



The Leopard's Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Catalhoyuk

Ian Hodder

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A firsthand account of the discoveries at this seminal ancient site in Turkey, one of the first farming settlements in history.

Catalhoyuk, in central Turkey, became internationally famous in the 1960s when an ancient town--thought to be the oldest in the world--was discovered there together with wonderful wall paintings and animals, including leopards, sculpted in high relief. The archaeological finds included the remains of textiles, plants, and animals, and some female terra-cotta figures that suggested the existence of a "mother goddess" cult. The initial excavation was interrupted in 1965, and answers to the riddles of this Neolithic site remained unresolved until Ian Hodder initiated a new campaign of research in the 1990s. Described by Colin Renfrew as "one of the most ambitious excavation projects currently in progress, undertaken at one of the world's great archaeological sites," this has been a truly multidisciplinary undertaking, involving the participation of over one hundred archaeologists, scientists, and specialists. Hodder and his colleagues have established that this great site, dating back some 9,000 years, provides the key to understanding the most important change in human existence--the time when people moved into villages and towns, adopted farming as a way of life, and began to accept domination of one social group by another. Through meticulous excavation procedures and laboratory analyses, they peel back the layers of history to reveal how people lived and died and how they engaged with one another, with their environment, and with the spirit world.

Full of insights into past lives and momentous events, "The Leopard's Tale" is superbly illustrated with images of the art, the excavations, and the people involved in this world-famous dig.

The Leopard's Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Catalhoyuk Details

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From Reader Review The Leopard's Tale: Revealing the Mysteries of Catalhoyuk for online ebook

Jody Kuchar says

Civilization markers. A good book for the serious scholar.

Susan Ferguson says

Interesting study. The author sifts through things found at the site in the different levels. He has come to the decision that social growth led to a settlement/village agrarian lifestyle with domesticated animals and plants. There is still much to be learned from the site, much excavation and study still to do. The title comes from the paintings on the walls showing people in leopard skins and leopard paintings used as decoration and the fact there were no leopard bones or traces at the site. There was much use of wild bull skulls and horns and other wild animals, but no leopards.

The author frustrates me by speaking of something in a chapter, then saying , "but I'll talk about later in chapter x". I found that quite irritating.

Probably written for a more serious archeology person.

Farzana says

Beautifully illustrated and clearly written.

Mesa says

work book!

Barnaby Thieme says

A startling revolution has quietly occurred in our understanding of the origins of civilization, and Ian Hodder has been at ground zero. As the director of excavation at one of the most important archaeological sites in the world, Hodder is in a unique position to give an account of the ancient Anatolian settlement Çatalhöyük -- and what an account it is! This is clearly the definitive book on the site, and is absolutely essential reading for anyone interested in early Anatolia, or the development of agriculture and urbanization.

I could not conceive of a better guide to take us through the site. Hodder presents the carefully-gathered fruit of decades of research, ranging from careful sifting through dust and soil for tiny fragments to climatological surveys to surveys of midden heaps to microscopic examination of ten-thousand-year-old pollen samples.

With equal care, he has gathered together theoretical models to build hypotheses based on these findings to reconstruct some sense of the history and culture of the population of Çatalhöyük, giving a sense of how people lived, how the economy and society were organized, and what they may have believed.

The key unifying framework that Hodder meticulously assembles is what he calls "material entanglement," which is a framework for understanding how and why complex sedentary societies arose.

The old theory that planting led to agriculture, which led to sedentary housing, which grew because of greater availability of food, leading eventually to urbanism, has to be seriously reevaluated in the light of archaeological discoveries at Göbekli Tepe, which is in the same general region as Çatalhöyük. As far as we can tell, this monumental site was established and used by semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. This suggests that the earliest large-scale collective constructions of great magnitude may have been ritual centers, and not the product of the stabilization of planters.

Hodder sees Çatalhöyük as a reflection of a millennia-long process of intercoupling by social groups, who begin sharing or exchanging material resources, and thereby gradually bind themselves in reciprocal dependencies and relationships. He does not use a systems theoretic vocabulary in the book, but the process would be well-described as the self-organization of an emergent society along the lines described by Stuart Kauffman.

The culture of Çatalhöyük gives every appearance of reflecting this process in its artistic culture and economic organization. There is a very gradual evolution from strong nucleation of material culture within each home to increasing dependencies and portable cultural artifacts traveling among the homes. Likewise, the early layers of the settlement show a profound interest in connecting the home to ancestry, to the extent that most of the homes include multiple human burials under the floors. This tendency becomes markedly diminished over time, perhaps reflecting the movement of the spiritual center of gravity from the individual house to the collective society.

Another important contribution of this book is a revision of the early reading of Çatalhöyük as evincing a "goddess culture" as popularized by Marija Gimbutas. The evidence does not give strong support to such a hypothesis, and her association of Çatalhöyük with her hypothetical matriarchal societies of Old Europe needs to be significantly revised. Many of the figures previously believed to be female figurines, for example, have turned out under closer inspection to probably depict animals, and research looking for evidence that women held privileged social positions have failed to find any corroboration for such a hypothesis.

Hodder's book is sweeping in scope, carefully argued, and beautifully written. It will surely stand for many years as the definitive work on the subject.

Jane Lebak says

I'm going to have a hard time telling you how much I loved this book, but I'll try. I was mentally composing this review last week and thinking "It's unputdownable" and then it turns out I got really sick and I had no choice but to put it down. Which was okay because I just got to enjoy the book longer. Just don't borrow my copy of the book because of the germs I breathed into it -- although the odds are really slim I'd have let this book out of my house anyhow. Just saying.

Ian Hodder is writing about an early human settlement in Anatolia, kind of like a beehive in the way the houses are constructed (entrance at the top, everything identical, ritual cleaning, etc) and this settlement went on to become huge, for thousands of people, and it lasted for a thousand years. The people themselves seem fascinating, burying their dead right in the house and every so often going back to retrieve some ancestor's skull or burying someone with someone else's skull. There's a fascination with wild animals and a disdain for domesticated ones at a time when humans were involved in wholesale domestication of themselves.

And although archaeologists have found 650,000 animal bones on the site, and although paintings show lots of leopards and leopard skins, they found not one single leopard bone.

Ooh. Mystery!

Hodder's prose is at times clunky but at the same time, he's very thorough about explaining what he's saying, so by the time you get to a really technical sentence, you understand the whole thing *and* its significance. EG, Hodder writes "The number of phytoliths displaying greater than 10 cells constituted less than 15 percent of the assemblage, and there were no wheat-husk phytoliths with over 70 silicified adjacent cells," and you don't think, "Huh?" Instead you think, "Oh, WOW, really?"

Hodder also writes with class. He collaborated with a lot of other scholars and scientists and credits them right in the text, and where he disagrees with someone, he phrases it with the utmost respect. I'm going to look up his other books to see if he wrote anything else I might find interesting.

Overall, yeah. Read this. This is cool.

Raymonds009 says

Low on jargon and high on provocative speculation about the 7th millennium in central Anatolia. I am not an anthropologist or sociologist but I enjoyed reading about the roots of our earliest civilizations in the area. Fantastic illustrations and drawings elucidate the story even further. A great effort which may be followed by more research of this area in the future. I hope so.

William says

Catalhoyuk itself is interesting enough, but, for me, the writer certainly didn't make it seem that way. Certainly, as a scholar, Hodder can't write in such an entertaining way as to make the findings as engaging as fiction. Yet, the book suffers from poor writing; how many times must we read the same details or find that the Hodder starts to veer into fascinating details, only to tell us that we'll read about it later? Each chapter becomes bogged down in terribly inconcise detail about the findings of the past 50 years. I'm not saying that these details are unimportant--they are--but get on with the good stuff, man! If you're deeply interested in Catalhoyuk, I'm afraid this book is unavoidable. But, Hodder should take a page from far more engaging and yet equally as educational popular science writers, if he hopes to reach a wider audience than people with scholarly interests. Because Hodder simply needed a better editor, I had to put this one down. Intend to read "The Goddess and the Bull" instead.

Colleen Clark says

This book is the archaeologist's ruminations and analyses of the ongoing dig at Catalhoyuk, a prehistoric site in central Anatolia, now Turkey. I read it after I read Michael Balter's "The Goddess and the Bull".

For anyone interested in prehistoric archaeology and the long story of how we have become what we are learning about Catalhoyuk is fascinating. But this book is not the first to read; some background, Balter's book at least, is essential.

The daughter of a friend is an archaeologist. She thinks that Hodder is full of himself and is an arrogant SOB, and he may well be, but the story is fascinating and the personality of the archaeologist beside the point.

Chris Hamby says

I read very little in archeology, but I found this book very accessible and engaging. Hodder is obviously deeply invested in the subject, but his writing manages to focus on the minutiae of the site as well as the broader implications for human historical and cultural development. It helps that the site, Catalhoyuk, is an amazing and strange find.

John says

A facinating read on one of the most amazing archaeological sites in the world, Catalhoyuk. As a fan of Ian Hodder, he discusses and give his interpretations on some of the mysteries of this site. If interested, check the Catalhoyuk webpage: <http://www.catalhoyuk.com/>

Claire Webber says

Endlessly fascinating if you come expecting a full-on post-processuralist description of a well-known dig - but topography descriptions do wear on you if you aren't a paleobotanist.

Adrian says

Archaeologist Hodder details the excavation of this neolithic site in Turkey. It was continually inhabited from 9000 years ago to 6000 or so. The people were agriculturalists who still hunted wild game. They lived in small close-set houses with roof-top openings and buried their dead beneath platforms in the houses they lived in. Art covered the walls of the houses much of it centered on the leopard still active in the Middle East at this time. Hodder perhaps goes overboard on this culture's connection to the spirit world but it's still a fascinating job of prehistoric detection.

