

The Çatal Hüyük ruckus that erupted in the rug community in the late 1980's and early 1990's was impossible to ignore, and I published two related articles in *Oriental Rug Review*. The *Update* posted below was the second, written for the December 1992/January 1993 issue (Vol. XIII, No. 2) at the request of the editor. The earlier article, with a detailed examination of questionable "reconstructions," is posted separately. A few illustrations have been added to each.

I love old Anatolian kilims with a passion strong enough to resent efforts by some individuals to fabricate a Neolithic tradition for them based on apparently non-existent materials. Such efforts are a disservice to the weavers who created this powerful textile art.

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The Goddess from Anatolia

An Updated View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy

by Marla Mallett

When *The Goddess from Anatolia* by Mellaart, Hirsch and Balpınar [1] was published in late 1989, the simmering, five-year-long Çatal Hüyük controversy came to a boil. The character of the debate over James Mellaart's Neolithic Anatolian kilim hypothesis shifted abruptly. It suddenly focused on the credibility of 44 startling new drawings of "reconstructed" wall paintings. Complex issues, such as design diffusion and historical continuity, became irrelevant. I want to provide a little background on this dispute and summarize the factors that prompted my involvement in it. My piece entitled [*A Weaver's View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy*](#) which was published in the August/September 1990 issue of *Oriental Rug Review* [2], is posted separately on this website. A related book review by Murray Eiland appeared in the same 1990 edition of *ORR*. [3] I will refer to arguments presented in those pieces, I shall comment on Mellaart's response, and then I will assess the current state of the controversy.

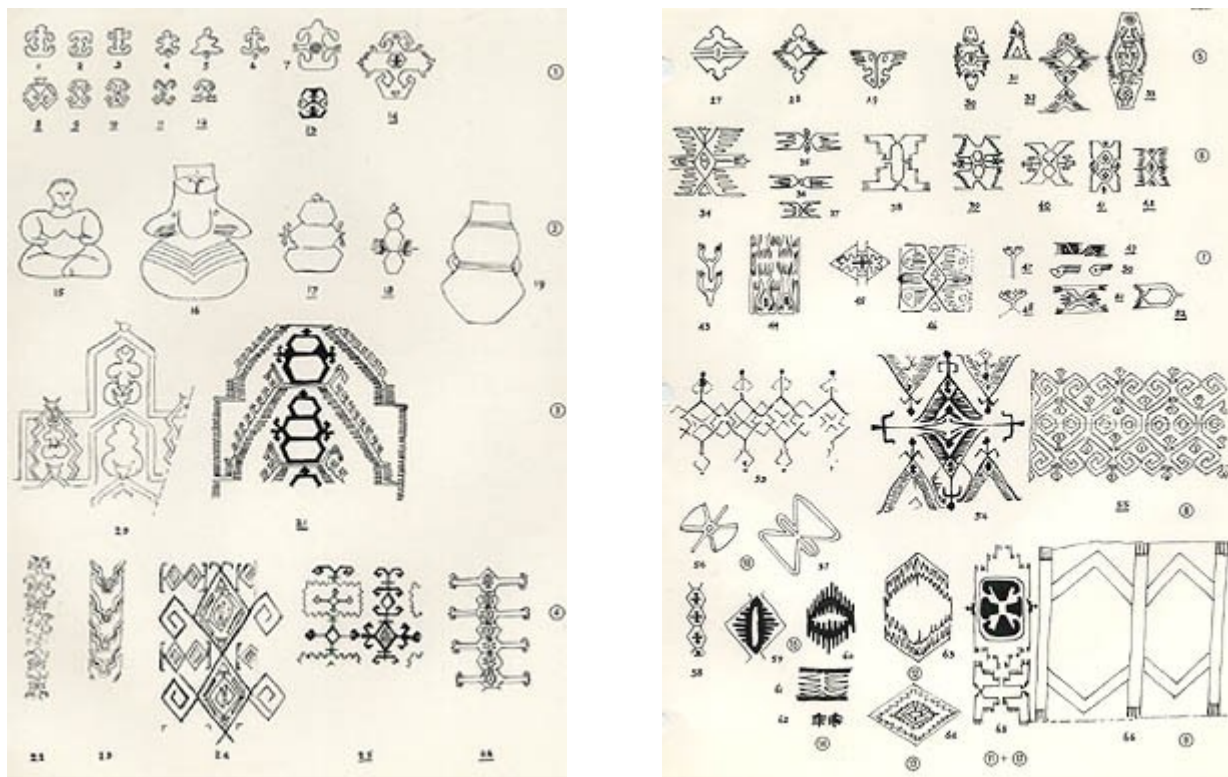


Mellaart first suggested a possible Neolithic "kilim connection" at the 1983 International Conference on Oriental Carpets in London, prompting many of us to eagerly study his earlier articles, reports, and 1967 book, *Çatal Hüyük, A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*. [4] The Turkish archaeological site of Çatal Hüyük, excavated by Mellaart in the early 1960's, was fascinating; the possibility of Neolithic roots for

Notes appear at the end of this page.

kilim design was intriguing. Mellaart's basic theory held that large paintings on some interior walls of this complex were copies of actual woven kilims used in other, more important buildings. The paintings were supposedly less expensive substitutes. Pegs were said to be positioned for suspending some of the hangings. Although no actual remains of 8,000-year-old tapestry weavings were found, motifs that Mellaart claimed to have sketched from fragmented paintings were surprisingly like those on kilims of today.

The written version of Mellaart's conference presentation was published in Bertram Frauenknecht's 1984 book, *Early Turkish Tapestries*. [5] Major flaws in the argument immediately became apparent. We saw significant problems glossed over, and hypotheses treated as established facts. No documentation was offered. No photos supported the small sketches of supposed Neolithic kilim motifs: a figure holding two birds, winged deities, globular goddesses stacked in niches, and many others (shown below). No clues indicated how these images fit into the larger scheme of things at the Çatal Hüyük site; the shrines from which they supposedly had come were not identified. The visual presentation itself was confusing, since sketches of tangible clay artifacts, motifs from modern kilims, and undocumented wall-painting motifs were all mixed together.



Sketches which accompanied the 1984 article by James Mellaart, "Some notes on the prehistory of Anatolian kilims" (B. Frauenknecht, *Early Turkish Tapestries*, pp. 25-41.)

The drawings with underlined numbers were sketched from modern kilims. Mellaart says the other motifs were copied from Çatal Hüyük wall paintings (the majority) or Hacilar painted pots (Numbers 16, 19, and 67-70). There are no photographs or other documentation to authenticate any parts of these wall paintings. Nor did anything similar appear in the original Çatal Hüyük Excavation Reports.

In retrospect, this Mellaart article sucked us in and set us up. Unable to evaluate the material for years, many readers accepted it on faith. Others adopted a wait-and-see attitude. [6] A few skeptics grumbled, but very little firm opposition appeared in print. A commentary by Werner Brüggemann [7] was one notable exception. There was plenty of time for Mellaart's ideas and primary images to become familiar, convenient and comfortable. We understood that all would be revealed in a major, forthcoming publication. We were primed and ready.



The Goddess from Anatolia, published late in 1989 under the auspices of Milan rug dealer John Eskenazi, should have answered the questions and silenced the critics. Instead, it exploded on the rug world scene, intensifying and polarizing the debate. Although some kilim aficionados were wildly enthusiastic, others were incredulous. An inordinate amount of wrangling and bickering ensued among collectors, dealers and textile researchers. "Hostilities" were even reported at European rug meetings.

Isolated from the public debate, I could only react to the book itself. I was stunned by overwhelming stylistic incongruities between Mellaart's new "reconstructed" paintings and the obviously genuine wall paintings appearing in photos in the 1960's Çatal Hüyük excavation reports. [8] Subject matter in the new drawings was completely different too. Deities and their animal entourages were now everywhere. Indeed, an elaborate new Neolithic Mother Goddess cult flourished where none had existed before. Most extraordinary of all were "reconstruction" drawings placed alongside strikingly similar modern kilims: "reconstruction" drawings with kilim motifs, but garbled warp/weft directions! They would have been impossible to weave. Something was definitely wrong. But how could it be so terribly wrong? Again, documentation was missing.

My first reaction was incredulity, but the second was resentment over apparently irregular field work. How could remnants of 8,000-year-old wall paintings, even the smallest fragments, have been destroyed without photos? The Çatal Hüyük paintings were, after all, among the world's earliest architectural murals. First, we were told that proper film was unavailable in Turkey, later that they had "run out of film." Why, then, wasn't archaeological work halted? Instead, crews continued to excavate the important Neolithic mound over four field-work seasons, stripping layer after layer of buildings and paintings. There was, indeed, a photographic record of some paintings (those we see in the excavation reports), but nothing, it seemed, that could verify even small portions of Mellaart's intricate new goddess/kilim "reconstruction" drawings. Later, in *The Goddess from Anatolia*, we were told that painted fragments upon which the "reconstructions" were based were too difficult to photograph. [9] The excuses kept changing. Most recently, in February of 1991, Mr. Mellaart stated that "color slides and black and white photographs of the better pieces" had been lost in a 1976 fire at his father-in-law's house. [10] There had been photos after all?!

In the spring of 1990, as I sat composing a letter of indignation to *Hali*, in which I hoped we would find a sensible handling of this affair, *Hali 50* arrived. Here was a glowing 14-page review of *The Goddess from Anatolia* by Ian Bennett, the book's editor. [11] It had 33 color illustrations and was accompanied by a three-page review of the Basel kilim conference that had served as the publication's "official launching." [12] Here was James Mellaart, identified as "The Prophet," with co-authors Udo Hirsch and Belkis Balpınar as the "High Priest" and "High Priestess." A cult was developing, with a widening circle of devoted disciples. The *Hali* rave review termed *The Goddess from Anatolia* a long awaited opus...as remarkable and revolutionary a publication as it was hoped and expected it would be... The principal thesis was said to have "that air of brilliant inevitability about it which characterizes the effect of any beautifully structured hypothesis that seeks to explain the previously inexplicable." An editorial, under the banner heading "1990: The Year of the Anatolian Kilim," declared that this publication "surely marks the coming of age of kilim studies." [13]

Clearly, an indignant Letter to the Editor was inappropriate -- at least to that editor. Instead, I began digging again through the old excavation reports and other early writings, while examining the new "reconstruction" drawings and text more carefully. Could my intuition have been so wrong?



In studying those 1960's excavation reports, I discovered profound contradictions between Mellaart's original reported findings for some Çatal Hüyük shrines and the version now presented in *The Goddess from Anatolia*. At first these were startling and perplexing. But as the discrepancies multiplied and became more blatant, my attitude shifted. At one stage the required detective work was minimal indeed: the original excavation reports stated definitively that "no trace of any painting" could be found associated with certain shrines -- some of those for which there were now newly "reconstructed" paintings! From then on, *expecting* discrepancies, I felt we must be confronting a grand but not too subtle hoax. I could almost imagine Mellaart standing by, laughing at the naive ruggies who were so easily duped. The clues were so obvious and so plentiful, if one simply looked.

With my suspicions verified by Mellaart's own early reports and my conclusions no longer in doubt, I decided to prepare a summary of my findings. Meticulous accuracy and precise documentation required hours of checking and cross-checking of each source against the others. Finally, I made charts to aid in tracking each structure excavated, each genuine painting (those documented in the early publications), and each new Mellaart "reconstruction." Irrefutable evidence was essential to support my contention that most of the "reconstructions" were very likely mere fantasy. It was gratifying that *Oriental Rug Review* agreed to publish my lengthy article in its entirety, along with interminable footnotes. (It is [*posted separately here*](#).) It was heartening to learn that Dr. Eiland was composing a similar article in the form of a book review. Although our approaches differed, our conclusions were similar. Both articles were published by *Oriental Rug Review* in August of 1990.

The 6th International Conference on Oriental Carpets, held in San Francisco in November of 1990, would have been an ideal forum for airing Çatal Hüyük problems. Mellaart, and his co-authors Hirsch and Balpınar were all scheduled speakers, along with several other kilim researchers, including me. Eiland was the Academic Chairman of the conference. Kilim aficionados from around the world were anticipating a lively discussion. Regrettably, Mellaart canceled his appearance.

Instead of defending his work publicly, Mellaart presented a written response in *Hali* in early 1991. [14] There he attempted to justify the discrepancies in his published work but dodged most specific, critical issues. He gave new reasons why documentation had been lost. He stressed that his excavation reports were merely "preliminary" in nature, but he did not explain why, in 25 years, no corrections had been made available to the archaeological community if the reports were indeed so inaccurate. He focused on the difficulties encountered at the Çatal Hüyük site rather than the questions raised by his critics, dismissing serious issues with irrelevant talk of the "havoc caused by Greco-Roman storage pits, brick-pits, lavatories and graves cut into the upper levels of the mound." When he did deal with specific issues, as when trying to excuse color problems in the "reconstructions," he failed to reconcile definitive 1967 statements with the new work.



Mellaart even made new claims in his rebuttal that magnified his problems. The detailed 1963 excavation report had dismissed Shrine AIII, 11 with one brief paragraph. [15] It stated that only a small fragment of a hunting scene had survived (at the right), below traces of a black-on-white geometric pattern.

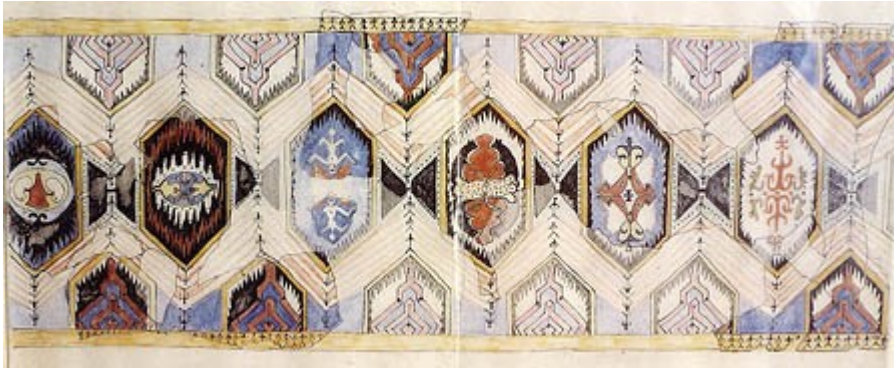


Excavation Report tracing of a wall painting from the north wall of room AIII,11 at Çatal Hüyük. (Anatolian Studies, Vol. XIII, 1963, Plate V.a)

Yet in *The Goddess from Anatolia*, six of the most important new Mellaart drawings were identified as works from this shrine (including that at the right and the two below). The two elaborate paintings below were each supposedly 5.5 meters in length! Mellaart has now claimed that this building had "some ten successive layers of painting, all differing from each other." He has not explained this latest contradiction, nor has he told us why such extensive paintings were ignored in the 1963 report. Whether those major works were uncovered *in situ* or in fragmentary state, how could they have been forgotten? We are forced to choose: we can believe either the original 1963 Mellaart account or the contradictory 1991 Mellaart story.



"Sketched reconstruction" of a Çatal Hüyük wall-painting said to be from Shrine AIII,11. James Mellaart. (*The Goddess from Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate

XVIII,1.)

"Sketched reconstruction" of a Çatal Hüyük wall-painting said to be from Shrine AIII,11, north wall, upper part. Said to be 5.5 meters in length. James Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XVII, 2).



"Sketched reconstruction" of a Çatal Hüyük wall painting said to be from Shrine AIII,11, north wall, lower part. Detail. Said to be 5.5 meters in length. Neither this, nor the painting above, nor four others supposedly from this building, were mentioned in the original Excavation Report. James Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XVII,1).

In trying to explain other serious discrepancies, Mellaart stated that many "reconstructed" paintings were pieced together from fragments of fallen or discarded rubble "hidden below final floor levels." He noted that sometimes such fragments were not found until "after a winter's interval." This, he said, was why so many paintings were not mentioned in the excavation reports. He singled out Shrine AII, 1 as an example. The three newly "reconstructed" paintings supposedly from this shrine that appear in *The Goddess from Anatolia* (two of them shown below) are indeed important to questions of fraudulence, since Level II buildings were described in the original excavation reports as having "no trace of any

painting." Mellaart's defense, however, failed to resolve this problem. When we check the 1963 report we find that consecutive pages describe Shrine AII, 1 and the room *directly beneath* it. [16] If crew members had discovered painted fragments "hidden below final floor levels " of Shrine AII,1, this necessarily occurred that first year, *not* the following excavation season. By 1967 Mellaart was still claiming that no paintings had been found in Level II buildings, while the charts in his book also indicated no traces of paintings in those shrines. [17] Mr. Mellaart's smoke screen simply doesn't work. We are forced to decide which is more credible -- the 1963 and 1967 accounts or Mellaart's 1989-1991 version.



"Sketched reconstruction" of a wall-painting said to be from Çatal Hüyük, Shrine AII,1. James Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XVII, 12.)



"Sketched reconstruction" of a wall-painting said to be from Çatal Hüyük, Shrine AII,1. James Mellaart. (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate XI, 8.)



So-called "scale copy" of a wall painting said to be from Çatal Hüyük, Shrine E.VIII,10. J. Mellaart (*The Goddess From Anatolia*, Vol. 1, Plate II, 14.)

In his rebuttal, Mellaart ignored several similar problems which require explanations. He failed, for example, to account for his peculiar yurt painting attributed to Building E.VIII, 10. Mellaart's 1966 excavation report had definitively stated that "no traces of wall painting" were found in that building. [18] Since Building E.VIII, 10 was excavated during the *last* field-work season, this problem certainly cannot be resolved with claims that painted fragments were discovered during a *later* excavation season, "hidden below final floor levels."

If, as Mellaart has now suggested, most of his reconstruction drawings of more than 44 large wall murals were pieced together from sketches of fallen fragments, enormous quantities of rubble would have been involved. He has even said that many more paintings existed: non-kilim subjects he has not yet "disclosed"! We now are asked to believe that he himself, as director of the Çatal Hüyük excavations, catalogued and made drawings of those fragile fragments at the site (perhaps some with 10 layers of painting?) then disposed of them, while his crew members concentrated on more dramatic projects. It is significant that not a single person involved in the excavations has yet been found who saw any of this fragmentary material at the site in the 1960s.

Please see "[A Weaver's View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy](#)" for a detailed examination of all these matters and for documentation.

Unfortunately, Mellaart's rebuttal has not resolved any of the problems pointed out in my previous article or Eiland's. He has not explained the confused, garbled warp/weft directions in his drawings of complex kilim motifs. He has not explained the radical discrepancy between subject matter in his new drawings and in the Neolithic paintings we can see and read about in the 1960s excavation reports. He has not justified the preposterous stylistic and conceptual disparities between his drawings and the genuine, photographed Çatal Hüyük wall paintings spanning several centuries.

Mr. Mellaart has not responded to criticism of his basic Neolithic kilim hypothesis. He has failed to salvage his important but apparently bogus "peg hole" argument, devised to persuade us that textile hangings were used at Çatal Hüyük. He has not explained why it was only after Hans Helbaek's death that he announced Dr. Helbaek's supposed discovery of "tapestry imprints" in plaster at Çatal Hüyük. He has discounted the most recent, sophisticated and conclusive tests on the fibers found in Çatal Hüyük graves -- fibers unsuitable for tapestry. Although Josephine Powell twice brought forth pertinent research findings by Michael Ryder and others, [19] Mellaart has failed to counter this expert's opinion that wool available in the seventh millennium B.C. was too hairy, kempy and pigmented to be suitable for spinning and dyeing.

Mellaart still has not begun to reconcile the requirements of large scale tapestry production with Neolithic warp-weighted loom technology. In arguing that kilims similar to modern ones were woven in Neolithic times (and in producing drawings of them) he has totally disregarded the normal impact of technological advances on textile production. Mellaart apparently failed to realize that differences in weaving mechanics are reflected in distinctive kinds of patterning, weave balance and fabric structure. Although slit tapestry is easy and natural to produce on most two-beam looms

with good warp tension, it is extremely difficult to produce on unstable, weighted warps. This problem is so severe that it dwarfs other relevant questions of loom technology, but Mellaart has conveniently ignored them all.

Anyone speculating on slit-tapestry kilim development needs to consider the role played by different shedding methods. It is safe to presume that in most parts of Anatolia the large kilims of modern times evolved from modest, functional pieces with simple, often banded designs to become increasingly intricate. Mainstream development seems to have occurred on heavy looms built to handle mundane household textile production -- looms with full-width shedding. As slit-tapestry pattern sheds were increasingly segmented, either heddles were hand manipulated to facilitate localized patterning or sheds were hand-picked. A dependence on hand-picking encouraged the use of smaller and smaller warp units, with more and more complex patterning. In modern Turkey, we see not only cluttered, decadent tapestry products, but degenerate processes that have aided and abetted the aesthetic decline. As household weaving needs changed, loom technology changed. When handwoven clothing production by nomads and villagers ceased, or when more knotted carpets were made as commercial commodities, the resulting loom adaptations inevitably favored one product at the expense of another.

Kilim weaving could not remain unaffected by these dynamics. It is curious, indeed, that Mellaart chose the end of the Anatolian kilim tradition -- with its decadent features -- to imitate in many of his 8,000-year-old kilims. In fact, his hodge-podge collection of over 40 new kilim/Goddess "reconstruction" drawings -- supposedly kilim designs representing several hundred years' work -- displays absolutely no stylistic or technical evolution. His Neolithic kilim theory still rests principally on designs that he claims "look like kilims" -- designs that, in many cases, could not be woven in slit tapestry.

Amazingly, *The Goddess from Anatolia* "reconstructions" proved not to be the last chapter in the Mellaart Çatal Hüyük saga. Incredible "disclosures" were yet to come. Early in 1991, the published version of Mellaart's Basel kilim conference lecture appeared, replete with still *more* drawings of lost goddess cult "evidence." [20] This time the "evidence" included approximately 150 drawings depicting beach pebbles incised with goddesses, clay plaques showing looms and landscapes, decorated loom weights and bone objects, even a clay shrine with stalactites and goddesses. There were sketches of still more wall paintings. All of these, along with Mellaart's remarks, were too astonishing to ignore. I felt compelled to comment and did so in a piece on the "Letters" page of *Oriental Rug Review*. [21] Mellaart did not respond to a request that we be told where his newest artifacts might be viewed. In April of 1991, he had stated that the clay plaques had disintegrated. Presumably we were to believe that his new bone and stone objects suffered a similar fate. Again, undocumented drawings of non-existent objects were apparently considered adequate for a gullible rug audience.



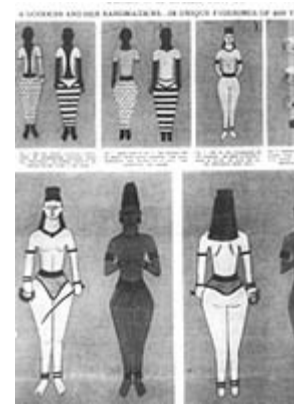
Incised beach pebbles, James Mellaart. (Mellaart, "The earliest Representations of the Goddess of Anatolia and her Entourage," *Anatolische Kelims: Die Vorträge, Basel, 1990*, p. 29.)

In fact, the presentation of this material merely continued a remarkable Mellaart pattern that had begun 30 years before with the scandal-ridden Dorak treasure drawings. In 1959 he published an article in *The Illustrated London News* entitled "The Royal Treasure of Dorak -- A First and Exclusive Report of a Clandestine Excavation Which Led to the Most Important Discovery since the Royal Tombs of Ur." [22] On those pages, a glittering array of Yortan Culture objects appeared -- in unsubstantiated drawings. Mellaart "disclosed" the world's *first* smelted iron object, the *first* depiction of ocean-going ships outside Egypt, and a sketch of a sketch of the world *first* real kilim. There were bejeweled and carved daggers, gold vessels, silver, bronze and electrum Barbie dolls, and gold sheathing from an Egyptian pharaoh's throne (for convenient dating). Heady stuff! But nothing was documented, and

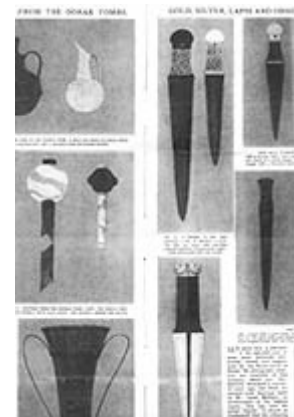


nothing had been seen by any other live human.

In 1967 Kenneth Pearson and Patricia Conner explored several aspects of the story surrounding this curious cache in a book, *The Dorak Affair*. Mellaart and the mysterious treasure had become a favorite target of Turkish journalists campaigning to stop the smuggling of precious artifacts. Although the existence of the objects was neither proved nor disproved, one result of the sensationalism and scandal was that Turkish authorities halted excavations at Çatal Hüyük. I was surprised to find that eventually a version of the escapade even appeared in popular literature. A detective story writer, August Derleth, incorporated the critical elements in a short story entitled "The Adventure of the Golden Bracelet" in his 1973 collection, #2 *The Chronicles of Solar Pons*. [23]



A sampling of Mellaart's "Dorak Treasure" drawings published in a 1959 edition of the *Illustrated London News*.



Anatolian kilim detail, Plate 45, *Anatolian Kilims*, C. Cootner, 1990.

So what is the current state of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy (in late 1992)? Since my original article and Dr. Eiland's were published in August of 1990, archaeologists Dominique Collon [24] and Mary Voight [25] have supported our conclusions with articles of their own in *Hali* and *Oriental Rug Review*. Dr. Voight's article dealt not only with credibility problems in the "reconstructions" but also with the lack of evidence for the existence of a goddess cult at Çatal Hüyük. Josephine Powell provided us with important data and an insightful assessment in two unpublished conference lectures -- one in Basel at *The Goddess from Anatolia* unveiling, and another later on. I should emphasize that *not one of our arguments pointing to the probable fabrication of "evidence" has been refuted*. Some early Mellaart supporters in the rug/textile community have back-pedaled to reposition themselves on the issue. One vocal adversary who cornered me at the San Francisco conference reluctantly admitted that he could not disagree with my published arguments; he said he just didn't like my "tone." He presumably did not appreciate the embarrassment the disclosures caused for

himself and several other individuals. In fact, the only specific counter argument we have heard was Cathryn Cootner's De Young Museum lecture suggestion that flying penises on one of the museum's kilims proved fraudulence to be impossible in the Mellaart affair. [26] Can she possibly have been serious?

It is important to realize that Mellaart's new "reconstructed" goddess/kilim material was not published by a professional archaeological journal, academic press, or even standard, commercial publishing house. As a result, the work was not distributed through normal channels to members of the archaeological community and was not subjected to normal peer review. The book's \$270 price tag also severely curtailed its circulation. Published privately, by an Italian rug dealer, *The Goddess from Anatolia* was promoted almost exclusively within rug circles, where academic standards are routinely ignored. For a prominent academician, this was a peculiar way, indeed, to disclose such amazing archaeological materials. Since our rug and textile community was the targeted audience, and because our scholarship was immediately affected, it became our responsibility to debunk the work, if debunking was in order.

The only English language archaeological publication which has dealt with the matter is an obscure journal called *The Review of Archaeology*. In the fall of 1990 Marija Gimbutas, a longtime champion of primitive goddess cults, gave *The Goddess from Anatolia* a glowing review. [27] She had previously used Mellaart's "evidence" to support her own theories in *The Language of the Goddess* (1989). In her review, she termed the new Mellaart works "treasures for the religious historian and the archaeomythologist... a gold mine." In her opinion, the modern kilims (18th and early 19th century examples) illustrated in the Mellaart book were "only a pale echo of past ages," without the "vitality" of the new goddess paintings.

In the spring of 1992, in the same journal, Carl C. Lamberg-Karlovsky of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, published remarks critical of both the Gimbutas review and the Mellaart publication. [28] Dr. Lamberg-Karlovsky's commentary, entitled "'Constructing' the Past," dealt forthrightly with questions of credibility:

The reader of Gimbutas' review is left entirely uninformed on a matter of critical importance: namely, there is absolutely no objective evidence for the existence of the dozens of "new" wall paintings from Çatal Hüyük which Mellaart reveals in these volumes for the first time. There is not a single

photograph nor a single fragment which substantiates the existence of these wall paintings.

He summarized: "Bluntly put, there is no objective reason to believe that these "new" wall paintings at Çatal Hüyük exist." He then expressed further astonishment:

For 25 years Mellaart appears to have kept these "new" wall paintings from Çatal Hüyük a closely guarded secret. Over the years he neither published an indication of their existence nor apparently discussed them with any colleague; more telling is the fact that he appears to have even kept his own excavation staff completely unaware of their existence. As a field archaeologist I find it simply incredible that the discovery of dozens of wall paintings can surface after 25 years without a single person, fragment of their remains, or photographic documentation able to support their existence!

It is bad enough that archaeologists must confront the "lunatic fringe" in dealing with those who find Celts, Etruscans, and Babylonians in the New World, so ably documented in the recent book *Fantastic Archaeology* by Stephen Williams, and are confronted with looted objects on the antiquities market. It is a sad episode in the history of the discipline when a competent archaeologist, one who has made significant contributions to the field, perpetuates such a travesty upon the standards of archaeological documentation.

At the end of his article, Professor Lamberg-Karlovsky recounted a personal conversation with his friend Mellaart concerning the drawings, and concluded sadly:

This unfortunate situation is one that must concern every archaeologist. A competent scholar and a most important archaeological site have been badly discredited. Within the context of today's post-processional mode of reasoning we are constantly reminded that interpreting the past is a subjective enterprise. Although subjective reasoning is an undeniable component of archaeological thought it must be based upon concrete, well-documented, empirical evidence. The "new" wall paintings at Çatal Hüyük are beyond the acceptable boundaries of subjective reasoning -- based as they are upon a complete absence of empirical evidence.

This opinion seems to accurately reflect the predominant view within the archaeological community.

In the rug field, a few Mellaart supporters remain incensed that work

by a man of such eminent academic standing should be questioned. They do not tell us why *any* published work should be immune to scrutiny. Is it better for possibly fraudulent materials to infiltrate and dominate rug literature? What kind of scholarship do we want? Do we actually prefer fantasy to truth? A clear unbiased view of *The Goddess from Anatolia* may be difficult for individuals previously captivated by Mellaart's reputedly spellbinding slide shows. Objectivity may be impossible for his friends. The rest of us, however, must evaluate the published material and ensure that its impact on serious literature is not greater than is merited.

Currently the Goddess is alive and still kicking in a few quarters. A few committed Mellaart defenders have dodged the question of fabricated reconstructions, weakly conceding that "Some people are skeptical of the Goddess Theory." It is not, however, a matter of skepticism. How can *any* consideration be given to theories based upon materials that appear to be fraudulent? Issues of iconography, historical continuity, and design diffusion are totally irrelevant under these conditions. It is important to remember: *Without the suspect Mellaart reconstruction drawings, there is no Goddess/kilim theory.* If the drawings must be thrown out, out must go that beloved deity with vultures (the up-ended Ottoman carnation), the rotund goddesses in niches (the Sivrihisar multiple-niche kilim look-a-likes), and the "Neolithic" version of the *elibelinde*. These sketched motifs are centerpieces for both the dubious "reconstructions" and the elaborate iconography explaining them. It is impossible to dismiss the Mellaart drawings and still keep any legitimate Neolithic Goddess/kilim connection. To speak of "archaic kilim motifs of possible Neolithic origin" is to promote a fantasy.

In the marketplace, this is precisely the kind of promotion we are seeing. Neolithic kilim design hype is rife. Fantasy obviously sells more kilims for higher prices. Every piece has become a potential cult object. An 8,000-year-old tradition, complete with vultures and goddesses, has been found irresistible. With this kind of pedigree, \$50,000 and \$75,000 kilims have become a reality. Unfortunately, effective sales gimmicks -- even if fraudulent -- are not willingly abandoned.

Since 1983, rug literature has been re-infected repeatedly with the Çatal Hüyük virus. *The Goddess from Anatolia* simultaneously heightened enthusiasm for Mellaart's fantasy and destroyed it by exposing everything. When the veracity of the "evidence" could finally be tested, it failed.

Arguments exposing duplicity in the Mellaart material have not been refuted. The controversy is dead -- or should be. Credible scholarship now requires that the apparent fraudulence be acknowledged by all. Authors who cling to the fairy tale and choose to perpetuate it can be

accorded little respect. It's time, indeed, to shelve the Çatal Hüyük affair and the goddess -- alongside the Dorak Affair -- and get back in touch with reality.

In the years since this article and the earlier one were published, most promoters of the 1984-91 Mellaart materials within the textile community have turned their focus to other areas. In a few places, however, the fantasies survive, primarily as useful sales tools. Since references to the material appeared in a number of rug books, newcomers to the field continue to stumble upon Goddess/kilim stories and are entranced. How much more satisfying ultimately, however, are the truly valid reasons for appreciating the textile masterpieces made by sensitive and creative Anatolian artisans. These women did far more than merely copy stale, millennia-old designs. Furthermore, we should remember that most of these Turkic nomad and village weavers had cultural roots in Central Asia, not Anatolia.

Now, after many years, excavations have resumed at the important Neolithic site in central Turkey. Reports by the current archaeological team led by Ian Hodder are available at www.catalhoyuk.com For the original article examining the questionable "reconstruction" drawings in detail, as well as complete documentation, go to:

[A Weaver's View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy](#)

Notes

- 1. Mellaart, James, Belkis Balpinar and Udo Hirsch, *The Goddess from Anatolia*, Milan, 1989. Four volumes.**
- 2. Mallett, Marla, "A Weaver's View of the Çatal Hüyük Controversy," *Oriental Rug Review*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (August/September 1990), pp. 32-43.**
- 3. Eiland, Murray, Review of *The Goddess from Anatolia*, James Mellaart, Belkis Balpinar and Udo Hirsch, in *Oriental Rug Review*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (August/September 1990), pp. 19-26.**
- 4. Mellaart, James, *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia*, London, 1967.**
- 5. Mellaart, James, "Some notes on the prehistory of Anatolian Kilims" in Bertram Frauenknecht, *Early Turkish Tapestries*, Nürnberg, 1984, pp. 25-41.**

This article was reprinted in *Oriental Rug Review*, Vol. IV, No. 10, January 1985, pp. 416-421.

6. Andrea Maréchal, in "The Riddle of Çatal Hüyük," *Hali* 26, April/May/June 1985, pp. 6-11, summarized the Mellaart theory and evidence, typifying the caution that many individuals felt was justified. This article suggested that some elements of the argument were "perplexing" and that further evidence was needed.
7. Brüggemann, Werner, "Carpets and Kilims -- A Contribution to the Problem of the Origins of Designs in Kilims," Robert Pinner and Walter B. Denny, eds., *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 71-83. This paper was presented at the 5th International Conference on Oriental Carpets in Vienna in 1986.
8. Mellaart, James, "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1961, First Preliminary Report," *Anatolian Studies XII*, 1962, pp. 41-65; "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1962, Second Preliminary Report," *Anatolian Studies XIII*, 1963, pp. 43-103; "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1963, Third Preliminary Report," *Anatolian Studies XIV*, 1964, pp. 39-120; "Excavations at Çatal Hüyük, 1965, Fourth Preliminary Report," *Anatolian Studies XVI*, 1966, pp. 165-191. These were all published by the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara.
9. Mellaart, James, 1989, Vol. 11, p. 20.
10. Mellaart, James, "James Mellaart Answers His Critics," *Hali* 55 (February 1991), pp. 86-87.
11. Bennett, Ian, "The Mistress of All Life," *Hali* 50 (April 1990), pp. 97-99.
12. "The Discovered Kilim," *Hali* 50 (April 1990), pp. 97-99.
13. Editorial, "1990: The Year of the Anatolian Kilim," *Hali* 50 (April 1990), p. 83.

14. **Mellaart, James, "James Mellaart Answers His Critics," *Hali* 55 (February 1991), pp. 86-87.**
15. **Mellaart, James, *Anatolian Studies XIII*, 1963, p. 49.**
16. **Mellaart, James, *ibid.*, pp. 45-49.**
17. Mellaart, James, 1967, p. 155 and charts on p. 81.
18. **Mellaart, James, *Anatolian Studies XVI*, 1966, p. 178.**
19. In lectures by Ms. Powell at the Basel Kilim Conference in January 1990 and the San Francisco 6th International Conference on Oriental Carpets in November 1990. Thus far, these remain unpublished. The Basel papers were compiled and published by Jürg Rageth (see Note 20) but because Ms. Powell refused to delete comments critical of the Mellaart materials, hers was not included.
20. **Mellaart, James, "The Earliest Representations of the Goddess of Anatolia and Her Entourage," *Anatolische kelims; Symposium Basel, Die Vorträge*, Jürg Rageth, ed., Basel, November 1990, pp. 27-46.**
21. **Mallett, Marla, in a Letter to the Editor, *Oriental Rug Review*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (April/May 1991), pp. 46-47.**
22. ***Illustrated London News*, November 29, 1959.**
23. **The scenario: London archaeologist on train meets girl wearing antique gold bracelet; girl takes archaeologist home where he spends three days sketching collection of priceless Yortan culture objects; subsequently all objects and girl disappear.**

24. **Collon, Dominique, "Subjective Reconstruction? The Çatal Hüyük Wall-Paintings," *Hali* 53, October 1990, pp. 119-123.**

25. **Voight, Mary, "The Goddess From Anatolia: An Archaeological Perspective," *Oriental Rug Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (December/January 1991, pp. 32-39.**

26. An ICOC lecture on November 17, 1990.

27. **Gimbutas, Marija, "Wall Paintings of Çatal Hüyük, 8th-7th Millennia B.C.," *The Review of Archaeology*, Fall 1990, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 1-5.**

28. **Lamberg-Karlovsky, Carl C., "'Constructing' the Past," *The Review of Archaeology*, Spring 1992, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 37-39.**

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