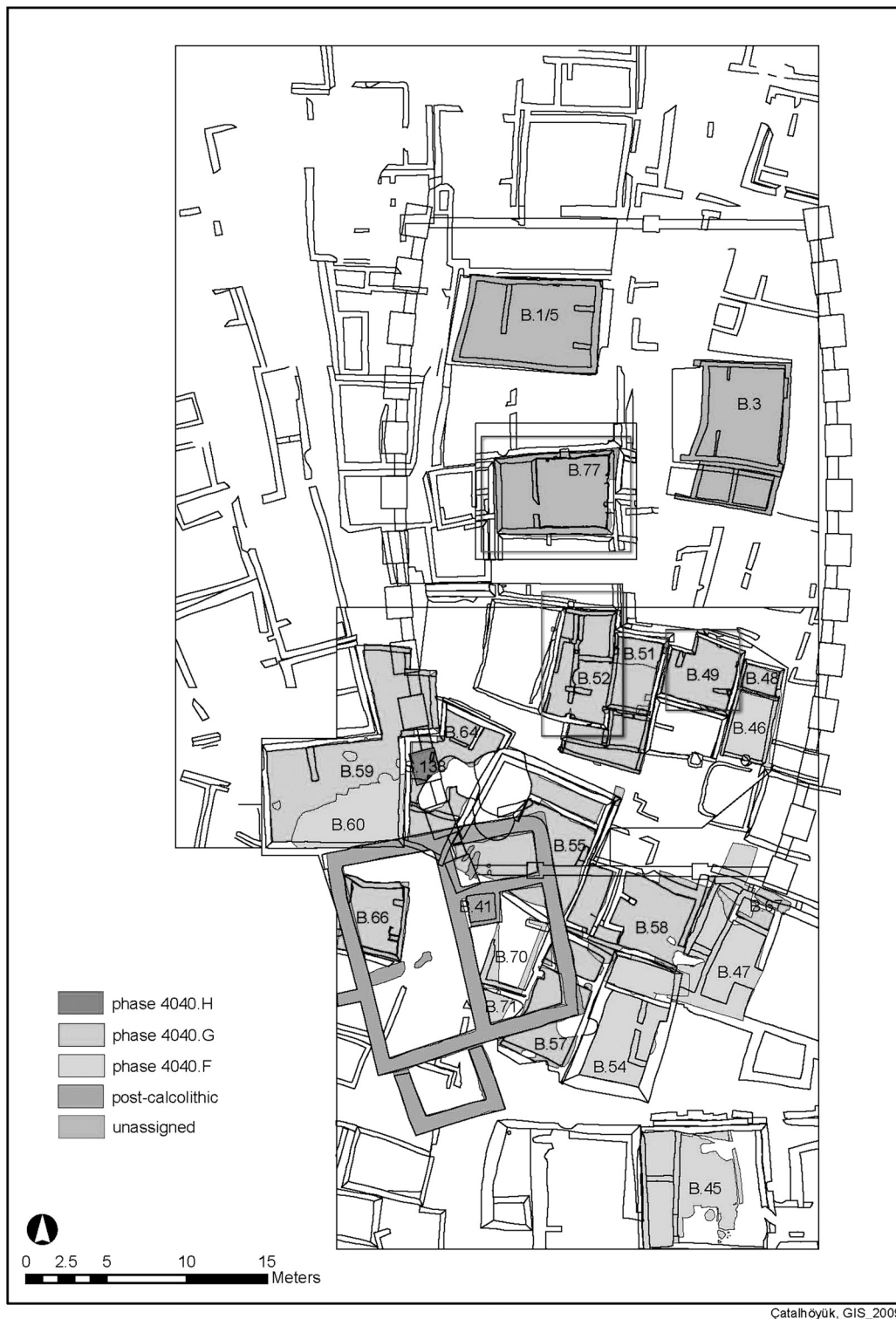
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Table 11.2 (*continued*)

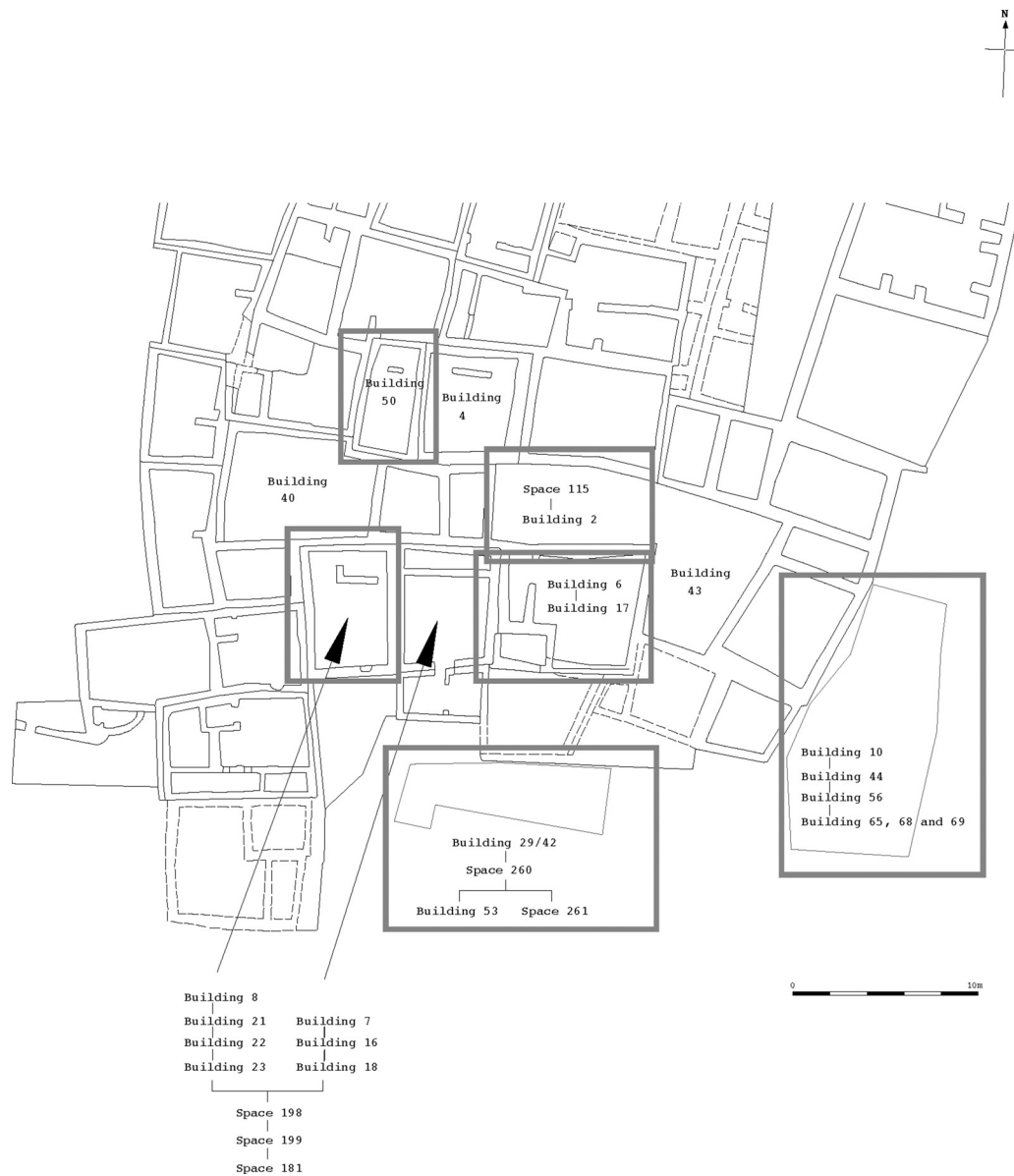
	Unit	Area	Space	Building	Feature	Level range	Materials	Deposit description
18	11965	4040	93	52	2040	VI, V	Stones, obsidian, sheep bones, antlers	Box/basket deposit, southeast corner
19	11969	4040	94	52	–	VI, V	Animal bone (antler, mandible, skull)	Abandonment deposit? Placed on top of bucranium set into wall niche
20	13352	South	121	65	–	III–IV	Antler, horn cores +1 obsidian blade, scapulae, stone tools, figurine?, obsidian, flint	Placed infill deposits
21	13571	TP	318	–	–	III, II	Antler (1), worked stone (4)	In ‘niche’ of eastern wall of ‘passage’
22	13932	IST	284	63	1997	IV, V	Antler, stone, pottery, animal bone, obsidian	Cache; construction/abandonment deposit (bench 1997)
23	14460	4040	335	49	4006	VI–V	Stones, animal bone, antler, obsidian, flint, worked bone	Midden deposit under platform, southeast corner)
24	15803	TP	326	74	–	III, II	Antler, skull, maxilla, bone tools, worked stone, clay objects, pigment, obsidian	Infill of eastern part of building, also filling doorway in southern wall
25	16459	4040	337	77	–	VII–V	Antler, horn core	Burned infill deposit?/from collapse? (near southern wall)
26	16488	4040	337	77	3092	VII–V	Antler, stones, goat horn core, scapula	Bin deposit
27	16489	4040	336	77	–	VII–V	Antler, mandible, tortoise shell	Infill deposit in front of alcove in northern wall (above a possible stone/grindstone/stone tool abandonment deposit)
28	16492	4040	336	77	–	VII–V	Bone tool, clay balls, scapula, skull, antlers, figurine, green stone axes, grindstone	Abandonment deposit? In front of southwest platform and in center of space
29	16523	South	332	75	–	V	Antler (1), flint (1), bone points, scapula	Dump in southwest corner

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

315



11.1. Plan of 4040 Area with Hodder phasing. *Source:* Çatalhöyük Research Project.



11.2. Plan of South Area. Buildings with mixed or antler deposits are outlined in black.
Source: C. Nakamura and Çatalhöyük Research Project.

MAGICAL MATERIALITIES

While magic often seeks out isolated and hidden spaces, perhaps it does so only to contain the force of its performance. On a sensory level, magic acts to captivate, agitate and even derange normative modes of perception; at such moments, one would perceive a distinct disruption



11.3. (13342) Cluster found in Space 122 of Building 56: yellow pigment (right), ax head (top), stone (middle) and crystal/speleothem (left). *Source:* Jason Quinlan and Çatalhöyük Research Project.

in the expected. Against the earthen, smooth surfaces of clay and plaster and enduring presence of human and animal bone, certain materials such as crystal and pigment would have stood out for their different qualities, such as color, appearance or hardness (along similar lines, some stones and pebbles from deposits also might have been selected for their color, shape or general quality). None of these materials are commonly found at the site.

Crystal forms are associated with caves as they derive from speleothems, namely, stalactites and dogtooth spar (Gürcan 2008). Indeed, their color, hardness and appealing natural form would have provided a notable interruption in the clay materiality that dominated daily life. Furthermore, these materials might have drawn upon their respective associations with caves and other distant locales. Regardless, their presence would assert a quality of the exotic, different or otherworldly into the house. Such interruptions may have yielded a kind of power that was

guarded (hence their occurrence in hidden contexts such as construction deposits or within a bench or placed between walls; see Table 11.1) and not widely known or available to the general population. Their procurement may also have been shrouded in secrecy. It is perhaps significant that most of the deposits containing crystal occur in the South Area, and almost exclusively in Building 65 (13365, 13370, 14009, 14019, 14078, 14522); this building belongs to one of the history house sequences (65, 56, 44 and possibly 10; see Regan 2006), and all of these deposits seem to mark off transitional (and therefore liminal) moments when certain rooms or features go in and out of use. Given that crystal seems to be associated almost exclusively with Building 65 (the one exception being the crystal block found in association with a bin in the burned Building 52), there may be some particular association of this material with this house. Intriguingly, Mellaart (1967) also reported finding broken stalactites in 'special' buildings.

The rare occurrence of pigment in these deposits (13342, 13365, 14019, 15803 and TP), either in or next to B.65, is also intriguing. Clumps of pigment sometimes occur with skeletons in burials (F.200, F.760, F.3010, F.6000) and have rarely been found in any other context. The deposits with pigment listed in Table 11.1 occur in between a wall and bin or oven, or near a wall. Karen Wright (pers. comm.) has suggested that the prevalence of grindstones (to grind pigment for the paint) in B.65 may indicate that this was a house of wall painters. This suggestion, while inconclusive, is provocative and does not rule out a magical use for pigment. In fact, the act of painting itself may have evoked something of the magical, as many wall paintings were visible only intermittently (Hodder 2006: 190) and were plastered over and repainted numerous times, suggesting a powerful, temporally bounded, performative act.

It is not only rare and exotic materials that might have held particular power. Many scholars have suggested that obsidian, which is relatively ubiquitous at the site, had both a symbolic and an economic vitality at Çatalhöyük (Carter 2007; Conolly 2003; Hodder 2005b, 2006b). Like the more uncommon materials already mentioned, obsidian dramatically contrasts with the compliant qualities of clay. Obsidian is hard, darkly luminous and dangerous; it requires significant skill to bring out its sharp and mortal potential, yet it can also be made reflective (as mirrors; see Mellaart 1962), and its ubiquitous presence underfoot even creates a distinct sonority within the house (see Carter 2007). Notably,

obsidian is one of the few materials consistently cached in houses. All of the cached obsidian pieces are pre-forms (Carter 2007), that is, material that is on its way to becoming something else. Carter notes that some have interpreted these caches as either capital (Mellaart 1963) or symbolically powerful assemblages (Conolly 2003; Hodder 2006b) and further implies that these hoards might in fact exploit both of these valences, as they were meant to become incorporated *as part of* the building (Carter 2007). Obsidian was obviously valued for a variety of reasons, and it is possible that certain forms of the material – not the finished pieces or the debitage scrap, but the *intermediary* pre-forms with the potential of becoming something else – were deemed powerful in such a way that needed to be contained and/or incorporated into the house. In this case, particular materials and forms might have been viewed as ‘magically’ powerful because of certain properties and qualities they yielded.

Whereas obsidian was fairly ubiquitous across the site, another less common material also occurs with significant frequency in mixed deposits and liminal contexts: deer antler (Table 11.2). Russell and Martin (2005) have observed that deer in general are not very common on-site, although their remains are more abundant in the early levels (pre-XII.B). After this point, only the antlers and skins occur on the mound, suggesting that deer were not being eaten in significant amounts. Deer antler takes the form of tools (picks, pressure flakers, soft hammers, hafts/handles), ornaments, pendants, pre-forms and waste material (Russell 2007, 2008). While antler, as a raw material, does not provide the stark contrast to the clay- and bone-dominated townscape, it is a relatively rare material at the site. Russell and Martin suggest that there may have been taboos against eating deer on-site, and given the particular treatment and occurrence of deer parts on-site, deer likely encompassed a very different set of meanings from cattle (2005).

In depositional (and possibly ritual) terms, deer antler is particularly marked by its occurrence in certain placed and infill deposits in buildings. Antler often occurs with other materials in contexts that appear to be marking room and bin closure or transition events, alcove/niche/doorway areas and certain individuals in burial contexts (Table 11.2). So antler, like obsidian, had multiple uses and valences; with a natural hardness and pointedness, it was visually and perhaps symbolically dramatic, but it also could be transformed into a variety of tools, thereby participating in numerous productive activities.

Strikingly, while antler deposits occur in many different buildings, they seem particularly ‘thematic’ in two buildings in particular: Buildings 52 and 77 (Table 11.2; Figure 11.4). Both buildings, dating to levels ranging from VII to V and located in the 4040 Area, were ‘burned’, perhaps intentionally (Cessford 2005; Hodder 2008; Twiss et al. 2008). In particular, antlers and antler tools in these buildings were associated with bins, corners and gestures of closure or ‘abandonment’.

Symbolically, antler is a highly evocative material, as it can signify continuity, specifically through the trope of cyclic rejuvenation. Visually, deer antlers are also evocative of roots and fire, and may also symbolize tradition, aggressive masculinity, sacrifice and so on. Unlike horns, which continually grow and form over a lifetime, antlers shed and regrow annually; they issue from the same foundation, yet instantiate continual change in life through a repeated cycle of death and rebirth. Notably, antlers do not regrow exact copies of what came before; they are similar, but never the same. It is possible that the Çatalhöyük inhabitants, like other cultures, may have attributed to deer antler a kind of intrinsic regenerative power: that of life (continuity) through constant transformation (growth, death, rebirth). This kind of self-rejuvenating power of the antler would contrast with (but not necessarily oppose) the more steadfast and accumulative power of the horn, which visually, and perhaps symbolically, dominated the house and religious domain.

Finally, with respect to the presence of deer on-site, there is some indication that these animals and some of their body parts were prized, aesthetically and/or symbolically. Worked animal teeth often occur as beads. Most of these beads stem from badger (Russell 2008), dog (F.2050 in B.44 in the South) and boar (F.1710) teeth. However, deer teeth and *fake* deer teeth forms made from long bones also occur in this bead form (see 5169.X2-13 from F.563 in B.17 and 10829.X5, 7, 15 from F.1710). Deer teeth are the only bead forms that appear to be copied, and this act of copying may indicate special significance given to deer teeth or to deer in general.

While we may only speculate as to the symbolic meanings of these various materials, examining their particular materialities along with their contexts of use and deposition does provide some suggestive possibilities. One quality common to obsidian, antler and teeth is that they are natural, hard, pointed or sharp materials that can evoke a sense of danger, power and perhaps defense. Hodder and Meskell (Chapter 2) underscore the



11.4. (16492) Cluster on floor of Building 77 with deer antler in front of southwest platform, sealed by building collapse/demolition. *Source:* Jason Quinlan and Çatalhöyük Research Project.

potential association of teeth and claws at the site with male prowess, the construction of memory and piercing of the flesh. In addition, I would suggest that these materials, as indices of the wild and its power, might have been used defensively for apotropaic protection – as the ‘defense that goes on the offensive’, to use a Derridian turn of phrase (Derrida 1994). This kind of apotropaic logic appropriates certain materials and animal parts that have the power to wound, pierce and kill, since these objects, when displayed defensively, can effectively ward off potential aggressors. Given the focus on discrete animal heads (horns, mandibles, and teeth in particular) and claws and paws, it is possible that humans viewed these body parts as the very source and condensation of animal power. This idea finds support in the marked concern for removing both heads and ‘hands’ from actual animal bodies (seen in cattle bucrania, bird talons and claws, bear paws, etc.) and their representations in plastered sculptures (Mellaart 1962, 1963). Notably, the display of teeth and claws

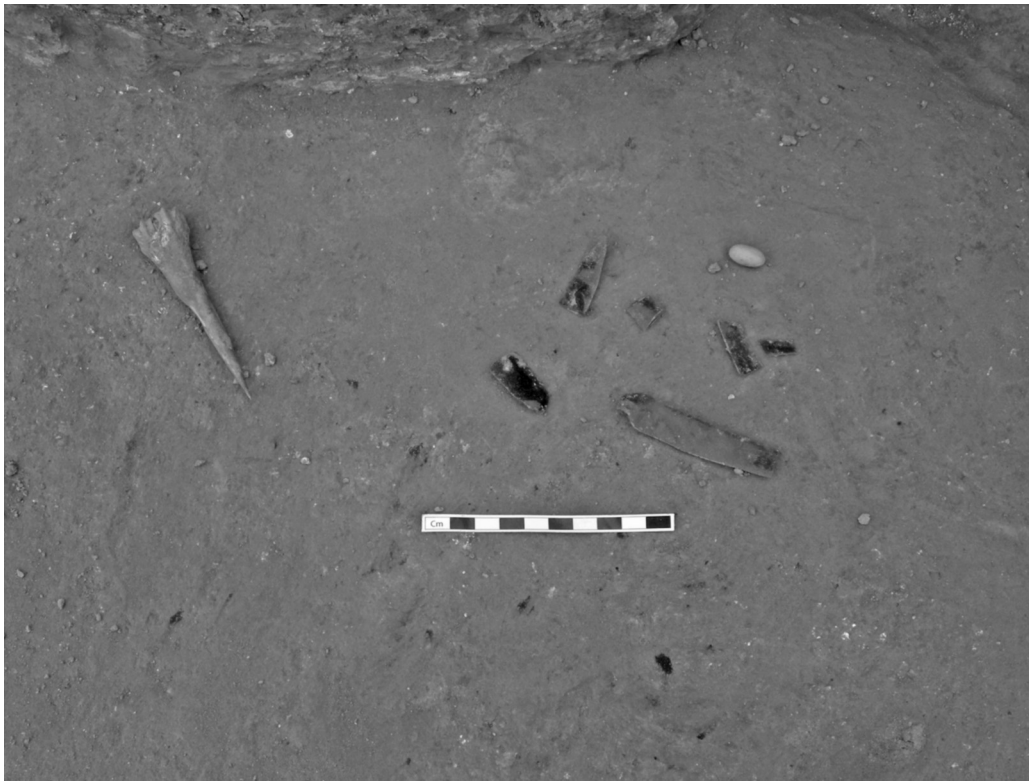
is a relatively consistent *defensive* behavior among mammals in response to threat stimuli such as predators or attack situations (Blanchard and Blanchard 2000). The removal, displacement and fetishization of horns, teeth and claws, then, could have rendered a powerfully concentrated symbol in the part separated from the whole (Albrecht 1999). It was as if all the force of wild animal power and vitality came to reside in these castrated parts, but with the caveat that such power was no longer bound to a wild, dangerous animal agency; rather its power in such castrated forms could be appropriated and redirected defensively.

Similarly or mimetically, then, other sharp or sharpened materials such as teeth, antler and obsidian at various times might have operated within this kind of ‘domesticating’ apotropaic logic. Fitting to such a task, we often find such materials in liminal and perhaps dangerous spaces: in burials, in corners and in between spaces, and in building and feature transition horizons. I will return to these themes of space and time later on, but for the moment I wish to briefly address the power of association and assemblages.

MAGICAL COMBINATIONS

While certain materials may take on magical qualities at Çatalhöyük, we know that these same materials were not always or exclusively magical. Obsidian and antler, for instance, also provided the raw material for crafting blades, points, hammers and other tools. At times, a piece of obsidian was simply a blade, just as an antler was a hammer, or a tooth an ornament. Magical qualities therefore emanated not only from the materials themselves, but also from a particular associative constitution in time and space.⁴ Tables 11.1 and 11.2 list nearly 60 deposits of various groups of materials, some of which may testify to a magical act or event. Common materials occurring in combination include obsidian, animal bone (especially scapulae and mandibles), figurines, pottery fragments,

⁴ This idea departs significantly from Mauss’s notion of ‘magical milieu’, which emphasizes the intentional *marking-off* or bounding of magical spaces and times (generally with formal entry and exit rites and taboos) that oppose a ‘normal’ milieu (Mauss [1950] 2001: 61, 123). Rather, what I am proposing is more of a *happening* of magic that occurs in the assembly of certain materials, agencies, locales and moments. Human marking, in the sense of Keane’s idea of ‘markedness of attention’ (Chapter 8), is certainly part of such events, but it does not require the rigid bounding and separation of normal vs. abnormal modes or categories.



11.5. (13359) Cluster of objects located on an upper floor of Building 65, possibly placed near a pilaster at the central west wall of the structure prior to abandonment: one bone point, six pieces of obsidian and a small rounded stone. *Source:* Jason Quinlan and Çatalhöyük Research Project.

flint, ground stone, worked bone, colored stones and pebbles, as well as ax heads. Such collections also occur in waste deposits, so in themselves these materials together do not likely signify a magical operation. What catches the eye, however, is when one piece of a different material appears in a collection of another kind of material. For example, excavators have found instances of a single piece of flint in an obsidian cache (e.g., 4210), and one bone tool amid a cluster of stone (e.g., 14929). The intrusion of a non-everyday object also marks certain deposits as something different. Some of the more provocative groupings include the following:

[4401] a badger mandible, tooth pendant, green rubbing stones, an ax point and one piece each of obsidian and flint deposited in a scoop under an oven in B.6;

[5019/5022] a human skull, ground stone, obsidian, clay object and animal bone deposited in a postretrieval pit in the northwest corner of B.17; and

[14522] animal bone, figurine, baby leg, stone, obsidian and crystal deposited in the southeast corner of B.65 under pre-construction makeup of a platform.

Groupings of numerous different objects engage our associative capacities in a much different way than do those that contain the same one or two materials. Were such collections intentionally placed? If so, then why this selection of objects and for what purpose? Again, there is something in the juxtaposition or play of contrasts that captures our attention. In some cases, the collections seem to represent materials from various aspects of life: eating, working, crafting (animal bone, obsidian, grindstones, tools); these have been interpreted as commemorative (Russell 2008; Twiss et al. 2005) or perhaps dedicatory deposits (Hodder 2006b).

However, in other cases, some materials seem to evoke more metonymic or symbolic relations. For instance, mandibles and scapulae, animal parts not known for their meat, occur frequently in mixed deposits (see also Wilson 1999). Ax heads, flint, figurines, horns and human bones in addition to the materials already discussed also regularly appear. Certain materials also seem to co-occur more than others, and it would be interesting to investigate these relationships more closely in future studies. Regardless of the specific relationships, in a general way these groupings suggest a collision of various worlds: domestic, exotic, destructive, creative, animal and human. Alternatively, it is possible that these object collections sought to capitalize not on the power of their specific connections, but rather on the presentation of radical indeterminacy. Placing familiar objects in unusual combinations asserts a kind of derangement of normative modes of perception. Positioned between the known and unknown, these deposits might have been regarded as objects 'out of place'. As such, they would constitute an event that disrupted the consensus (Nakamura 2005). And I am similarly struck by the way in which these material assemblages effectively accomplished the equivalent of what Deleuze regarded as the force of painting (and what I regard as the force of magic): a presentation that conjures a force that exceeds the totality of the complex relations and ideas that produce it (2003). What is magical may be scrutinized, picked apart and analyzed, but to little avail;

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

325

for while there may be rules to follow, it is its performance and effect, not its comprehension, that yields social power.

MAGICAL MOMENTS AND PLACES

Certain materials and assemblages seem to reveal a unique form of human attention, one that we might qualify as magical. Yet perhaps the most compelling evidence of magic at Çatalhöyük is to be found in a particular marking of space and time. The deposits listed in the Tables 11.1 and 11.2 range from clusters of objects scattered on a common floor surface to objects sealed in inside features. Excavators sometimes refer to many of these deposits as ‘abandonment/closure’ and/or ‘foundation’ deposits, given their locations in specific places and transitional moments. The acts of building and rebuilding/reuse were highly ritualized practices at Çatalhöyük. In addition to these deposits, there is a distinct pattern of systematic clearing, leveling, infilling and rebuilding of houses at the site. Some history houses such as the B.65–56–44–(10) sequence display a remarkable degree of consistency in such practices, from the way in which features and structures are closed and remade to the locations and kinds of deposits incorporated into the house (Regan 2006, 2007). Given the centrality of the house in social life, such processes were likely incorporated into the religious domain. However, given the hidden (and perhaps dedicatory and/or apotropaic) nature of these deposits, it is appealing to imagine that they operated on a register slightly different from the more exposed, public trappings of a community-building spirituality.

Hodder (2006b) and Pels (2003) have noted the vital economy of revelation and concealment that fuels certain memorial and spiritual practices at the site. But the retrieving of human skulls, sculpture and architectural materials from previous foundations underscores the memory and revelatory side of the process. What of those deposits that were not meant to be ‘retrieved’? While perhaps not forgotten, these events were not meant to be remembered, if remembering meant to be revealed and propelled back into the living human domain. The kind of work they accomplished, be it dedication, sacrifice, protection, recognition, constitution or all of the above, mapped out a different kind of economy. For one thing, the nonrevelatory logic of these deposits is one of accumulation rather than recycling. Furthermore, these deposits marked the boundaries of certain ‘forms of life’ (i.e., features, rooms and houses). At moments of building, retrieval, closing or transformation, they marked as significant not only

the features or houses, but certain *liminal moments*, and one wonders if such ‘marking’ attributed agency not only to specific objects (such as ovens, bins, platforms and houses), as Keane and Pels describe (Chapters 8 and 9), but also to particular moments in time as well – to the transitional, liminal and sheer potential in processes of becoming.

On a practical level, placed deposits mediated a direct relationship with the house itself. They marked and therefore recognized a certain kind of life or power, both in the features or spaces they inhabited and in the moments of their transformation. Such liminal zones are highly charged by their ambiguous potential, as they inhabit that indeterminate area in between two existential states. Transitional moments and spaces, then, instantiate the very essence of becoming. And in such localized moments lie gainful opportunities to intervene in and affect a future outcome.

Conclusion: Magical orders

Things that remain hidden articulate a different kind of concern for the future than those that are found and retrieved. In a sense, the former become timeless as they remain ‘on hold’, never meant to fulfill that sovereign moment of revelation at a specific future moment. The marking of liminal locales in such a way, with collections of durable, often fragmented objects from all spheres of life, suggests a kind of magical harnessing of power. Namely, the intentional juxtaposition of the transitory (the liminal) with an enduring materiality composes an act of sublime transgression. To mark the ‘in between’ places is to focus on *connection* rather than discrete objects, places and times. It is the denial (indeed, the violation) of the boundary or limit par excellence, while in the very same movement, it announces – no less than enhances – its absolute power and significance. If humans create and seek out boundaries and limits in order to make sense of their world (the realm of religion), they also retain the primordial right to occasionally reset and transform them. Perhaps the magical, then, is simply this instrumental memory of noting and performing a certain prior (or other) truth that has been all but forgotten, yet persists in some absent-minded bodily or material form. And the cunning assertion that such acts put forth is that order and sense are founded upon their very transgression and dissolution; magic keeps open the possibility of things being otherwise under the guise of a conservative form of memory.

Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

327

While it may never be possible to pin down the precise significance of certain evocative finds and deposits at Çatalhöyük, as a form of human marking they do underscore the idea that magic does not necessarily reside in certain materials and their attendant agencies or in certain humans and their skills. Sometimes it seems to encompass a more indeterminate kind of agency, one conjured through the conscription of a specific time, locale, group of materials and their attendant ‘agencies’ in order to accomplish an instrumental and perhaps transcendent act of observation or recognition.

Certainly, at Çatalhöyük this kind of power might have been privileged and guarded capital, and the particular concentration of ‘magical’ materials and deposits in some houses is intriguing. One might wonder if certain groups had differential ‘access’ to magical technologies and how this might correlate to the distribution of religious or spiritual capital across the site. As noted earlier, Buildings 52 and 77 and building sequence 65–56–44–(10) seem especially marked by the presence of these kinds of ‘unusual’ deposits, but in unique ways. In future work, the general category of clusters must be studied in more detail in order to flesh out significant differences between less marked and highly marked deposits, and further consideration of these houses and their remains might shed some light on the more specific social valences of magic and spirituality at the site.

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Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

329

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Magical Deposits at Çatalhöyük

331

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