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Çatalhöyük East and Kösk Höyük: a grand connection?

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Citation

Biehl, P. F., & Rosenstock, E. (Eds.). (2022). Çatalhöyük East and Kösk Höyük: a grand connection? In *6000 BC. Transformation and change in the Near East and Europe* (pp. 125-135). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781107337640.010

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 8

ÇATALHÖYÜK EAST AND KÖŞK HÖYÜK

A Grand Connection?

Bleda S. Düring

GRAND NARRATIVES AND NEAR EASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY

GRAND NARRATIVES HAVE PROVEN to be remarkably persistent in Near Eastern archaeology. This is not only true for older publications, or at the implicit level. Remarkably, some of the most recent versions have been put forward by archaeologists who would claim to be at the forefront of the postmodern wave in archaeology that started in the 1980s.

In 1979, Lyotard famously announced that grand narratives – or “metanarratives” – had lost their former enchantment and that society no longer found these narratives credible (Lyotard 1979). This perspective filtered into the archaeological discipline in the 1980s mainly as a result of the highly innovative work of a group of scholars who revolved around Ian Hodder and who were based in Cambridge. Scholars from this Cambridge group such as Shanks and Tilley put forward this postmodern perspective on archaeology most fervently (1987a, 1987b). This position was taken up in the archaeology of prehistoric Europe in various studies in which grand narratives were challenged and in which the emphasis was on contingencies, local trajectories and non-linear transformations (Bailey 2000; Chapman 2000; Thomas 1999, 2004; Whittle 1996).

I am grateful to Eva Rosenstock and Peter Biehl for inviting me to their inspiring workshop in Berlin, and to Jana Anvari for taking care of various practical things.

In contrast, a clearly postmodern synthesis of the prehistoric Near East, or any specific section of it, has yet to materialize. With the exception of the archaeology of Cyprus (e.g. Knapp 2008), it is difficult to think of more than a handful of postmodern papers on Near Eastern archaeology (e.g. Boyd 2005; Croucher 2006; Harmanşah 2007, 2011) and none of these has so far made a significant impact on the Near Eastern archaeological discourse. I would argue then that Near Eastern archaeology remains determined to a significant degree by the quest for grand narratives, which remain largely unproblematic. Here I think not only of older important publications, such as Burney's *From Village to Empire* (1977) and Redman's *The Rise of Civilization* (1978), but also of a series of more recent publications that focus primarily on cognition and symbolism, for example, Hodder's *The Domestication of Europe* (1990), Cauvin's *Naissance des divinités, naissance de l'agriculture* (1997) and Lewis-Williams's *Inside the Neolithic Mind* (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005).

Recently, Peter Pels, who is a social anthropologist involved in the Templeton project focusing on religion at the Çatalhöyük Research Project – arguably one of the most postmodern projects in archaeology with its focus on multivocality and stakeholders (Hodder 1997, 2000) – was struck by the degree to which grand narratives continue to structure our discourse and interpretations (Pels 2010:220): “archaeological analysis is suspended between the twin anchors of the material record, on the one hand, and theoretical narratives of the *longue durée*, on the other. The effort of bringing these together in a process of abduction seems to be the essence of archaeological interpretation.”

In this light, it is not without irony that Ian Hodder and Lynn Meskell, two key scholars in post-processual archaeology – which is decidedly postmodernist and is also known as “interpretive archaeology” – have recently co-written a paper

in which the basic idea appears to be that there is some form of coherent Neolithic cosmology that is manifested best at sites with rich imagery such as Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük. Comparing these two sites, they have argued that there are “widespread and long-lasting themes in the early settled communities” revolving around maleness, dangerous animals and piercing of the flesh (Hodder and Meskell 2011:250–251).

In proposing this argument, Hodder and Meskell are of course following the lead of various earlier studies (Cauvin 1997; Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005; Verhoeven 2002; Yakar 1991). This is undoubtedly a clear example of a grand narrative. In these publications it is suggested that one can use words like the “Near Eastern Neolithic” – a concept that covers an enormous time span of about 5000 years and includes extremely diverse cultural horizons – as if it is somehow unified around particular economic or cosmological essences. This is a view that I think is extremely problematic. What is remarkable for the Neolithic of the Near East in general and that of Anatolia in particular is the striking degree of cultural diversity in evidence, with a series of regional cultural horizons spread across the region (Düring 2011; Gebel 2002; Kozłowski and Aurenche 2005). The idea that Neolithic societies across the Near East were similar in their conceptualization of the cosmic order and their societies on the one hand, while at the same time displaying great diversity in the manner in which people were buried, settlements and houses were ordered and artifacts were produced on the other hand, is not plausible. In fact, there is a great deal of variety in the imagery that has been used to promote arguments for a coherent Near Eastern Neolithic cosmology: For example, there are clear differences in context and content that separate the imagery of Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük (see the discussion attached to the Hodder and Meskell 2011 paper, e.g. the remarks by Douglas Baird).

ÇATALHÖYÜK AND KÖŞK HÖYÜK: A GRAND CONNECTION?

The conference theme for which this paper was first developed was, “Which changes and continuities can we see around 6000 cal BC in Anatolia and beyond?” This question in itself could be problematized as an example of a grand narrative in that the question frames the discussion in such a manner that, first, 6000 cal BC is given special significance, as opposed to, for example, 6500 cal BC or 5500 cal BC – whereas in fact many archaeologists would argue that in Anatolia both 6500 cal BC and 5500 cal BC are more significant in terms of cultural change than 6000 cal BC (Düring 2011; Özbaşaran and Buitenhuis 2002); and, second,

that the changes around 6000 cal BC are somehow similar and interconnected across a large geography. However, I do not intend to pursue these points here. Rather I would like to focus on a postulated cultural connection that is of great relevance to understanding the periods before and after 6000 cal BC in central Anatolia – that is, the connection between the sites of Çatalhöyük East on one hand, and Köşk Höyük on the other hand (Figure 8.1).

This postulated connection between Çatalhöyük and Köşk Höyük bears all the hallmarks of the Near Eastern discourse on Neolithic cognition that I have already discussed, in which there is some form of coherent Neolithic cosmology that is manifested best at sites with rich imagery such as Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük.

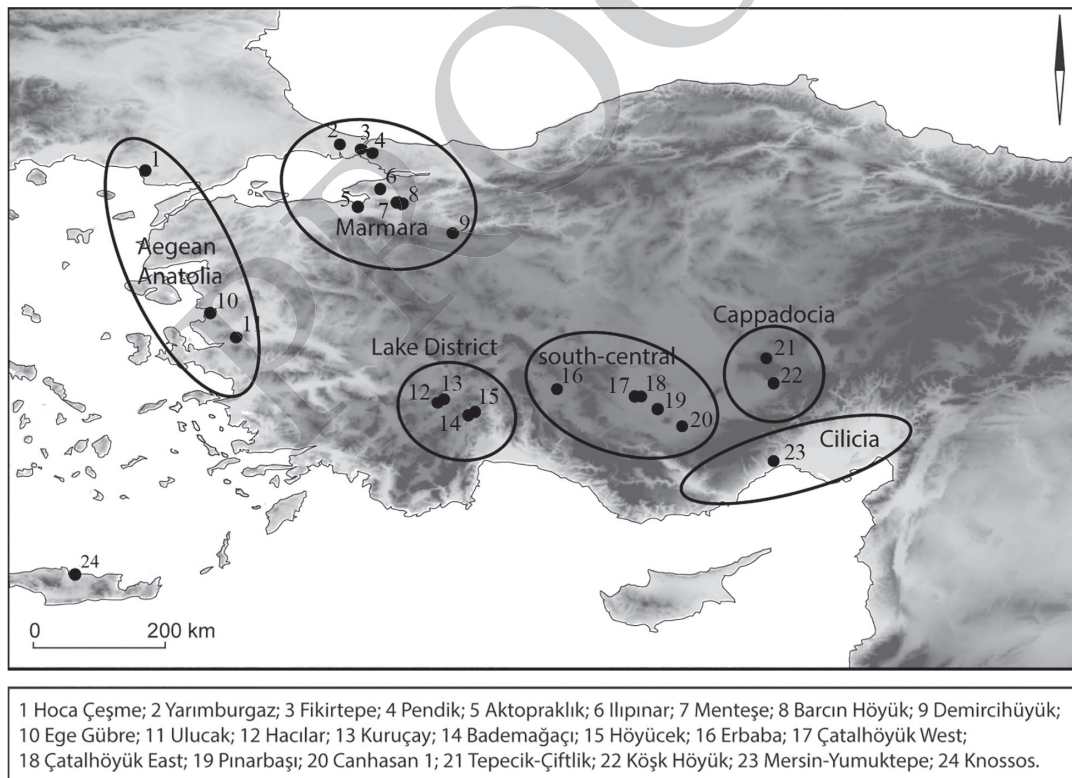


Figure 8.1 Late Neolithic sites of Asia Minor, ca. 6500–5500 BC. (Produced by Joanne Porck and Bleda Düring)

It is clear that Köşk Höyük has provided a rich corpus of imagery, and perhaps it should not surprise us, therefore, that this imagery was interpreted in a well-established tradition for such data sets in Near Eastern prehistory.

The assemblages and features found at Köşk Höyük are part of the same cultural horizon that has also been investigated at Tepecik-Çiftlik in recent years, and which will be discussed in other contributions to this book (Bıçakcı this volume; Godon this volume). In this discussion, I will therefore not talk much about Tepecik-Çiftlik, though I regard the two sites as highly comparable.

The Köşk Höyük sequence has been divided into five main levels, of which Levels 5–2 have been assigned to the Ceramic Neolithic by the excavators, and Level 1 is dated to the Early Chalcolithic (Öztan 2007:224).¹ This chronology is problematic, however. Level 1 has been radiocarbon dated to 5200–4800 cal BC, and thus belongs to the Middle Chalcolithic period (5500–4000 BC; see Düring 2011: 127–129). For Levels 5 to 2 at Köşk Höyük, a single radiocarbon date is available from Level 3, dating to 5600–5380 cal BC, implying that Levels 3 and 2 at least are Early Chalcolithic. Levels 5 and 4 remain undated at the moment. They have been exposed only in small areas and little is known about these levels. The available data from Köşk Höyük, then, derive mainly from Levels 3 and 2, that is, the Early Chalcolithic, and to a lesser degree Level 1, which is Middle Chalcolithic and which has strong parallels to the site of Güvercinkayası (Gülçur and Fırat 2005; Schoop 2011).

This assessment of the Köşk Höyük chronology is important in light of the argument put forward by Aliye Öztan – the excavator of the site – and others that there is a direct chronological and cultural link between Köşk Höyük and Çatalhöyük East (Öztan 2007:229; Yakar 1991:310–336, 2011:239). This argument is based

on what appear to be resemblances in the iconography and burial traditions of the two sites, which I will discuss briefly. Recent radiocarbon dates from early layers at the site of Tepecik-Çiftlik have in fact closed the chronological gap (Bıçakcı et al. 2012), but the plastered skulls and relief decorated pottery that will be discussed here do not feature in these Neolithic strata.

Burial Customs

Burials at Köşk Höyük were usually found within buildings, either below benches or beneath walls (Öztan 2007:225–227). While it is tempting to draw a parallel with the sub-floor burials at other sites such as Çatalhöyük and Aşıklı Höyük, the Köşk Höyük burials differ from the former in that they consist of neonates, infants and children only. Some were simply buried in a pit; others were placed in a ceramic container. Objects such as ceramics with relief imagery, figurines, seals, arm-rings and necklaces were commonly found in these burials. Some of these objects, such as figurines, are never found in burials at Çatalhöyük (Hamilton 1996; Hodder 2006:231). Famously, a number of plastered skulls were found on top of, or buried in, the raised compartments of the Köşk Höyük buildings. A total of sixteen of these skulls seem to have been found so far (Öztan 2007:226). Some were plastered on the face with the rest of the skull perhaps having originally been covered by a hat or a wig. The eyes are often carefully executed, and sometimes inlaid with stones. The plastered skulls include those of women, infants and children. Interestingly, one Level 2 burial containing an adult was found in an open space, with the skull missing and accompanied by various ceramic vessels (Öztan 2007:226–227).

The Köşk Höyük plastered skulls (Öztan 2007: fig. 11) have been interpreted as representing the tail end of a tradition of skull plastering,

well known from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (ca. 8700–6000 cal BC) in the southern Levant and also evidenced at the site of Çatalhöyük East (Öztan 2002:57–58, 2007:226). The curation and modification of skulls is generally linked with some form of ancestor veneration (Kuijt 2000; Macqueen 1978; Wunn 2001). At Çatalhöyük a lot of attention has been given to a few examples of skull removal from burials, and to the curation and embellishment of those skulls (Hodder 2006; Hodder and Cessford 2004:35). However, on the whole, skull removal and curation constitute an extremely exceptional rather than a common practice at Çatalhöyük, in contrast to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B in the Levantine region, where the removal of skulls from graves and the plastering of skulls were more widespread (Bienert 1991; Kuijt 2000; Talalay 2004). At Çatalhöyük, the examples of skull removal and curation, along with other secondary burials, tellingly do not include young people (Andrews et al. 2005) and may well have been connected to ancestor cults, but the same is not necessarily true for Köşk Höyük, where modeled skulls include those of children (Bonogofsky 2005). In view of the fact that there are considerable differences in the ubiquity of skull curation and modifications (this practice seems to be much more common at Köşk Höyük than at Çatalhöyük given the much larger number of excavated graves at Çatalhöyük and the fact that only a few plastered skulls have been found) and the types of people/skulls selected for (only adults at Çatalhöyük versus adults and children at Köşk Höyük) on the one hand, and the fact that apart from the few Çatalhöyük examples there are no further examples linking the Köşk Höyük plastered skulls to those of the southern Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (e.g. at sites such as Aşıklı Höyük or Mersin-Yumuktepe [Yakar 2011:237–238]), on the other hand, it seems improbable that the Köşk Höyük plastered skulls are part of a broad Neolithic tradition, and it

makes more sense to regard the curated and modified skulls as parallel practices that evolved independently.

Iconography

The second argument for the suggested cultural link between Köşk Höyük and Çatalhöyük consists of iconographical similarities between the two sites. At Köşk Höyük, one wall painting was found, seemingly with a geometric motif (Öztan 2007: fig. 7), but the main corpus of imagery consists of relief-decorated pottery, which is a regular component of the ceramic repertoire at both Köşk Höyük and Tepecik-Çiftlik (Bıçakçı et al. 2007:243; Öztan 2007:229). Some of the large carinated necked jars, vessels with diameters of up to 40 cm, are decorated with figurative scenes of humans and animals in high relief, some of which are also painted. Depicted motifs include: processions of wild animals; animal heads molded onto the shoulders of vessels; what appear to be hunting scenes, for example, human figures with bow and arrow juxtaposed to wild animals, and others where humans seem to be dancing next to wild animals rather than hunting them; scenes in which stylized female human figures appear to be dancing; and others in which people appear to be harvesting wheat or milking cows (Öztan 2007:229, figs. 16 and 26). The women depicted in figurines and on the vessels are wearing their hair in long cones upwards, or perhaps this is a hat of some sort. The men on the ceramic vessels seem to be wearing a kind of hat and a skirt with a back flap that is also visible in Köşk Höyük figurines as a hanging piece of cloth, which is sometimes shown horizontally on the vessels, possibly to indicate that the person is moving quickly (Bıçakçı et al. 2007; Godon 2005; Öztan 2007).

Much of this extremely rich imagery found on the relief-decorated ceramics of Köşk Höyük is reminiscent of wall paintings found in the upper

levels at Çatalhöyük East, and the two have been explicitly linked for this reason (Bıçakcı et al. 2007:248; Öztan 2007:229). However, I think there are many problems with this comparison, apart from the already mentioned fact that there is a chronological gap between the imagery of Köşk Höyük and Çatalhöyük East.

First, the Çatalhöyük images are wall paintings, whereas those from Köşk Höyük appear on pots. This means that both types of imagery would have been used in very different cultural practices. In particular, the wall paintings at Çatalhöyük East would have been visible for no more than a few months at most before they were sealed by a new plaster layer (Matthews 2006), whereas we can expect that the carefully crafted large relief-decorated pots of Köşk Höyük and Tepecik-Çiftlik would have been used and have been visible over much longer periods of time, possibly as the centerpiece of the house. Thus, whereas the Çatalhöyük wall paintings might have been linked with very specific occasions, those at Köşk Höyük probably served a wider range of events or at least multiple events. Second, whereas at Çatalhöyük there is no overlap between wall paintings and figurines, at Köşk Höyük there are very real parallels between the figurines and the images on relief-decorated pottery. A related point is that, third, while at Çatalhöyük female figures do not really seem to feature in the wall paintings – although they are prominent in the figurine assemblage, especially in the upper levels (Hamilton 1996:226; Voigt 2000:287; Düring 2011:104, but see Nakamura and Meskell 2009:219–222 for a different view) – at Köşk Höyük women are prominent in the relief-decorated pottery.

Fourth, a major difference is the role accorded to domestic resources in the Çatalhöyük wall paintings on the one hand and on the Köşk Höyük relief decorated pots on the other hand. At Çatalhöyük domestic resources are conspicuously absent from the iconography. Sheep and

goats are domesticated and are important in the economy, but they hardly feature in the wall paintings and molded features at the site, where the emphasis appears to be on dangerous animals such as aurochs, leopards and vultures, creatures that are able to tear you apart (Hodder and Meskell 2011; Russell and Martin 2005). One interesting exception to this is a sheep buried next to a person in one of the Level 7 buildings at Çatalhöyük (Russell and Düring 2006). Likewise, cultivated crops do not surface at all in the symbolic repertoire of this site, and the Çatalhöyük botanists have felt somewhat excluded in the debate about cosmologies and symbolism that has been so important in the Çatalhöyük Research Project (Fairbairn et al. 2005; Hodder 2003). Remarkably, however, at Köşk Höyük there are depictions both of domestic animals, including one image possibly depicting a cow being milked (Öztan 2007:29) – an activity which would fit with recent lipid residue analysis studies which place the emergence of dairy production around 6500 cal BC in, for example, the Marmara region (Evershed et al. 2008) – and one image that rather unmistakably appears to show a crop-harvesting scene (Öztan 2007: fig. 26).

It appears then that at Köşk Höyük we have possible evidence for the representation of engagement with domesticated animals and plants – the care and cultivation of which were probably among the most time-consuming activities in many prehistoric societies – which was here for the first time depicted in the iconography. This is surely a major difference from the imagery of Çatalhöyük. This symbolic prominence of domestic resources might appear to link comfortably with a view formulated by scholars such as Gérard and Thissen that the Early Chalcolithic was the “true Neolithic” and was characterized by an increased reliance on farming, and that hunting and gathering were no longer of significance during this period

(Gérard 2002:108; Thissen 2002; Marciniak and Czerniak 2007). However, apart from the domestic animal species, bones of deer, bear, wild boar, wild horses, wild donkeys, hare and foxes were also found at Köşk Höyük, and it appears that hunting played an important role, as it did at Tepecik-Çiflik (Bıçakçı et al. 2007:246; Öztan 2007:233). Further, wild animals such as cattle, deer and donkeys also feature on the relief-decorated ceramics of Tepecik-Çiflik and Köşk Höyük. Thus, while domestic resources are depicted in the Köşk Höyük imagery, the subsistence economy itself would have been a mixture of domestic and wild resources, much the same as at Çatalhöyük (Fairbairn et al. 2005; Russell and Martin 2005). It would appear then that we are dealing with culturally distinct filters in which particular aspects of life were or were not emphasized socially.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Thus far I have problematized a proposed cultural connection between Çatalhöyük East on the one hand and Köşk Höyük on the other hand. The aim has also been to critique a line of argumentation in which specific key sites, usually those with rich contextual records and rich imagery, are accorded the status of representing the cosmology and culture of their respective periods more broadly, and data from these key sites are then welded into an overarching grand narrative of prehistoric cosmologies and societies. Apart from the problematic set of assumptions upon which such a reconstruction is based, this line of reasoning relegates sound archaeological research focusing on assemblages, building and burial traditions and other types of practices and chronology to irrelevance.

For example, a major problem with arguing that Köşk Höyük is the cultural descendant of Çatalhöyük East is that – as a result of the work

of the Poznań team at Çatalhöyük East (Marciniak and Czerniak 2007), and the Buffalo/Berlin team on the West mound (Biehl and Rosenstock 2009; Biehl et al. this volume) – we now have a seamless sequence from Çatalhöyük East to Çatalhöyük West, with an apparent period during which both mounds were occupied before occupation finally shifted to the West mound. The archaeology of the Early Chalcolithic Çatalhöyük West mound differs markedly, however, from the archaeology of Köşk Höyük. To name but a few examples, Köşk Höyük does not have the painted pottery typical of Çatalhöyük West (Franz/Pyzel this volume; Biehl et al. this volume; Last this volume) – which is also broadly comparable to that of Canhasan I (French 1998) – whereas relief-decorated pottery of Köşk Höyük and Tepecik is almost completely absent at Çatalhöyük West. Similarly, the agglutinated buttressed basement buildings found at Çatalhöyük West (Biehl et al. this volume: Figure XX) – and paralleled in Canhasan I (French 2005) and also in the Lake District at sites such as Hacilar and Kuruçay – are absent in Köşk Höyük, where buildings take on very different forms (Düring 2011:122–199).

To postulate that there is a direct chronological and cultural link between Köşk Höyük and Çatalhöyük East is to claim that data concerning material culture and building traditions – which are the bread and butter of archaeology – are irrelevant. Somehow archaeologists have a tendency to abandon their sound and systematic study of the past when it comes to interpreting images and reconstructing cosmologies, and not to scrutinize interpretations of these with the same rigor as those concerned with pottery and chronologies. I argue that it is time to start taking the diversity that characterizes Anatolian prehistory seriously and counter efforts to fit the data into overarching narratives that link key sites into a single synthesis while glossing over the

manifold archaeological and chronological facts and discrepancies in the rich records of primary archaeological data that have been amassed over the last decades. Elsewhere I have argued that in the Late Neolithic we can distinguish a series of regionally circumscribed cultural horizons (Figure 8.1; Düring 2011; 2013).

This position has three consequences. First, iconographical data and burial practices such as skull curation and modification should be understood primarily in the contexts of particular sites or specific cultural horizons, rather than as manifestations of broader cultural traditions spread across the Near East manifesting “the Neolithic cosmology.” In my previous work on Neolithic settlements of central Anatolia, I have tried to develop such a regional approach (Düring 2006). For the site of Köşk Höyük we will have to wait for more extensive publications before such studies can be undertaken, and no doubt the systematic work at nearby Tepecik-Çiftlik will be of great importance in this endeavor. Notwithstanding these problems, it is possible to sketch an admittedly hazy picture of this cultural horizon. In the Early Chalcolithic a clearly distinct cultural complex emerged in Cappadocia. Remarkably, this cultural complex was clearly bounded: at nearby and contemporary Canhasan we are dealing with a completely different type of pottery traditions and distinct settlement forms. Within Cappadocia, however, we seem to be dealing with a strongly integrated package of cultural traditions, in which figurative art in the form of relief-decorated vessels and figurines was significant. These images appear to represent some of the key activities people were engaged in, such as hunting, dancing and, possibly, agriculture. Such activities were apparently important in some way in the symbolic constitution of society. What is also apparent is that the dead continued to circulate among the living, with the frequent removal of skulls and the replastering of these skulls to symbolically refresh

them. No doubt, when more data become available on the houses and settlement at Köşk Höyük and Tepecik-Çiftlik, it will become clearer how these elements fit within the broader social system. The type of approach toward understanding prehistoric imagery and burial practices that I am arguing for is the contextual archaeology that Ian Hodder was advocating already in the 1980s (Hodder 1986), in which cultural phenomena are linked with the broader cultural context and in which contextual associations are of key importance.

A second consequence – long overdue – is the necessity to move away from “big site archaeology,” which in Turkish prehistory means that we have to move away from a Çatalhöyük bias in particular. This site is of course tremendously important for our understanding of Neolithic Turkey, but it is not *the key* that will allow us to understand Neolithic Turkey at large. That Neolithic horizon is simply too diverse to approach with Çatalhöyük glasses only, however well the site has been investigated and published. More broadly, any synthesis of the Near Eastern Neolithic that concerns itself only with sites such as Göbekli Tepe or Çatalhöyük while not discussing all the other settlements we have investigated – and which are necessary to place these sites in context – should be treated with great scrutiny.

Third, I think it is time to start taking seriously the ideas put forward by Lyotard and try to get away from the grand narratives that served us well in the early days of archaeology but have developed into a conceptual burden that keeps us from better understanding the complexities of the past we want to reconstruct. Thus, I want to return to the question at the heart of this volume that was posed by Peter Biehl and Eva Rosenstock: “Which changes and continuities can we see around 6000 cal BC in Anatolia and beyond?” My take on this would be that we need to appreciate the complexity of regional trends,

as, for example, different developments occur in the Marmara region than in Aegean Anatolia, which is different from the Lake District, and also from central Anatolia. Of course, there are issues that link these regional cultural horizons, but the way things play out in each region is determined by multiple factors which include, among other things, the local ecology, climate changes, demographic developments, interactions with other regions and the cultural history of an area. The past then, like the present, is complex and multifaceted.

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NOTE

- ¹ In this chapter I will use the Öztan 2007 and the Bıçakçı et al. 2007 Turkish language sources for discussing Köşk Höyük and Tepecik-Çiftlik. More recently an English translation of these studies has appeared (Öztan 2012; Bıçakçı et al. 2012), but these differ in minor but significant points in their content, possibly due to poor translation and editing.