

This article from *Oriental Rug Review*, August/September 1990 (Vol. 10, No. 6) was a reaction to a controversial publication by archaeologist James Mellaart. A few illustrations have been added. An update, written two years later, is posted separately. I have posted these articles now because references to the material appear occasionally in rug literature, and newcomers to the field are inevitably fascinated, but unfamiliar with the issues.

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A Weaver's View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy

by Marla Mallett

It is logical to believe that vestiges of deeply rooted prehistoric cult mythology appear in modern Anatolian kilim imagery. Theories as unorthodox, however, as those presented in the new Mellaart/Hirsch/Balpinar publication, *The Goddess from Anatolia*, 1989, must endure close scrutiny of all the arguments and evidence. [1] Neither the work's hefty price tag nor its padding with archaeological references and lessons in ancient history ensures credibility. The elegant prose of supporters' reviews should certainly not secure automatic endorsements.

Fascinated by archaeological findings at Çatal Hüyük in south central Turkey, but skeptical because of problems encountered in earlier articles, I was eager to see the new book. It was a shock. I was stunned by stylistic inconsistencies between the Neolithic wall paintings shown in photographs or scale copies, and the new group of 44 "reconstruction" drawings by James Mellaart. Here were elaborately detailed, panoramic works said to be "reconstructed" from fragments, but with no verifying photos. Here were stylistically garbled sketches displaying irreconcilable design concepts. Here, placed alongside modern kilims, were purported copies of their Neolithic counter-parts -- but with warp and weft directions jumbled. From my weaver's perspective, questions of iconography, design diffusion, and historical continuity became incidental. Basic issues needed attention first. Were the drawings credible? Could slit-tapestry weaving actually have occurred in Neolithic Anatolia? Was there proof? Or indeed,



Wall painting from Level III shrine, Çatal Hüyük. (*Anatolian Studies*, Vol. XII, Plate XVI, a and XVI, b.)



Detail from new "reconstructed" wall painting

said to be from Shrine A.III, 11, Çatal Hüyük. James Mellaart. (*The Goddess from Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XIII, 7.)

any evidence of such production?

It was enlightening to read Mellaart's excavation reports from the 1960s [2] as well as other early writings. Contradictions between those texts and the current work indicated more than a runaway kilim theory and an overly fertile imagination at work. Technical and stylistic problems now combined with incriminating disclosures to reveal what seemed to be careless, poorly conceived fabrications -- possibly a deliberate hoax.



Çatal Hüyük, building plan, level V, from the Excavation Reports. (*Anatolian Studies*, Vol. XII, p.47)

The Basic Premise

The central problem in the current controversy is Mellaart's *presumption* of slit-tapestry weave production in the sixth and seventh millennia B.C. Since the discovery of simple burial fabrics at Çatal Hüyük (on Levels VIB and VIA, c. 5980-5780 B.C.), we can speak with assurance of an 8,000-year-old Anatolian weaving tradition. An 8,000-year-old *kilim* tradition is an entirely different matter and is untenable. The gulf between primitive and sophisticated technology cannot be bridged simply by Mellaart's claim that some Çatal Hüyük wall paintings are "obvious copies of slit-tapestry kilims." Yet his unsupported premise, with serious flaws, has expanded to become more than hypothesis: the current publication compares "kilim" designs then and now. With no firsthand experience of textile processes, Mr. Mellaart has been swept away by his theories. Before accepting his premise, a look at the realities of Neolithic weaving technology is essential.

Loom Problems

Notes appear at the end of this page.



Dunartepe, Kars, depiction of warp-weighted loom. C. 3000 B.C.

At Çatal Hüyük, only the most rudimentary textile technology has been demonstrated. Mellaart argues for the presence of warp-weighted looms, although he offers contradictory statements as to whether or not loom weights were found. [3] Technical details seen in simple burial fabrics from the site make the presence of that loom type a reasonable guess -- but that loom in its most elementary form.

The most important technological advance in weaving history -- the invention of heddles -- most likely occurred several thousand years later in Anatolia. Mellaart has not addressed this matter. Neither the warp-weighted loom shown in a pottery shard drawing from Dunartepe, Kars (c. 3,000 B.C.) nor an example from a third century A.D. Eskisehir gravestone have heddle bars. [4] Nor does either representation show the double rows of warp weights indicative of a slanting loom with mechanical shedding. Mixed signals from finds at sites like Troy and Gordian keep open the question of when the invention of heddles occurred.

The Çatal Hüyük burial fabrics are structures produced by extremely slow, tedious work. Weft twining and transverse soumak wrapping use no shed in their manufacture; they employ no heddles. They are simple techniques related to basketry. As for the plain-weave tabby cloths found, specialists agree that before the invention of mechanical shedding, such fabrics were darned -- that is, alternate sheds were laboriously picked by hand. Because twining is so inefficient for cloth production, most cultures abandoned that technique after the invention of heddles. The presence of twining in Çatal Hüyük graves indicates that the accompanying plain weave fabrics were almost certainly darned.

It is an enormous technological jump from these primitive fabrics to the sophistication of large scale tapestries -- particularly with warp-weighted looms involved. The authors apparently have failed to consider the technical peculiarities and limitations of that loom type. Yet we are asked to believe that today's complex central Anatolian kilim tradition developed within that unsuitable technology. If we accept Mellaart's theory, we must believe that this tradition was later transferred intact to artisans who used much superior, two-beam loom processes. To slit-tapestry weavers these are preposterous notions. We cannot ignore the fundamental relationships between loom, technique and product. Techniques (and designs) which are simple and logical on one kind of loom can be terribly impractical on another.

A major difficulty in any warp-weighted weaving is the maintenance of proper warp spacing and continuous parallel orientation of the warps. If this is a problem with *continuous wefts*,

imagine the complications with the *discontinuous wefts* of slit tapestry, when groups of warps are continually separated from adjoining ones. Only elemental geometric patterns with horizontal stripes and shallow diagonals are practical, unless the forms are dovetailed or, better yet, interlocked.

If wefts are even slightly eccentric, weaving on a weighted warp easily becomes an impossible mess. Eccentric wefts absolutely *require* strong warp tension and stationary warp placement. Under optimum conditions (constant, perfect warp tension and alignment), the sidewise pull of curved or sloping wefts often distorts warp yarns *after* a tapestry is removed from the loom. These warps cannot be allowed to distort *during* the weaving process as they inevitably would on a weighted warp. [5]

It is important to understand that slack tension during tapestry weaving results in a sleazy fabric. Unless slack or non-stationary warps are widely spaced, it is difficult to produce a weft-faced structure. It is hard to imagine loose, flimsy, weighted-warp tapestries hanging horizontally on Çatal Hüyük walls as Mellaart's drawings suggest, since even the sturdiest slit-tapestry kilims are vulnerable structures when hung horizontally.

Even the basic processes of slit tapestry are impractical for a weighted warp. The weaver, working downward from above, must continually push wefts upward. Each individual weft yarn not in use hangs freely where it can tangle with loose warps. Each dangling weft tends to pull its last completed pick downward. In other words, completed sections can continually unravel. With two-beam vertical or horizontal looms these problems do not occur.

When all of the technical problems are considered, it is impossible to believe that Central Anatolia's rich tapestry tradition developed on simple weighted warps with no mechanical shedding -- the technology presumably present in Neolithic Anatolia.

The Fibers

There has been much discussion of the carbonized textile fibers from Çatal Hüyük burials. Mellaart summarizes various points of view in the new publication but glosses over recent re-examinations of the fabrics. With scanning electron microscope technology, those fibers Burnham and Helbaek previously thought might be wool have now been identified as bast fibers, probably flax. [6] Thus we still lack evidence that

the wool yarns necessary for tapestry were present at Çatal Hüyük in 6,000 B.C.

The Plaster "Impressions"

Mellaart has stated unequivocally that the late Hans Helbaek "proved the existence of slit-tapestry weaving at Çatal Hüyük." Mellaart says:

These walls yielded another clue in the form of imprints in the once damp plaster, of slit-tapestry weave, where someone had leaned against the wall. First discovered by Hans Helbaek in 1962, such impressions have since been recognized in well over a dozen instances. [7]

Mellaart, however, fails to document this claim. He provides no photos, nor are such imprints mentioned in any of the original excavation reports. He also fails to state how he concluded that the imprints were made by tapestries.

In Helbaek's own 1962 *Archaeology* report on Çatal Hüyük textiles, there are no references to such imprints. [8] He uses the same photos of burial wrappings as Burnham and Mellaart. [9] Helbaek also shows the remains of rush matting and basketry, and he includes a clay impression of a coiled grass basket. But there is no mention anywhere of his having discovered tapestry impressions in plaster.

Curiously, after his emphatic statements, Mr. Mellaart backtracks to say:

None of the imprints was distinct enough to allow us to observe any significant pattern, so the *onus probandi* rests on our knowledge of slit-tapestry weaving and on our interpretations of "geometric" wall-paintings as depictions of actual kilims. [10]

Certainly the burden of proof is on Mr. Mellaart.

The "Peg Hole" Evidence

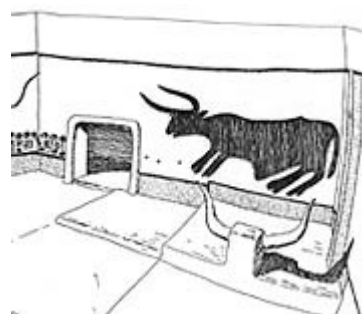
In 1984, Mellaart stated: "In the more opulent shrines there were stout peg holes for hangings on the walls, probably real

kilims which the bulk of the population copied in paint." [11] In *The Goddess from Anatolia*, Mr. Mellaart restates this idea, telling of "peg-holes containing the remains of burned wooden pegs high up on the walls in a number of shrines." Altogether he cites four shrines as examples: E.VI, 14; VII, 8; E.VI, 31; and E.VI, 10. [12] Mellaart's notations in the original excavation reports on these buildings, however, create a different impression.

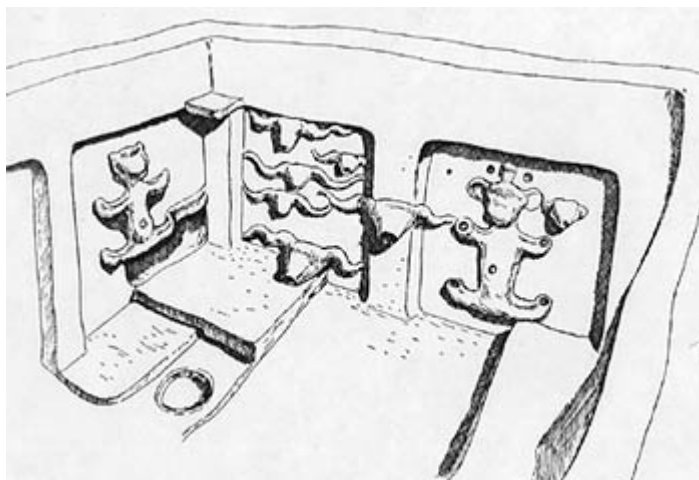
The Shrine E.VI, 14 report notes only "a large bull's head fixed on three pegs into the wall." [13]

The Shrine VII, 8 report mentions a group of three peg holes in the plaster wall beside a bull relief carving. The excavation report drawing shows these holes to be about two feet above the floor -- hardly a position suitable for a textile hanging. [14]

In the Shrine E.VI, 31 report, Mellaart describes a plaster "goddess" relief and says "several holes above the head indicate the sockets for applied headgear or the pegs for a hanging cloth covering the figure of the goddess from the gaze of the profane." [15] A look at the drawing (below) shows that this "goddess," modeled in deep relief on a recessed wall, could much more easily have been covered by a hanging suspended from the projecting wall just above it. A kilim placed as he suggests would certainly have bulged, and with holes so closely spaced, it would have been narrow indeed, covering only a portion of the relief. A similar "goddess," with no peg holes, appears on the adjoining wall.

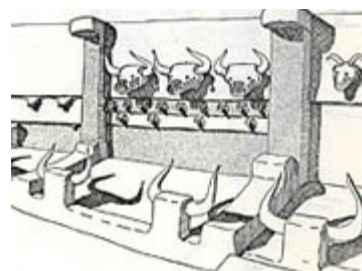


Excavation Report drawing of Shrine VII, 8. Çatal Hüyük.
(*Anatolian Studies*, Vol. XIV, p. 63.)



Excavation Report drawing of Shrine E.VI, 10. Çatal Hüyük.
(*Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 48)

Mellaart's 1963 description of Shrine E.VI, 10 provides his only reference in the original excavation reports to actual rows of peg holes. [16] He says "A row of holes on the main panel (west) of the north wall suggests that there may have been a textile hanging on the wall." He adds that "another row over the lowest panel suggests another." But since Mellaart has recently emphasized that peg holes for hangings were found only in opulent shrines while painted imitations occurred in other buildings, it is surprising to read in his 1964 report of continued work on this important shrine a reference to "panels of red paint and some fragmentary geometric designs." [17] He tells also of finding "scars of broken off animal heads and the lower jaw of a wild boar." These objects seem irrelevant until we read of Shrine E.VI, 8 decorations from the same excavation level. There Mellaart notes a row of boar mandibles "stuck in holes made through some earlier forms of decoration in the form of wall paintings." These boar mandibles were covered with molded plaster "breast" forms. [18] Obviously, rows of holes could do more than hold pegs for supporting textiles.



Excavation Report drawing of Shrine E.VI, 8. Çatal Hüyük. (Anatolian Studies, Vol. XIII, p. 63.)

Clearly, the presence of a few holes in Çatal Hüyük's plastered walls does not constitute substantive evidence of kilim weaving in the sixth or seventh millennium B.C. The significance of "peg holes" has been misrepresented.

The Photographed Wall Paintings

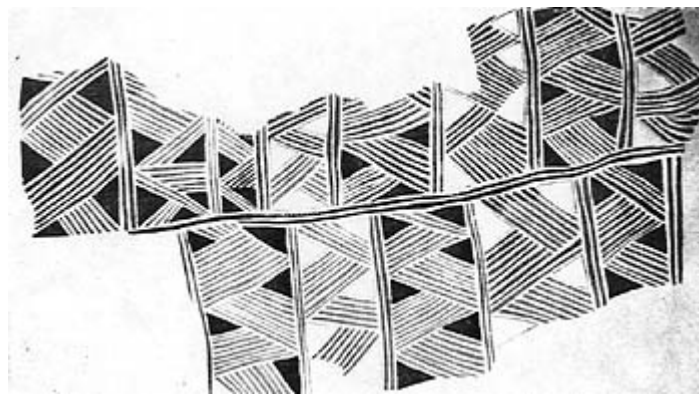
Without concrete evidence, Mellaart's presumption of an 8,000-year-old Anatolian kilim tradition rests solely on his perception that some Neolithic painters at Çatal Hüyük copied designs from kilims. This, I think, is a misconception.

There are 30 photographs of painted walls in the new publication, *The Goddess from Anatolia*; all of these, plus a great many more, are included in the original excavation reports published by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara. [19] I urge anyone who wishes a clear view of this topic to read those reports.

An overview of the *entire* group of painted walls is essential for a balanced view. The paintings display two general approaches to wall ornamentation. Some show lively, naturalistic, narrative scenes with human figures and animals, while others consist of non-objective geometric forms: circles, diamonds, triangles, linear net work, spirals, chevrons, dots, groups of short linear

markings, honeycombs with oval openings, quatrefoils, and horizontal/vertical grids. Hand print representations also appear frequently as a repetitive motif. In the most complex non-objective compositions, motifs are typically scattered about: they are not aligned in the regular fashion of woven patterning. Except for one or two elemental triangular or diamond repeat patterns, resemblances to kilim ornamentation are non-existent. Most of the designs, including the simple grids, could not be produced in slit tapestry. Some are related to basketry or, in two or three instances, perhaps, to felt patterning, while others appear on clay stamps or painted on modeled animal heads. Yet, nearly all of the wall paintings with geometric motifs are identified by Mr. Mellaart in the original reports as "kilim" designs.

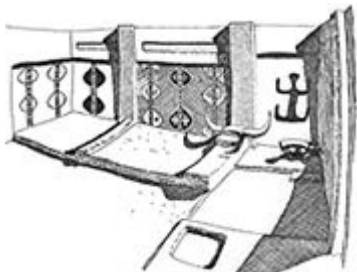
Excavation Report drawing of wall painting from Shrine A.III,8. Çatal Hüyük. (*Anatolian Studies*, XIII, Plate IV, a)



The painting above is an example. Mellaart refers to this attractive painting in 1963 by saying: "The composition of the design leaves little doubt that what we see here is meant to be a Neolithic kilim." From then on he refers to "the painting of the kilim." When analyzed, however, there is nothing kilim-like about the pattern. The all-over parallel series of close, steep diagonal lines do not appear in slit-tapestry weavings; the structure would be impossibly weak. Nor do similar illusions of overlapping forms appear in Anatolian kilims. A more logical guess is that the motif was inspired by simple basket or rush mat interlacings. [20]

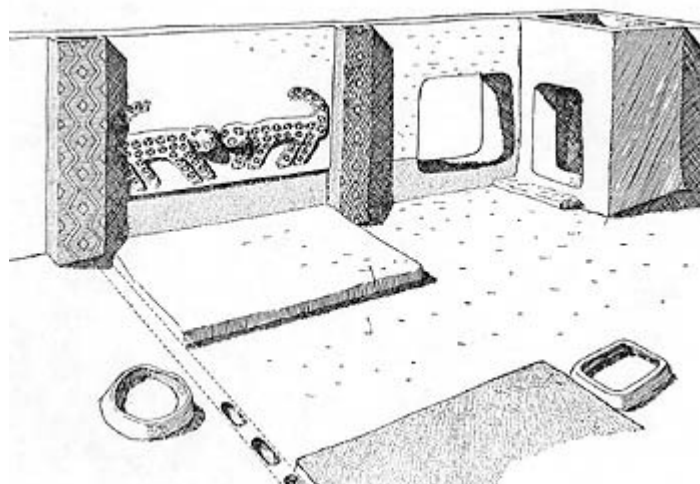
Excavation Report drawings of wall painting from Shrine E.VI A, 50. Çatal Hüyük. (*Anatolian Studies*, XIV, Plate 1, b, and below, p. 43.)



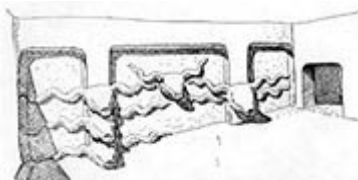


The drawing above shows a painted design also referred to repeatedly in the excavation reports as a "kilim pattern." Why? Its background of diagonal, linear, curving brick-like details is the antithesis of tapestry-woven patterning. Nor is the top border, with its repeated half circles, a tapestry weaver's motif. It is just as unreasonable to call the large dark, curvilinear forms kilim motifs. Is this wall painting supposedly a "textile copy" then, simply because it has ornamented vertical bands?

When interpreting non-figurative paintings such as these, it is essential to consider their context. At Çatal Hüyük we find complex sets of interior architectural features: elaborate systems of horizontal and vertical panels and recesses, vertical and horizontal ribs, engaged posts and pilasters, platforms, curbs, benches, and spectacular "bull pillars." Red paint or red-painted grooves are used extensively to emphasize these architectural features, as well as roof beams and doorways. Occasionally plastered wood posts are painted with simple geometric patterning, as in the drawing below.



Excavation Report drawing of Shrine E.VI, 44. Çatal Hüyük.
(*Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 44.)



Excavation Report drawing of Shrine VII.9. Çatal Hüyük.
(*Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 53)

Considered in this context, we need not conclude that every painting with borders or bands is a kilim imitation, as does Mr. Mellaart. In the context of carefully delineated architectural spaces, we can view painted geometric divisions, ornamented bands, and borders differently. The earlier painting (with curving brick-like design) shows vertical, geometric bands, some with bull's horns projecting from them. These features seem merely two-dimensional painted versions of the engaged columns and projecting animal heads seen in other shrines -- a logical extension of major three-dimensional elements. They are further ornamental subdivisions of the architectural space.

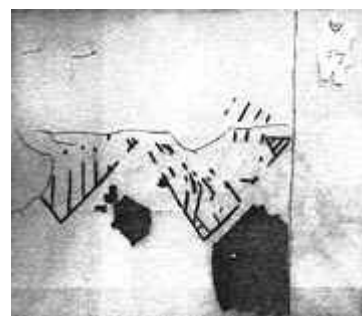
The Questionable "Reconstructions"

James Mellaart's newest "evidence" in support of an 8,000-year-old Anatolian kilim tradition consists of 44 sketched "reconstructions" of fragmented paintings. These sketches raise innumerable questions. Some designs he infers to be copies of woven hangings by placing them alongside modern kilims in *The Goddess from Anatolia*. The "evidence" is unconvincing.

Although 48 plates illustrate the new "reconstructions," four of these are details, but they are not identified as such. [21] Three are shown with the negatives flipped. Mellaart is presenting this group of elaborate new "reconstructions" just now, some 25 years after the excavations ended, explaining that in some cases he only belatedly noticed resemblances to modern kilims. As already noted, however, innumerable times in the excavation reports from 1962 through 1966 he referred to Çatal Hüyük wall decorations as "kilim paintings," "kilim copies," "kilim designs," or works "reminiscent of Anatolian kilims."

Although some complete wall paintings from Çatal Hüyük were dismantled and moved to the Ankara Archaeological Museum, most of the intact paintings were photographed (and published in the reports), then destroyed as excavations proceeded to lower levels of the mound. The fragmented remains of others are the focus of the current controversy: paintings *not* illustrated in the original reports. It is unclear just how these painted fragments were recorded during the excavations. We have seen neither a single detail photo of them nor original, unaltered tracings or drawings by excavation team artists. If scale copy drawings of these fragments were indeed made on the site, their present location has not been disclosed. How then, are we to judge the veracity of Mellaart's new "reconstructions"? We have, in fact, no tangible evidence of the paintings' existence. Likewise, in 1984, when Mellaart's first "elibelinde" figures, "bird carriers" and other such motifs were published by Frauenknecht in *Early Turkish Tapestries*, no supporting photos were provided for verification. [22]

In contrast, the Çatal Hüyük excavation reports from the early 1960s show actual scale copies of a few extremely fragmented paintings. Shrine IV, 1, for example, is described as being in terrible condition, with preservation of its paintings "virtually impossible." The fragments are nonetheless described fully; three drawings made on the site are included in the excavation report, along with one photo detail and a tracing. [23] Why have we been shown nothing similar to substantiate Mellaart's new "reconstructions"?



Scale copy from the Excavation Reports of a fragmented wall painting in Shrine IV, 1. Çatal Hüyük. By A. L. Stockdale. (Anatolian Studies, XII, Plate XIII, a.)

There are occasional written references to indecipherable wall paintings in the original excavation reports. Yet, in only two or three instances do these references occur in descriptions of buildings for which Mellaart has now made sketches. The rest of the group of 44 fragmentary paintings newly "reconstructed" by Mellaart are mentioned nowhere -- not even in shrine descriptions where they should logically be noted.

Specific Problems

I would like to cite a few specific problems I encountered when searching the excavation reports for descriptions of the fragmented works Mellaart has now "reconstructed."



Excavation Report drawings of two wall paintings from Shrine A.111, 8. Çatal Hüyük. (Anatolian Studies, XIII, Plates IV,a and IV,b.)

In the 1963 report, Mellaart describes the paintings of Shrine A.III, 8 in detail. [24] One pattern from that shrine (the so-called "kilim design") we have already seen. In his report, Mr. Mellaart describes all four shrine walls, noting the location of each painted layer and telling us where two, three or four layers of painting were present. He illustrates all four phases of painting found in the shrine. The second photo at the left shows earlier painted designs underlying the so-called "kilim" pattern.

But now, in *The Goddess from Anatolia*, we find a new detailed "reconstruction" of yet another "kilim" painting purported to be from the same interior (below). [25] Where, with all of the building's surfaces and layers already accounted for, can we find space for this new painting? Why did neither a photo nor a scale copy of it appear in 1963 along with the other fragmented works? Moreover, how could this painting, with its much more rigid style, fit into the A.III, 8 scheme? Technical problems appear in this supposed "kilim" copy as well; I will discuss these later.

"Reconstructed" wall painting said to be from Shrine A.III, 8. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate V, 4.)



A more perplexing question concerns six important new "reconstructed" paintings, all supposedly from Shrine A.III, 11 and all illustrated in *The Goddess from Anatolia*: Plate XVII, 1; Plate XVII, 2; Plate VIII, 13; Plate XV, 6; Plate XVIII, 1; and Plate XIX, 1. Two are monumental works showing "mountain shrines and cave-like niches with goddesses and their symbols of power." Each is supposedly 5.5 meters in length (one shown lower left, the other below). Plate XVII, 1 (top left) shows the much touted "goddesses of fertility in vertical stepped niches," and XIX, 1, surprising "vertical multiple niches with bulls' heads."

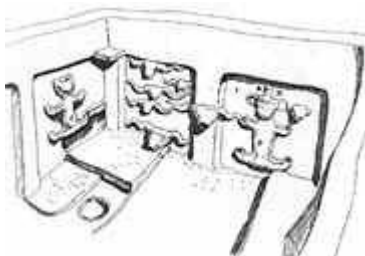
Two "reconstructed" wall paintings said to be from Shrine A.III, 11. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plates XVIII, 1 and XVII, 2.)



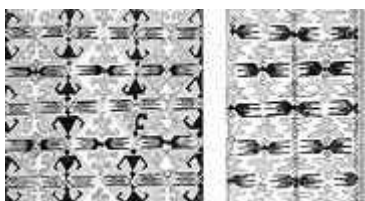
One of two monumental (5.5 meters) "reconstructed" wall paintings said to be from Shrine A.III, 11 (detail). J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XVII, 1.)



Hunting scene that was shown in the Excavation Reports as the surviving painting in building A.111, 11. Çatal Hüyük. (*Anatolian Studies*, Vol. XIII, 1963, Plate V.a.)



Excavation Report drawing of Shrine E.VIB, 31. Çatal Hüyük. (*Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 48.)



"Reconstructed" painting said to be from Shrine E.VIB, 31. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XI, 1.)

These are among the most important new "reconstructions" in *The Goddess from Anatolia*, yet in his 1963 excavation report on this shrine, Mellaart does not mention fragments of any such paintings. Instead, he merely says that the north wall at one time had been decorated with a hunting scene of which only a small part had survived, below a geometric pattern in black on white, resembling the kilim in the second shrine which is surrounded by an orange painted niche" (the "kilim" in the second shrine is the basketry-like painting from Shrine A.111, 8). His initial report devotes only one short paragraph to this shrine and its two small sequential surviving fragments; it illustrates the small hunting scene fragment. [26] But where are the remnants that formed the basis for six new extensive and finely detailed "reconstructions," including those shown above? If Mr. Mellaart and his team had laboriously cleaned and recorded these panoramic paintings, why would he not have mentioned them in this 1963 excavation report description?

A "reconstructed" painting purported to be from Shrine E.VIB, 31 presents another puzzle. The west and south walls of this building we have already seen. The 1964 excavation report discusses the interior at great length, describing it as "one of the best preserved of Level VIB." [27] Mellaart says in his report that although both the shrine's "north and the greatest part of the east wall are destroyed, the rest stands to a height of 6 feet." He subsequently describes all of the extant surfaces and their large plaster reliefs. He even notes one surface left undecorated: "The next panel on the south wall carried the diagonal impression of the wooden ladder leading to the roof, so no space was available for a relief here." Noting the missing east wall to the left of a plaster relief, he continues: "Nor do we have any indication of what might have been represented on the next central panel (restored as blank) which was destroyed right down to the lower red-painted dado above the platform." With every suitable wall space either covered with sculpted reliefs or missing, it is certainly surprising to find a newly "reconstructed" painting for this shrine (Plate XI, 1) in *The Goddess from Anatolia*.

We should remember, as well, that this building, E.VIB, 31, was one of two shrines categorized as so "opulent" that it had peg holes for "real kilims" instead of wall paintings imitating kilims. (Here there were peg holes over the head of one "goddess" relief.) Mr. Mellaart must have temporarily forgotten his "peg-hole" argument when "reconstructing" a new painting for this shrine.

Our credulity is even further strained when we try to reconcile Mellaart's original discussion of Shrine A.II, 1 with material in *The Goddess from Anatolia*. In his 1963 excavation report he writes, "At the moment this is the latest building at Çatal Hüyük that may be considered a shrine. *It lacks, however, the wall-paintings with which such buildings are frequently decorated in the lower levels of this site. So far, no trace of any painting, whether geometric or figural, has been found at Çatal Hüyük later than Level III.*" [28]

Shrine A.II, 1 is on Level II, which is, of course, later than Level III. How astonishing it is after reading Mr. Mellaart's own words, "It lacks...wall paintings," to find three new "reconstructed" paintings from this shrine in *The Goddess from Anatolia*: Plate XI, 8; Plate XI, 9; and Plate XVII, 12. [29] From where did they come?



"Reconstructed" paintings said to be from Shrine A.II, 1. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XI, 8, Plate XI, 9, and Plate XVII.)



Drawing said to be a "scale copy" of a painting from building VI, 10. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate II, 14.)

Another description discloses comparable evidence of apparent fabrication. Mr. Mellaart says in his 1966 report, "Building VII, 10 may have been a house as *no traces of wall paintings or reliefs were found.*" [30] What are we to think, then, about the "yurt-like structure" from this building, depicted in *The Goddess From Anatolia* (Plate II, 14)? We can dismiss the possibility of a numerical error, since the text contains further references to this yurt. In any case, such a surprising subject -- a round lattice tent -- should have elicited comments whenever and wherever it was discovered. But no mention of such a painting occurs in any of the excavation reports, from 1962 through 1966. The author identifies this drawing in *The Goddess from Anatolia* as a "scale copy." This should indicate that it was made at the excavation site from a relatively intact painting, not "reconstructed" years later. Is our author's yurt a mirage?

It is a strange experience to reread Mr. Mellaart's *Goddess* text after discovering the discrepancies I have noted above. Lengthy descriptions of possibly non-existent works are mind boggling. Doubts immediately surface. But with careful attention, the iconographic descriptions assume a life of their own. A complete, fantastic mythological pantheon is established. Then we notice that, conveniently, nothing important is missing from the new "reconstructions" Every stalactite cave is filled with individualized detail. Myriad goddess manifestations and a plethora of associated creatures infest the complex panoramas. Everything is there, from bees buzzing around a goddess' beehive hairdo, to winged phalluses, to ibex hoof prints in the snow. A fertile imagination was surely required to produce this body of work, both written and visual.

Mr. Mellaart has told us that "the appalling state of preservation of the paintings, or rather the fragments thereof, meant that many years were needed for their assemblage." But in no instance have we been told the *extent* of the fragments from which the new "reconstructions" were extrapolated. Were these "fragments" small details or scattered markings? Are the extensive and detailed designs in *The Goddess from Anatolia* constructed from paintings Mellaart described once in the reports as only "small specks of paint"? Or "splodges of white and red paint"? Were the paintings *more or less* fragmentary than that minimal excavation report scale copy we saw earlier? Either way, problems are indicated.

Different individuals inevitably interpret fragmented or indistinct patterning in diverse ways. That is, of course, why photos are so important. With the passage of time, even Mr. Mellaart's own interpretations of poorly preserved Çatal Hüyük paintings seem to have changed, sometimes dramatically. For example, in 1967 Mellaart characterized building E.VI, 34 as a "House" and its painted subject matter as "Bird." By 1989 the "House" had become a "Shrine" and the painting a "Row of women fishing": four nubile figures with nets above two angular, fish-filled streams and a row of small seated figures (Plate IX, 3 in *The Goddess from Anatolia*). We should expect subjectivity in reconstructions; that is acceptable when we are given adequate means of judging their accuracy for ourselves. But the transformation of birds into fisherwomen requires too great a leap of faith.

Unfortunately, Mr. Mellaart provides no way for the viewer to judge either the integrity or logic of his reconstructions.

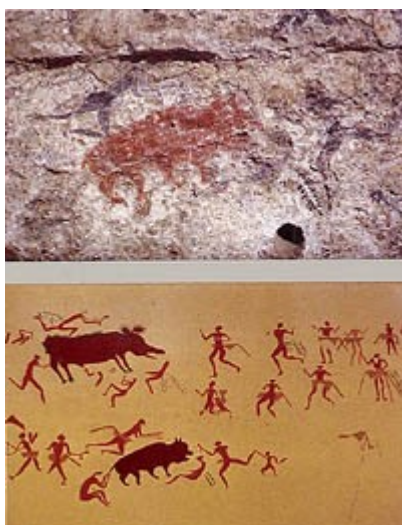


"Reconstructed" wall painting said to be from building E.VI, 34. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate IX, 3.)

His sketches are neither conventional archaeological reconstructions nor clever contrivances. They even omit dimensions, leading easily to misinterpretations of scale. Most importantly, they *fail to show what actually remained of each painting*. While many have ragged areas left blank, is this not for effect? While some drawings indicate missing areas with few dotted lines or lighter color values, is this not again contrived? Why do missing segments seem always to occur at pattern edges or in sections of easily extended pattern repeats? And why, if all clearly defined areas had actually been present in the fragmented wall paintings, was there need for delaying their presentation 25 years? I believe it important for every person studying Mellaart's material to carefully consider the manner in which the current "reconstructions" are drawn and to reflect upon what that implies.

Surely Mr. Mellaart's current work cannot be given serious attention unless photographs or original, unaltered scale copies by excavation team artists are produced for others to analyze. I believe that most of the skepticism and antagonism with which *The Goddess from Anatolia* has been met derives from Mellaart's cavalier presentation of unsupported and undocumented materials. I believe the animosity results less from disagreements over iconography, design diffusion, or issues of historical continuity than from questions of the author's objectivity, accuracy, and honesty in producing evidence. Surely no professional archaeological journal would publish "reconstructions" like those in Mellaart's current work, without supporting photographs, scale copies, or other verification. Why should textile scholarship require less?

Stylistic and Conceptual Problems



Wall painting from Shrine F.V, 1. Çatal Hüyük. Photograph and scale copy. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate II, 5 and Plate II, 7.)

Although matters of style are often subjective, in the current controversy they are remarkably clear cut and revealing. All but the simplest one or two Çatal Hüyük wall designs photographed (some geometric, some naturalistic) are distinctly un-kilim-like. On the other hand, most of the new "reconstructions" appear to connect in some way with modern kilims. Is this pure chance? With few exceptions, the new "reconstructions" differ dramatically in character from the actual painted walls or their scale copies. But these two groups must be compared stylistically in their entirety. Selected examples, viewed separately, give a false picture.

When comparing the two groups, even an untrained eye should find the "reconstructions" more rigidly organized, cluttered, clumsy and contrived. Many of the "reconstructed" designs are repetitive or symmetrical combinations of incongruous motifs: geometric and amorphous forms, stylized and naturalistic figures. They have few blank spaces, but instead a multitude of filler motifs. Repeat motifs are lined up and neatly squeezed into bands, borders, lattices, grids or niches. There are mirror-image designs with conventionalized human figures and animals as part of the repeat patterning -- even figures upended for the sake of symmetrical "kilim-like" composition. Some individual drawings are stylistically garbled. The striking simplicity and naturalness of the actual wall paintings is indeed difficult to find in the new "reconstructions."



"Reconstructed" wall painting said to be from E. VIB, 3. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate IX, 2.)

There are even color problems in the new "reconstructions." In his 1967 book, *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*, Mellaart lists colors found in the paintings uncovered during the first three excavation seasons. He qualifies his list, however, by noting that "blue occurs only once": a bright, blue azurite. He corroborates his observation when, in discussing a large bull painted blue, he notes, "This is the only case of the use of blue paint on walls so far." [31] Mellaart must have later forgotten this color circumscription, however, since blues appear in most of the *Goddess* color "reconstructions." By my count blues occur in at least 16 "reconstructions" that supposedly are from buildings Mellaart had already excavated during those first three seasons. Eleven of these particular paintings are not accounted for on the 1967 book's chart of shrine features, and so are doubly suspect. It is interesting to note how conveniently blues appear in several "kilim-like" drawings alongside modern kilims with blues in *The Goddess from Anatolia*.

Although my major concerns are with design, style, and weaving technology, I suggest that interested readers compare ideational content of the actual paintings (or scale copies) with that of the recent "reconstructions." The subject matter is decidedly different. There are conflicts, as well between Mellaart's early comments about painted subjects and the images which are now appearing. I will cite just two examples. First, goddess figures appear repeatedly in Çatal Hüyük plaster wall reliefs and small marble or clay sculptures but rarely in the photographed wall paintings, in fact, only twice. Mellaart speaks of this in his 1967 publication. [32] Yet, at least 25 of Mr. Mellaart's new "reconstructions" show goddesses or other deities as the prime motif. Here they appear in a full range of manifestations: roly-poly earth mothers, toothpick-slim bikini-clad maidens, [33] amorphous pairs of seated blobs, and cookie-cutter birth symbol figures.

A second conflict is apparent in Mellaart's 1967 comment, "vultures occur only in levels VIII and VII." [34] A look at the Goddess "reconstructions" shows, however, that in the 22 intervening years a plentiful supply of vultures has materialized -- nearly all in paintings supposedly from *later* shrines, levels VI through II. For example, one much touted motif, a "deity holding two vultures" (or "bird carrier"), is from one of the panoramic paintings (Fig. 9) allegedly from Shrine A.III, 11. This detail, from an already suspicious work, is the basis for Mr. Mellaart's argument that a common modern kilim pattern of geometricized carnations should be turned upside down and reinterpreted as "deities with vultures."

With obvious discrepancies in design, style, concept, and even subject matter, how can we fail to raise questions of credibility?



Detail of "reconstructed" wall painting said to be from Shrine A3, 11. J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XIII.)



Kilim from The Kastamonu area of Anatolia. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XIII, 8.)

Structural Problems in the "Reconstructions"

It is difficult, indeed, to believe that some of the *Goddess* "reconstructions" were not produced with a kilim book at the artist's elbow. Ridiculous problems occur in some of the sketches, however. The image below is one example. It consists of a long rectangular pattern with "fringe" drawn at two ends. The repetitive design of vultures displays similarities to distinctive groups of kilims from the Eskisehir region. Mr. Mellaart's bird designs, however, are shown with a warp-wise orientation. Only if the birds were turned 90 degrees could such a motif be woven in slit tapestry. It is an unlikely Neolithic wall painter's error; the supposed Çatal Hüyük artist simply could not have been imitating a woven hanging. If Mr. Mellaart was trying to produce such an imitation in his "reconstruction," he failed.



"Reconstructed" wall painting said to be from Shrine E.V, 9 and a kilim from Seyitgazi/Eskisehir region with "bird" design. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XIV.)

Ludicrous variations on the same problem occur with several *parmakli* ("finger") kilim design motifs. In Plate VII, 1 the "fingers" run in a warp-wise direction -- impossible for slit tapestry (at the right). In Plate IX, 12 the *parmakli* elements are shown properly weft-wise in end borders but, in this example, improperly warp-wise in the field. Exactly the reverse occurs in Plate XVII, 7. How could these be accurately sketched reconstructions of paintings the author claims as kilim copies?

Several other drawings show kilim motifs in disarray, with warp and weft directions confused. Two examples are *Goddess* Plates XVII, 3 and 4. The formats look remarkably kilim-like at first glance, but several of the elements could not be produced in slit tapestry. Similar problems occur in a great many of the sketches; warp-wise straight lines are too long or points of stress are staggered insufficiently. Examples with such problems are Plates XIV, 1; XV, 12; XVII, 11; XVII, 12; and IV, 9. Warp and weft are confused even in the extremely simple saw-toothed rhombs of the Plate VI, 3 "reconstruction" drawing, since we must assume the longer dimension indicates warp direction. It would not be woven in slit tapestry as drawn. It is a simple but foolish and revealing error.

The authors suggest with the inclusion of the "vertical niches with bulls' heads" design of Plate XIX, 1 that Çatal Hüyük inhabitants also must be credited with the format for distinctive modern Kutahya and Keçimuhsine *cicims*. Were Çatal Hüyük artisans brocade weavers too? The motif presents such formidable problems for slit tapestry it is most unlikely to have developed within that structure. The curious omission of any reference to this painting (along with five others) in the original Shrine A.III, 11 report makes this sketch doubly suspect.



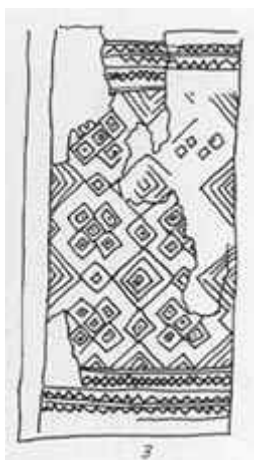
"Reconstructed" wall painting said to be from Shrine E.VIII, 1.

J. Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate VII, 1.)

The Dorak Affair

The current controversy is not the first instance in which James Mellaart has offered flimsy evidence as the sole "proof" of revolutionary archaeological findings. In the mysterious Dorak Affair, questions of credibility were debated in Turkey and elsewhere over many years -- without resolution. [35] Mellaart claims to have uncovered a cache of spectacular royal treasures (c. 2500 B.C.?) in a young woman's Izmir home in 1958, along with archaeological notes and a textile sketch -- a drawing of an excavator's drawing of a carbonized rug which supposedly had disintegrated after it was unearthed. A few months later, Mellaart published drawings of the objects in a London newspaper. In the meantime, however, all of the artifacts and their owner vanished.

As for the alleged textile, Mellaart tells us it had pattern and color "well enough preserved to be recorded" but was so decayed it might have been either a "kilim" or "coloured felt." He says, "I prefer the kilim interpretation." [36] In fact, Mellaart's colored design, published by Seyton Lloyd, is too linear for tapestry. [37]



The so-called "Dorak kilim." J.Mellaart.
(*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. III, p.100)

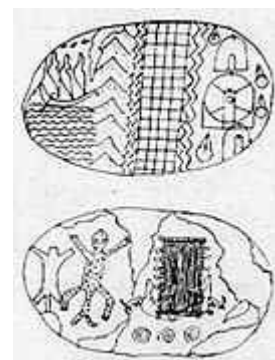
The relevant aspect of this episode is, of course, Mellaart's attempt to establish a milestone in textile history -- a 4,500-year-old kilim -- on the basis of nothing tangible. A sketch of a sketch is shaky evidence at best, if evidence at all. The parallels are obvious between this case and Mellaart's current efforts to establish an 8,000-year-old kilim-weaving tradition in Anatolia.

It is amusing that a black and white line drawing representing the alleged carbonized Dorak textile in *The Goddess from Anatolia* (Vol. III, Fig. XXVII, No. 3, and at the left here), now a sketch-of-a-sketch-of-a-sketch, has its own new and bizarre problems. It actually shows as *missing* nearly all of the parts which are *present* in Mellaart's color drawing of the same object, and vice versa.

The Clay Plaques

It is astonishing that now, after presenting his controversial *Goddess* "reconstructions," Mellaart has come forth with yet *another* set of *undocumented drawings*. This time, clay plaques are conveniently surfacing 25 years after excavations were halted at Çatal Hüyük. At least *drawings* of clay plaques. They show looms, no less! One in modern perspective too! But clay plaques are tangible, unlike flaky wall paintings which can dissolve or blow away. Clay plaques he must produce -- if, in fact, they exist.

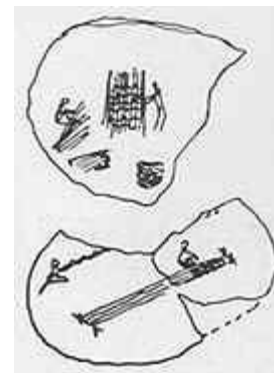
A recent *Hali* account of these plaques includes discrepancies, as it



claims these much earlier objects to be from "the 11th millennium," "ca. 9750 B.C.," then identifies them in captions as from "level 11." [38] Radio carbon dates place Çatal Hüyük Levels 10 through 2 between ca. 6500 and 5700 B.C., while Mellaart dates Levels 13 through 11 to the first half of the 7th millennium -- between 7000 and 6500 B.C.

But *when* could these enigmatic clay objects have been unearthed? They supposedly came from a deep sounding cut through the Çatal Hüyük mound to a late Upper Paleolithic stratum. The 1964 excavation report, however, which describes the sounding sunk under Room X, 8 during the last few days of the 1963 season, clearly states that the team found "*no pottery or artifacts made of clay.*" [39]

The deep sounding planned for the next season (1965) never was finished, but was given up because of excavation crew and staff problems summarized by Mellaart as "intrigues directed against us and our lady representative." In the course of the scandal, the entire work crew deserted the dig. Mellaart explains all of this in the 1966 report and says that "the primary goal of the expedition, a deep sounding into the earliest levels of the mound, had to be abandoned for lack of manpower." [40] In this report, Mellaart tells us that his team was only able to "push down the sounding through successive levels ending with Level XII at the end of the season." [41] He briefly describes the pottery shards found, but definitely makes no references in the reports to remarkable clay plaques depicting looms -- of any age. Since that time, there have been no excavations at Çatal Hüyük. [Note: Work resumed at the site 27 years later--in 1993--with a different crew.]



Drawings of "clay plaques" said to be from a deep sounding at Çatal Hüyük. J. Mellaart. (Mellaart, "The earliest Representations of the Goddess of Anatolia and her Entourage," *Anatolische Kelims: Die Vorträge, Basel, 1990*, p. 35.

We do not know when the first rudimentary kilims might have appeared in Anatolia, but they have not been established as part of the Çatal Hüyük milieu. The accumulated evidence strongly suggests that many, if not all, of James Mellaart's recent wall painting "reconstructions" are based, at best, on wishful thinking. Surely the rug community cannot continue to swallow such fantasies while professing an interest in scholarship.

That remnants of early cult symbolism should appear in modern kilims is a reasonable notion. The idea is incredible, though, that a small group (or groups) of fantastically talented weavers, with inappropriate equipment, could create such a wide ranging, stylistically diverse repertoire of kilim images -- slit-tapestry motifs and even design formats by 6,000 B.C. It is equally amazing that such creativity should evaporate over the next 8,000 years. Mr. Mellaart's extrapolations infer that stagnation set in millennia ago, with little artistic evolution since. To adopt this view, with only his

sketches as evidence, is a disservice to the creators of the lively, vigorous, and vibrant kilims we admire today. The best of these works reflect a viable, expanding tradition, not an inert and stagnant culture.

The fascinating Çatal Hüyük archaeological discoveries have obviously fired our imaginations; we want more and more from that spectacular site. It seems tragic that important findings are being sunk in a quagmire of misrepresentations and probable fabrications.

* * * * *

Work at the fascinating Çatal Hüyük site in central Anatolia has now been resumed by a new archaeological crew led by Ian Hodder. Reports on the work are posted at www.catalhoyuk.com

In January 1993 I published an article updating the controversy over the Mellaart reconstructions. It includes a consideration of Mellaart's rebuttal, as well as responses from the textile and archaeological communities. For that article, go to:

**[The Goddess from Anatolia:
An Updated View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy](#)**

Notes

1. Mellaart, James; Hirsch, Udo; and Balpinar, Belkis, *The Goddess from Anatolia*, Milan, 1989.
2. Mellaart, James, "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1961, First Preliminary Report," in *Anatolian Studies*, XII, 1962, pp. 41-65
Mellaart, James, "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1962, Second Preliminary Report," in *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, 1963, pp. 43-103.
Mellaart, James, "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1963, Third Preliminary Report," in *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, 1964, pp. 39-120.
Mellaart, James, "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1965, Fourth Preliminary Report," in *Anatolian Studies*, XVI, 1966, pp. 165-191.
3. In 1962 Mellaart claimed that spindle-whorls and loom weights were found at the Çatal Hüyük site. Now he claims they were not. See Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XII, p. 56; Mellaart, "The beginnings of Mural Painting," in *Archaeology*, XV, No. 1, Spring 1962, p. 11; and Mellaart, 1989, Vol. 11, p. 7.

4. **Marachal, Andrea, "The Riddle of Çatal Hüyük," in *Hali* 26, 1985, p. 11, Fig. 7; and Hirsch, Udo, "A contribution to the study of Anatolian tribal groups and their kilims," in Eskenazi, *Kilim anatolici*, Milan, 1984, p. 31, Fig. 20**
5. **Udo Hirsch seems to misunderstand tapestry weave problems. He "presumes" curved-weft techniques (and thus the more naturalistic patterns possible) developed on the warp-weighted loom. It is an ill-founded presumption but one which may seem logical to non-weavers. See Hirsch, 1984, pp. 29-33.**
6. **Vogelsang-Eastwood, G.M., "A Re-examination of the Fibres from the Çatal Hüyük Textiles," in Pinner, R. and Denny, W.B. (eds), *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies III*, London, 1987, pp. 15-19. See also Ryder, M.L. and T. Gabra-Sanders, "The application of microscopy to textile history," in *Textile History*, 16, No. 2, 1985, pp. 123-140.**
7. **Mellaart, 1989, Vol. 11, p. 44.**
8. **Helbaek, Hans, "Textiles from Çatal Hüyük," in *Archaeology*, XVI, No. 1, March 1963, pp. 39-46.**
9. **It is difficult to identify structures from the photos, but certainly none is weft-faced. The tapes may possibly be warp-faced, the other fabrics open constructions: either the weft-twining or transverse wrapping diagramed by Burnham, or simply loose plain weave. See Burnham, H.B., "Çatal Hüyük: the textiles and twined fabrics," in *Anatolian Studies*, XV, 1965, pp. 169-174.**
10. **Mellaart, 1989, Vol. II, p. 44.**
11. **Mellaart, James, "Some notes on the prehistory of Anatolian kilims," in Frauenknecht, Bertram, *Early Turkish Tapestries*, Nürnberg, 1984, p. 26.**
12. **Mellaart, 1989, Vol. 11, p. 44 and Mellaart, *Çatal Hüyük, A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*, London, 1967, p. 150. Please note that in Mellaart's references to particular shrines the designations "E" and "A", indicating the portion of the mound being excavated, are sometimes omitted. Likewise, the designations "A" and "B", subdividing Level VI, are sometimes omitted.**
13. **Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, p. 75.**

- 14. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 61, Figs. 18 and 19.**
- 15. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 47.**
- 16. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, p. 70.**
- 17. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 50.**
- 18. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, p. 69.**
- 19. See note 2.**
- 20. A photo of marsh grass matting from Shrine E.VI, 14 is shown in *Anatolian Studies*, XII, Plate XVI,c.**
- 21. Plate XII,8; Plate XIII,7; Plate XII,12; and Plate XIII,15. Please note that not all of the drawings in *The Goddess from Anatolia* are recent interpretations. Mellaart distinguishes between "reconstructions" and "scale copies," I question the designation "scale copy" in one instance: the drawing from Shrine VIII,10.**
- 22. Mellaart, 1984.**
- 23. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XII, p. 59-60; Plates XII, a, b, and c; Plates XIII, a, b, and c.**
- 24. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, p. 48-49.**
- 25. Our Figure 8 is shown turned horizontally, as Mr. Mellaart tells us in the text that this work had "a fringe painted on the *left*," 1989, p. 39.**
- 26. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, p. 49 and Plate V,a.**
- 27. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, p. 45-47. See also Mellaart, 1967, pp. 114-117; chart, p. 81; and diagram, p. 102.**

28. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIII, p. 46 and *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, chart, p. 115, See also Mellaart, 1967, pp. 155, 176, and chart, p. 81.
29. Now, 25 years later (in 1990), Mellaart claims that seven paintings were found on Level II
30. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XVI, p. 178.
31. Mellaart, 1967, pp. 132 and 110.
32. Mellaart, 1967, p. 166.
33. Josephine Powell's tongue-in-cheek observation.
34. Mellaart, 1967, p. 149.
35. Pearson, Kenneth and Patricia Conner, *The Dorak Affair*, London, 1967.
36. Mellaart, 1989, Vol. 11, p. 65.
37. Lloyd, Seyton, *Early Highland Peoples of Anatolia*, London, 1967, p. 31.
38. These drawings were shown at a Basel conference in January 1990 and are illustrated in *Hali* 50, 1990, pp. 98-99.
39. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XIV, 1964, p. 73.
40. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XVI, 1966, p. 165.

41. Mellaart, *Anatolian Studies*, XVI, 1966, p. 167.

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