

Media Release

Insights into the Fantasy World of Archeologist James Mellaart

A review of the estate of the British prehistorian James Mellaart in February 2018 revealed that the famous archeologist had invented allegedly 3000-year-old texts himself. The evaluation of the notes and manuscripts recovered last year has now been published in the Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society.

Zurich, Switzerland, August 27, 2019 – Before he died, the British prehistorian James Mellaart (1925–2012) had marked certain particularly important manuscripts for immediate publication. However, during a multi-day review of other parts of the estate in February 2018, Mellaart’s son and heir Alan and the Swiss geoarchaeologist Eberhard Zangger came across clues which left no doubt that Mellaart had actually invented these texts. Now a comprehensive scientific evaluation of these documents has been published in *Talanta – Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*. All articles in the 220-plus pages of the 50th volume of the proceedings deal with the material from Mellaart’s estate.

Mellaart had made a name for himself with the discovery and excavation of important Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in Turkey, including Beycesultan, Hacilar, and Çatalhöyük. Still in his thirties, he was even considered the most famous archaeologist in the world. However, from 1959 onwards he was repeatedly involved in scandals. In several cases, colleagues accused him of falsifying evidence, but were unable to substantiate these allegations. The documents and notes from Mellaart’s estate that have now been published finally provide clarity in a number of ways.

The artifacts that were recovered during the excavations in Beycesultan, Hacilar, and Çatalhöyük and cataloged on the spot were, of course, genuine. Many of these world-famous objects are now on display in archaeological museums across Turkey. There is no indication that Mellaart forged actual artifacts. His creative work was apparently limited to drawings and texts.

Certainly all (around 70) “reconstructed” wall-paintings from Çatalhöyük, which Mellaart had presented about twenty years after the excavations were completed, are forged. The walls of many rooms in Çatalhöyük did actually bear murals. These were documented during the excavations and are now exhibited in museums. The landscape panoramas, which were presented much later, however, were pure inventions.

Also completely invented is the so-called Beyköy Text. From 1993 James Mellaart claimed – sometimes even in his scholarly publications – to be in possession of the English translation of a substantial Late Bronze Age cuneiform text from western Turkey. As it turns out, Mellaart had composed this very extensive and detailed account himself over the course of about two decades. Alan Mellaart and Eberhard Zangger retrieved the notes and drafts that were needed to produce this text.

The first major scandal in which Mellaart was already accused of counterfeiting dates back to the publication of the so-called Dorak Treasure in 1959. An unpublished book manuscript on this treasure was found in Mellaart's estate, but there were no new firm indications that this artifact assembly was invented by Mellaart. However, most of Mellaart's companions still living today believe that the treasure never existed. Not even the house in which Mellaart claimed to have been shown the finds could ever be located again.

Still unclear is the provenance of a large Luwian hieroglyphic inscription which was also found in Mellaart's estate. Most articles in the current issue of *Talanta* deal with this particular document. The Dutch linguist Fred Woudhuizen and Eberhard Zangger list a number of clues which overall point to the authenticity of this inscription. For example, the text contains a sign for "great prince" which was not known when the drawing was first shown in 1989 but was later, in 2001, actually found in a Luwian stone inscription. If Mellaart had forged the inscription, he would have invented a sign whose existence was indeed confirmed years later.

Zangger's 58-page report "James Mellaart's Fantasies" is available as a PDF for free download at <https://luwianstudies.academia.edu/EZangger>

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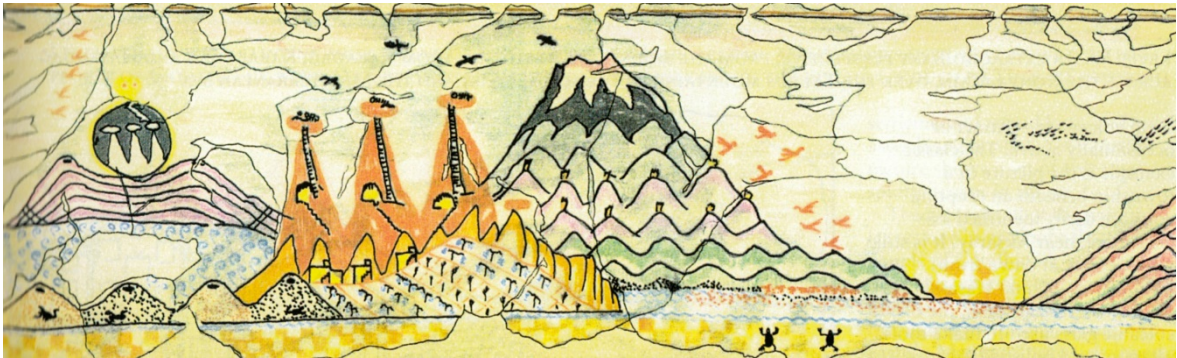
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A wall-painting that James Mellaart claims to have „reconstructed“ but was indeed invented by him.



Sketches on schist by James Mellaart with the same motives of allegedly reconstructed murals from Çatalhöyük.