

Sites under threat.

Tell settlements from South-East Romania

Katia MOLDOVEANU*
Radian-Romus ANDREESCU*

Abstract: *This paper has as aim to present some tell settlements from Southern Romania from the point of view of their preservation (identification of the main degradation types) and protection. With the shape of a mound, the tell type settlements drew the attention not only to archaeologists but also to local people who saw them as a good raw material source for different constructions. Despite their presence on the List of Historical Monuments the tell settlements are currently used as fields for agriculture or are invaded by constructions built inside the protection area or even on the site itself. All these had as consequence the total destruction of some of these sites (e.g. the tell sites nearby Bucharest: Vidra, Măgura Jilavei, Chitila). The carelessness of the local authorities regarding this type of monument is one of the causes the destruction of the tell settlements.*

Rezumat: *Acest articol prezintă așezările de tip tell din sud-estul României din perspectiva stării de conservare (identificarea principalelor tipuri de degradări asociate), a protecției lor și a punerii în valoare. Având aspectul unor movile (numite „măguri” sau „gorgane”) așezările de tip tell au atras atenția nu doar arheologilor, ci și localnicilor, care au întrevăzut în acestea, între altele, o sursă de materie primă pentru diverse amenajări. În ciuda statutului lor de monumente istorice, tell-urile sunt folosite ca teren agricol sau sunt invadate de construcții moderne, ridicate chiar pe așezare sau în aria de protecție. Toate acestea au dus în unele cazuri la distrugerea completă a câtorva dintre aceste situri (de exemplu tell-urile din jurul Bucureștilor: Vidra, Măgura Jilavei, Chitila). Indiferența autorităților față de acest tip de monument istoric face ca și în prezent numeroase așezări de tip tell să fie distruse de diverse amenajări și lucrări agricole.*

Keywords: *tell settlements, natural risks, man made threats, preservation.*

Cuvinte cheie: *așezări de tip tell, riscuri naturale, riscuri antropice, conservare.*

◆ Introduction

The *tell* settlements are an unusual type of monument. A very good description of a *tell* settlement was made by archaeologist Dinu V. Rosetti who excavated several Neolithic *tell* settlements near Bucharest in the interwar period. According to D.V. Rosetti the *tell* settlements are : "*artificial mounds made of rubbish belonging to collapsed buildings, due to often fires, floods and continuous habitation on the same ground*" (our translation; D.V. Rosetti 1932, p. 5).

These settlements are usually placed on river valleys, more rarely on terraces, easy to identify as a mound and visible in a flat land (the term "*tell*" is of Arabic origin and its meaning is mound). They were formed during hundreds of years by the accumulation of settlements debris which succeeded for centuries. Some of these settlements disappeared because of fires and other were abandoned. Their importance is related to the extraordinary richness of artifacts which they enclose inside of them. Some enclose hundreds of years of history and the information resulting from their research is important not only to the history of Romania, but also to the history of Europe.

Unfortunately these settlements were submitted during time to several degradations due to both natural risks and man made threats. The field works from the last decades in Southern Romania revealed several situations in which the *tell* settlements were partially or totally destroyed by the mentioned factors.

About 150 *tell* settlements were identified so far in Southern Romania. They belong to Gumelnița culture and they are the main form of habitation on Romania's territory in the 5th mill. BC (R. Andreescu, P. Mirea 2008). Several types of degradations associated with the *tell* settlements were identified, as well as some dysfunctions related with their legal status as historical monuments.

* Muzeul Național de Istorie a României, Calea Victoriei 12, sector 3, 030026, Bucharest;
katia_moldoveanu@yahoo.com; radian_romus@yahoo.com

◆ Degradations caused by natural factors

In this category we included several settlements submitted to natural factors (e.g. erosion, rain, wind, freezing / defrosting, etc.) which lead to the destruction of an important part of the settlement. Two examples will illustrate this type of destruction.

Sultana - *Malu Roșu* (pl. 1/1-2). The *tell* settlement is placed on the high terrace of Lake Iezerul Mostiștei, in Sultana village, Mănăstirea commune, Călărași County. The oldest scientific researches in a *tell* type settlement were undertaken at Sultana site, which is related with the beginning of the Romanian school of archaeology. Rescue excavations were undertaken at the site in the 70 – 80's of the last century. The excavations were restarted in 2001 (R. Andreescu, C. Lazăr 2008).

Nowadays what was left of the settlement measures cca. 35-40 m on the long axis and 25-30 m on the short axis. To make an idea about how the site was destroyed in the last decades, just notice that in 1923 archaeologist I. Andrieșescu estimated the long axis of the settlement at about 71 m (I. Andrieșescu 1926, p. 172). The area corresponding to about 30-35 m of the long axis of the settlement collapsed in the waters of the lake in approximately 80 years. Since 2001 when researched were restarted, more than 5m from the north-western edge of the settlement were collapsed. A very rich archaeological inventory was discovered at the site. Among it stands out a little treasure containing golden objects, some of the oldest artifacts in gold found in Europe. Nevertheless the site is not on the *List of Historical Monuments*¹ of Călărași County. This situation is due to a problem related to the legal status of the field on which the site is located.

Coțatcu *Cețățuia* (pl. 2/1). The *tell* settlement is placed in the bottom of a valley near Coțatcu village, Podgoria commune, Buzău County. The site was submitted to an accelerated deterioration in the last decades. The site was discovered in 1971 when the first land slides occurred and they affected the site. The researches undertaken back then consisted in a 40 x 1,5 m sondage on the long axis of the settlement. When the excavations were restarted in 2006 there were only 10-12 m left of this long sondage, the rest being collapsed in the nearby valley (R. Andreescu *et alii* 2010). In the settlement profile there were visible traces of burnt dwellings. The rich archaeological inventory belongs to the so called Stoicani-Aldeni cultural group dated back in the 5th millennium BC. Stoicani-Aldeni is a cultural group located in the contact area between the Chalcolithic civilisations of Precucuteni-Cucuteni and Gumelnița.

◆ Degradations caused by man made actions

The man made actions which affected a large number of sites are as follows: the modern habitation (houses), different constructions or infrastructural works (roads, embankments, lakes) and the agricultural works.

Some of the *tell* type settlements were affected by modern habitation.

Hârșova (pl. 3/1-2). The *tell* type settlement is placed on the Danube shore, in Hârșova town, Constanța County. The site is the biggest *tell* settlement in Romania, with an impressive height of 12 m, formed by the successive deposition of settlements belonging to the cultures Boian, Gumelnița and Cernavodă I, dated back to the 5th – 4th mill. BC. Initially the site covered more than two hectares but due to the erosion caused by Danube River and to human activities, the remaining settlements measures nowadays 190 m on the long axis and 80 m on the short axis. Modern houses could be found on almost the entire surface of the *tell* settlement and around it, so that the last habitation levels of the *tell* settlement were affected. The archaeological researches could be undertaken, with exceptional results, only a small part of the site (D. Popovici *et alii* 2000). The *tell* settlement from Hârșova is an unhappy example of conjugation of destructive natural factors and human made activities. The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code CT-I-s-A-02677).

Măgura-Bran (pl. 4/1-2). The *tell* settlement is placed on a remnant in Clănița valley, at the edge of Măgura commune, Teleorman County. Its present dimensions are 90 m on the long axis and a maximum length of 60 m. Its height is about 11 m, from which only 6,5 m are traces of successive settlements from Iron Age, Bronze Age and Eneolithic (Gumelnița culture). The *tell* settlement surface is occupied by the church and cemetery of Bran Village, though the upper levels of prehistoric habitations were strongly damaged. Under these circumstances, only a small sondage could be done

¹ The list comprises the sites and monuments in Romania.

on the slope in order to establish the site stratigraphy (R. Andreescu, K. Moldoveanu 2010, p. 17-18). The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-s-B-14210.02).

Uzunu (pl. 5/1-2). The *tell* settlement is placed in the nearby of Călniștea valley, in Uzunu village, Giurgiu County. The site is placed at the edges of the village and it was affected by the actions of the villagers. Archaeologist D. Berciu mentioned in 1956 a mound of big size located in the courtyards of two villagers, who repetitively made diggings on the southern edge of the settlement in order to enlarge the courtyard and obtain earth for other constructions (D. Berciu 1956, p. 500-501). Nowadays the site is much destroyed by the villagers who extended their courtyards in the detriment of the *tell* settlements. In the spring of 2010 many burnt dwellings could still be observed in the site profile and its very vicinity a new house was under construction. Nevertheless, the site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code GR-I-s-B-14834).

Some other *tell* type settlements were affected by various constructions or infrastructural works (roads, embankments, lakes, etc).

In Balaci commune, Teleorman County, two *tell* settlements were partially destroyed by various works. One of the *tell* settlements placed in the northern side of the village was cut by the local road. In the eastern side of the village, on Burdea River valley, there was another *tell* settlement destroyed almost completely by access roads and by the local villagers who took earth from the *tell* settlement for different constructions. Still, the site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-s-B-14186).

Another example is the site named *Gorgan* (pl. 6/1-3), Teleorman County, placed on Veda River near the town of Alexandria. It is one of the oldest mention of a *tell* settlements in Teleorman County by archaeologist C. Bolliac during his "archaeological exploration" from 1869 (C. Bolliac 1869, p. 3-4). Since that time, C. Bolliac mentioned a hole made by treasure hunters in the middle of the settlement. A side of the site was also destroyed by a local road. The settlement was researched in 2002 when a stratigraphical profile was made by cutting the side destroyed by the local road (R. Andreescu, D.W. Bailey 2003). Many trees could be found on site in past times and they also contributed to the partial destruction of the last habitation levels. The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-s-B-14182).

Other *tell* settlements are systematically destroyed by their use as clay source for different constructions. Such an example is the *tell* settlement from Glina - *La Nuci* (pl. 2/2), Bălăceanca commune, Ilfov County, placed nearby Bucharest on Dâmbovița River valley. The *tell* settlement was researched by archaeologist I. Nestor since the interwar period (I. Nestor 1933). The site was used as an earth source for different infrastructural works, as embankments of A2 highway. A lot of garbage is deposited around the site. The site is on the *List of historical monuments* (code IF-I-m-A-15146.02).

Another *tell* settlement around Bucharest researched in the '80s of the former century is the one from Chitila *Fermă*, Mogoșoia commune, Ilfov County. The site was discovered in 1972 when the bulldozers destroyed the *tell* settlement placed on the bank of Colentina River near the railway Bucharest - Ploiești (V. Boroneanț 2000, p. 49). The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code IF-I-m-A-15214.08 /09).

Another example is the one of the settlement named *Măgura din livezi* from Drăcșănei village, Teleorman County. In 2005 the embankment of a lake nearby was affected as a result of floods from Burdea River valley. The earth for repairing the embankment was taken from the *tell* settlement which lead to the destruction of the entire settlement. The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-s-B-14198).

The most frequent cause for the destruction of the *tell* settlement is represented undoubtedly by the agricultural works. They generally affect the upper levels of the *tell* settlements but there are cases when the sites are completely destroyed due to these works.

One significant example of intentional destruction of a site happened in the case of *tell* settlement from Vidra *Măgura Jidovilor* (pl. 7/1-3), Ilfov County, placed in Sabar River valley near Bucharest. The site was researched by archaeologist D.V. Rosetti in the interwar period (D.V. Rosetti 1934, p. 7). He mentioned that the *tell* settlement had a height of 6 m, composed of habitations levels belonging to Boian and Gumelnița cultures (6th – 5th mill. BC).

A field research made in autumn 2010 revealed the fact that the *tell* settlement was completely destroyed. Placed behind the houses in the village, practically in the courtyards of local people, the site was levelled by using bulldozers. One of the masterpieces of prehistoric art, the so called "Goddess from Vidra" was discovered at this site, so it is much possible that other objects of this kind to be lost during the levelling works done at the site, not to mention the lost of the historical information. The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code IF-I-s-A-15255.04/05).

Most of the *tell* settlements are currently used as agricultural fields. As a consequence, the last habitation levels are partially affected and many times traces of old houses could be found in the fields, disturbed by plough, as well as a rich inventory, composed of tools and ceramic spread within the perimeter of the site.

Such examples could also be found on Teleorman valley, at Slăvești (pl. 8/1) – the site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-m-B-14224.01) or Trivale-Moșteni (pl. 8/2) – the site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-m-B-14227.02). As a result of agricultural works, the edges of the site was compromised. Another example is the *tell* settlement from Petru Rareș, Giurgiu County. The site was researched by archaeologist D. Berciu (D. Berciu 1937) and nowadays it is used as agricultural field. The site is not on the *List of Historical Monuments*.

There are more examples but we focused on the *tell* settlement from Vitănești - *Măgurice* (pl. 9/1-2), Teleorman County, which is a special case. The researches undertaken here starting with the year 1993 showed the destruction degree on which the site was submitted by man made actions (R. Andreescu *et alii* 2003). The *tell* settlement is placed in Teleorman River valley, in the vicinity of the houses from Vitănești village. After 1989 the land on which the site is located was given back to the owners who transformed it into an agricultural field, which determined the intervention of archaeologists. As a consequence, agricultural works stopped in 1995 and the site was introduced in the *List of Historical of Monuments*. The archaeological investigations revealed that the last habitation level, belonging to Gumelnița culture, placed 20-30 cm under the ground, was strongly disturbed by agricultural works. Thus the burnt dwellings belonging to this level were partially destroyed and spread on the surface of the site. Many other holes dug by the local villagers also contributed to the site degradation. Another element which seriously perturbed the site stratigraphy is represented by animals which dug large galleries through the *tell* settlement, leading to the destruction of the site, mainly the prehistoric dwellings. The site is on the *List of Historical Monuments* (code TR-I-s-A-14230).

These are only a few examples from a long list of *tell* settlements totally or partially destroyed by natural factors but mostly by human made actions. Their visibility in the landscape offers both advantages but also disadvantages. On one hand, this visibility is an advantage for archaeologists who can easily identify such prehistoric sites but on the other hand, their visibility put their integrity in danger as local people see in them not historical monuments but rather a handy source for building material for houses or other constructions.

Such example is the case of the *tell* settlement from Bucșani, Giurgiu County. Placed in the floodplain of Neajlov River, the *tell* settlement was included in the pillar of a bridge which was supposed to be built over Neajlov River at the end of the 90's last century. Luckily in this case the archaeologists have been noticed and so the *tell* settlement could be researched before it suffered because of the construction of the bridge (S. Marinescu-Bilcu *et alii* 1999).

Unfortunately many *tell* settlements are located on private properties. The local people don't know the laws regarding the protection of heritage and act consequently by destroying important historical vestiges, old of some thousands of years, enclosed in these *tell* settlements.

◆ Discussions

Regarding the *List of Historical Monuments*, there are some dysfunctions regarding the *tell* settlements. Thus, some of them, for example Sultana – *Malu Roșu*, which is one of the oldest researched *tell* settlement and where excavations are still undertaken is not on the list, while other *tell* settlements which practically do not exist at the moment, are still on the list. It is the case of the *tell* settlement at Vidra, destroyed by agricultural works or the one from Vlădiceasca, Călărași County, which is covered entirely by the waters of Mostiște Lake due to some works made on the river.

For the protection of the mentioned sites there is a legislation based on Law no. 422/2001 regarding the preservation of historical monuments, together with the Government Ordinance no. 43/2000 regarding the protection of archaeological heritage. According with this law, the local authorities have an important role in protecting these sites. Unfortunately they ignore this type of monuments as they usually understand by "monument" a stone or wood construction and not a mound of earth. Even in big towns, not to mention in the small ones or in the villages, the historical monuments are destroyed without the authorities to take any measure. In these circumstances of ignorance of the legal frame it is not a wonder that the *tell* type settlements are not viewed as historical monuments which should be preserved.

The awareness of the local authorities is necessary in the first place for the protection of these sites because the ignorance of these sites is the main risk factor for destruction. Secondly, some campaigns of informing the communities about the cultural local values are needed, as well as the official signage for the historical monuments. Other actions which should be taken in consideration regarding the management of the monuments are: the creation of site museums inside the schools, enclosing systems for the sites, appropriate signage – directional informative panels and display panels and the inclusion in local circuits for visiting. Unfortunately these examples are rare.

An interesting case is the one found at Drăgănești-Olt (pl. 10/1-2), where there is a *tell* settlement which was partially destroyed by an industrial railway and currently serves as a waste disposal area. In exchange, the results of the researches undertaken in this site (M. Nica *et alii* 1994) are visible in the local museum (Museum of Boian Plain) where there is a very interesting ethno-archaeological park with a reconstruction of the *tell* settlement at 1:1 scale. There is also a site museum at Drăgănești-Olt.

A very good example of research, preservation and management of a *tell* settlement is the site of Çatal Hüyük (pl. 11/1-3), placed in Konya Plane, Turkey. Here we can find special shelters where visitors can look at vestiges preserved in situ even during researches, an experimental house (a reconstructed Neolithic house) and a visitor centre. On the website of the Çatal Hüyük research project² there is also an interesting management plan with a wide view on the archaeological site regarding issues as the conservation and protection of the site, integrated in a system of factors involved in this process. A special attention is given to real proposals for the preservation, protection and marketing of the site, on a short, medium and long term.

The present paper had as aim to draw the attention upon a less known type of monument, namely the *tell* type settlements. They are viewed as "*vast archive of highly selected memories*" (I. Hodder 2005, p. 131) as they enclose in them thousands of years of history and artifacts with a special value. Under the present conditions of economic development (infrastructural works, constructions, agricultural works) these monuments are more and more threaten with destruction. This is why a good collaboration is needed between the specialists involved in their research and the local authorities for the preservation and protection of *tell* settlements.

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- ArchaeoLandscapes Europe.

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² <http://www.catalhoyuk.com>

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Pl. 1. Sultana Malu-Roșu, Călărași County. 1. Aerial image of the site (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC); 2. North-western view of the site eroded by the waters of Iezerul Mostiștea.

Sultana Malu-Roșu, jud. Călărași. 1. Imagine aeriană a sitului (foto C. Bem, © cIMeC); 2. Vedere dinspre nord-vest a sitului erodat de apele Iezerului Mostiștea.



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Pl. 2. 1. Coțatcu Cetățuia, Buzău County. General view of the site affected by land slides; 2. Glina, Ilfov County. Image of the site used as earth source for different constructions.

1. Coțatcu Cetățuia, jud. Buzău. Imagine de ansamblu a sitului afectat de alunecări de teren; 2. Glina, jud. Ilfov. Imagine a sitului folosit ca sursă de pământ pentru diverse amenajări.



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Pl. 3. Hârșova, Constanța County. 1. Aerial view of the site invaded by modern habitation (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC); 2. View of the profile with traces of burnt Chalcolithic dwellings.
Hârșova, jud. Constanța. 1. Imagine aeriană a sitului invadat de locuirea modernă (foto C. Bem, © cIMeC). 2. Vedere a profilului cu urme de locuințe eneolitice incendiate.



Pl. 4. Măgura Bran, Teleorman County. 1. Aerial view of the site with the village cemetery (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC); 2. View of the site from the village.
Măgura Bran, jud. Teleorman. 1. Imagine aeriană a sitului cu cimitirul satului (foto C. Bem, © cIMeC); 2. Vedere a sitului dinspre sat.



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Pl. 5. Uzun, Giurgiu County. 1. Profile of the site with traces of Neolithic burnt dwellings; 2. View of the site invaded by constructions.

Uzun, jud. Giurgiu. 1. Profil al sitului cu urme de locuințe incendiate; 2. Imagine a sitului invadat de construcții.



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Pl. 6. Alexandria Gorgan, Teleorman County. 1. Aerial view of the site (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC);
2. Stratigraphic profile during researches.
Alexandria Gorgan, jud. Teleorman. 1. Imagine aeriană a sitului (foto C. Bem, © cIMeC). 2. Profil
al sitului în timpul cercetărilor.



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Pl. 7. Vidra Măgura Jidovilor, Ilfov County. 1. Image of the site during 1933 campaign (after D.V. Rosetti, 1934); 2. Image of the place where the site used to be, nowadays completely destroyed by agricultural works; 3. "The Goddess from Vidra", anthropomorphic figurine discovered in the settlement (after D.V. Rosetti, 1934, pl. I-III/1).

Vidra Măgura Jidovilor, jud. Ilfov. 1. Imagine a sitului în timpul campaniei din anul 1933 (după D.V. Rosetti, 1934); 2. Imagine actuală a locului unde a fost situl, distrus în totalitate de lucrările agricole; 3. "Zeița de la Vidra", statueta antropomorfă descoperită în așezare (după D.V. Rosetti, 1934, pl. I-III/1).



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Pl. 8. Sites affected by agricultural works: 1. Slăvești, Teleorman County; 2. Trivale Moșteni, Teleorman County (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC).
Situri afectate de lucrări agricole: 1. Slăvești, jud. Teleorman; 2. Trivale Moșteni, jud. Teleorman (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC).



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Pl. 9. Vitănești Măgurice, Teleorman County: 1. Image from 1993 with the site affected by agricultural works; 2. Aerial view of the site from 2010 (photo C. Bem, © cIMeC).
Vitănești Măgurice, jud. Teleorman: 1. Imagine din anul 1993 cu situl afectat de lucrări agricole; 2. Imagine aeriană a sitului din anul 2010 (foto C. Bem, © cIMeC).



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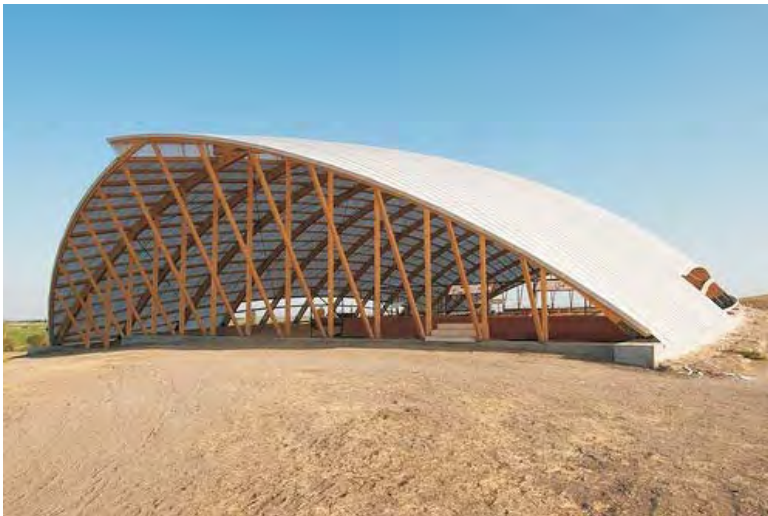


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Pl. 10. Drăgănești-Olt, Olt County. 1-2. Reconstruction of the tell settlement within the Museum of Boian Plain.
Drăgănești-Olt, jud. Olt. 1-2. Reconstituirea așezării de tip tell în cadrul Muzeului Câmpiei Boianului.



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Pl. 11. Çatal Hüyük, Turkey. 1-3. Protection structures of the site, with infrastructure for visitors (after <http://www.catalhoyuk.com>).

Çatal Hüyük, Turcia. 1-3. Structuri de protecție a sitului, cu infrastructura pentru vizitare (<http://www.catalhoyuk.com>).