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Göbekli Tepe and the Sites around the Urfa Plain (SE Turkey): Recent Discoveries and New Interpretations

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Abstract. The most famous Pre-pottery Neolithic site of Anatolia, Göbekli Tepe, since 1994 has been the subject of intensive studies due to its peculiar characteristics, linked to the presence of both circular buildings and the so-called anthropomorphic T-shaped pillars. It was supposed that its discovery would have been one of a kind, but in the next few years scholars revealed the existence of similar settlements in the area of Şanlıurfa Province. These sites, still far from being investigated, share with Göbekli Tepe the same archaeological evidences, including chronological features, size and architectural and iconographic traits. The aim of this article is to focus on the new available data, which could lead us to re-discuss the interpretive models valid up to a few years ago, as recent publications point out. New interpretive tools and excavations are required to better understand what seems to be the clue of the presence of a real cultural *facies* with precise connotations, amongst which an high specialized craftmanship, that was able to exploit the best limestone morphology of the territory for the construction of monumental complexes.

Keywords. Göbekli Tepe, T-shaped pillars, Pre-pottery Neolithic, Anatolia, communal buildings, History houses, circular enclosures, chiefdoms, animalistic art, Totemism.

INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the Neolithic, in south-western Asia, a radical change was witnessed concerning the type of architecture. In fact, unlike in previous periods, communities of individuals in those territories began to spend considerable energy in the construction of houses, community buildings and in the organization of entire settlements.[1]

Without forgetting the ecological reasons,[2] from the general global warming that occurred around 9600 BC which caused the melting of glaciers, rising sea levels and the territorial expansion of plants and animals (Scarre 2009: 176-182), or the demographic increase following the end of the Pleistocene (Binford 1968), probably more significant results were obtained as a consequence of cultural and cognitive developments. These were able to induce people to create new plots in symbolic representation and in the consequent reification of these ideas in innovative architectural structures (Watkins 2006: 15), which led Man towards a sedentary life starting from the Epipaleolithic period. Until then, within the tectonic phase, there is no documentation of major artistic events except for the so-called "cave art", recorded exclusively in France and Spain, and some other isolated cases (Renfrew 2011: 107). It was only with the end of the Pleistocene that this new "psycho-cultural" mentality became the preamble to that "Revolution of Symbols" (Cauvin 1997), which reached its apex during the Neolithic period.

From the 1960s onwards, the province of Şanlıurfa became the arena for important archaeological studies and excavations: particular importance was given to the prehistoric studies begun in south-eastern Anatolia in 1963 under the supervision of R. Braidwood and H. Çambel, which were able to reveal the region's key role during the Neolithic period. From then on, excavations were carried out at Çayönü, Biris Mezarlığı and Söğüt Tarlası and many other Neolithic sites (Çambel, Braidwood 1980), which pioneered the discovery of very important sites for our knowledge of the Neolithic Aceramic period (Pre-pottery Neolithic) in Anatolia, the most notably one Göbekli Tepe. Considered a singular site since its founding, Göbekli Tepe is the subject of intensive studies and speculations linked to its unique architectural and iconographic features.

The aim of this article is to reveal the most recent research conducted on the site, which puts it in contrast to what was originally supposed, namely that it was a "mountain sanctuary" of hunter-gatherers, with a cult, not to say religious value: the discovery of new Neolithic settlements contemporary to Göbekli Tepe, which share with it archaeological evidences, including the most famous architectural tract known as T-shaped pillars, suggest the existence of a real cultural *facies*, with precise connotations limited to the current Şanlıurfa Province, which was able to exploit the best limestone morphology of the territory in the construction of monumental complexes.

DESCRIPTION

The site of Göbekli Tepe

Located at the top of an extensive range of limestone hills overlooking the Harran plain, which is a visible point from a great distance, 15km northeast of the city center of Şanlıurfa, Göbekli Tepe, whose name means

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[1] The following article comes as the result of my MA dissertation discussed at the University of Pisa.

[2] From a climatic point of view, the transition between Pleistocene and Holocene in Southwest Asia has been characterized by abrupt changes in rainfall, vegetation, temperature and seasonality, which have had a significant impact on water resources, bringing a wetter and warmer climate in the Near East and spreading the forest into the steppe interior of Anatolia (Asouti *et al.* 2015: 1565), as evidenced by palynological analysis (Van Zeist, Bottema 1991: 34-49). However, starting from the Holocene, unlike what was hypothesized by G. Childe, the climate in Anatolia has not undergone great variations and has remained almost continental: this fact has been learned as a result of archaeological studies of carbonized remains of plants and seeds of species still present today (pistachio, oak, almond), found within the contexts of the PPNA (Çelik 2016a: 183).
This type of climatic condition, which alternates between very rainy periods and a hot summer, not making one condition prevail over the other, has unfortunately led to the destruction of most of the Neolithic wooden remains, used for the construction of buildings (Kurapkat 2014: 81).

"bulging mountain",[3] is an artificial mound about 300m in diameter and more than 15m high made of accumulated layers of debris deposited over an area of 9ha (Schmidt 2010a: 239), facing the springs of the Balikh to the east, also known as Cülap çay.

Excavations have been carried out since 1994[4] under the direction of the Museum of Şanlıurfa and the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul (DAI), within the so-called "Urfa-Project".

Stratigraphically speaking, there are not great certainties until now, except for the so-called "Level I", the latest and post-Neolithic layer, which points out mainly agricultural activities from the Middle Ages and modern times which caused erosion on the top of the tell and sedimentation on the slopes. As highlighted by the trench on the southern side of the excavation, this level reaches a thickness of more than 2m.

The earliest Neolithic horizon dates to the 9600-8800 cal BC, PPNA/EPPNB (Schmidt 2002b: 24), also called "Level III", to which all major circular buildings, from 10 to 30m in diameter, and larger T-shaped pillars (2-5.5m) belong. A geoelectrical survey including GPR confirmed their presence all over the site and not just into a specific area of the mound (Becker *et al.* 2014b: 11). These studies revealed more than ten buildings in addition to the eight already excavated, designated A-H according to the date of their discovery. Five of these monumental structures, A, B, C, D and G, are located in the main excavation area in the southern depression of the mound; Enclosure F is placed in the southwest hill, Enclosure E in the western plateau, whereas Enclosure H, one of the most recent discoveries, is located in the north-west hill (Notroff *et al.* 2016: 66).

Two circular pits with each 2m of depth coved into the bedrock have been found north-west of Enclosure E: probably linked to the building, these pool-like structures are really common in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period of Southeastern Anatolia in order to accumulate water.[5] Small burrows with diameter of 10-15cm and depth of 10-15cm at frequent intervals so as to form a circle represent the first stage of their building technique (Çelik 2016a: 182).

On the other hand, the most recent Neolithic layer, the so-called "Level II", presents architectural remains belonging to the periods between the EPPNB and the MPPNB (ca 8800-8000 cal BC) (DAI 2003: 171). It consists of buildings with rectangular rooms made of stone walls, terrazzo floor and often other unusual installations such as large stone rings (Schmidt 2002b: 24). Some of these buildings may have T-shaped pillars too, although smaller ones (approx. 1.5m).

In addition to these three levels, there is a fourth layer of occupation that has never been interpreted univocally before. Evaluated as Level IIB, subsequent to Level II(A), in the excavation plan of 2004 (Schmidt 2006b: 349, Fig. 2), in the plan of 2008 it then became intermediate between the layers mentioned above (Level II/III), in the one of 2010, in which it is clearly referred to as Level IV (Schmidt 2012b: 332, Fig. 2), even prior to Level III, and then its placing remains uncertain until the latest published studies (Notroff *et al.* 2016: 67, Fig. 5.1). The structures belonging to this phase of occupation are not fixed as well, but they are generally located in the central area of the hill, such as the enclosures G[6] and F (Dietrich *et al.* 2014: 12, Fig. 2).

Level III ends with a "ritual burial": covered with 3-5m of soil, the buildings of Göbekli Tepe are witnesses of this Anatolian tradition of the Neolithic period, involving both religious and domestic buildings, which relates them to a spiritual system (Özdoğan, Özdoğan 1998: 591). The origin of this filling material (300-500m3 of debris for each building: DAI 2004: 214) is still unknown, but it is not sterile soil because of the findings of the PPNA/EPPNB, including Helwan points, El-Khiam and Aswad points (PPNA), Byblos, Nemrik and Nevalı Çori points (EPPNB) (Schmidt 1996: 3).

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[3] See Schmidt (2011a: 98).

[4] The first appearance of Göbekli Tepe in official archaeological documents dates to 1980, when he was mentioned by archaeologist Peter Benedict in his article "Survey Work in Southeastern Anatolia" (Benedict 1980: 179-182). He went so far as to classify the site as medieval or modern, because of findings that he mistakenly considered small cemeteries and tombstones (Schmidt 2011a: 25).

[5] One of the two basins, the northernmost one, also has a central conical slab, an altar alike, and an access staircase with five steps, carved into the rock (Beile-Bohn *et al.* 1999: 48, Fig. 20; Schmidt 2007b: 279, Fig. 214) For further information, see Herrmann, Schmidt (2012: 57-67).

[6] There are currently no publications on Enclosure G. The only news come from Schmidt (2011b: 47).

Analyses made on samples of pedogenic carbonates have recently established a good *terminus ante quem* for the refilling of the enclosures: in particular, we must assume a first filling for Level III having as *terminus ante quem* the second half of the 9th millennium BC[7] and a second one for Level II in the middle of the 8th millennium BC (Dietrich, Schmidt 2010: 82).

Several elements cut in the rocky substrate have been found during surveys conducted in the areas around the mound (Schmidt 2009a: 187-223): among them, it is important to remember the already mentioned "pools" (DAI 1996: 607, Fig. 3), inlets for the extraction of rocks used in buildings, unfinished monoliths of stone[8] still *in situ*, 3 *phalloi* engraved in the rock of the western slope (Schmidt 1998: 3; 2000a: Table 10, Figs 1-2), and a great amount of chipped stone.

Level III

Level III includes the largest circular megalithic buildings, with a diameter of 10-30m, excavated in the middle of the great depression on the southern slope. The perimetrical pillars that belong to this phase are usually more than 3m high, they are linked with walls of quarry stone and benches and they are oriented towards the two central pillars (5.5m high in Enclosure D: DAI 2010: 184, Fig. 3).

Many pillars have anthropomorphic engravings or relieves, some of them appear to have stylized arms and hands connected to a decorated belt[9] (Schmidt 2011a: Fig. 117). However, the most unexpected feature is the one concerning the wide range of animal figures: there are not only ferocious animals represented in a hostile attitude, such as scorpions, snakes, wild boars, foxes, but also harmless one, as for instance gazelles and various bird species. Starting from the earliest excavation, buildings take their name after the most present species on their pillars. It is significant to see that all depicted animals are male, often sexually aroused, and no clearly female symbol is visible so far (Schmidt 1999: 13). One of the most remarkable sculptures discovered all over the site is the high relief of a predator on the perimetrical Pillar 27 in Enclosure C, which is a masterpiece of great plastic craftsmanship (Fig. 1).

Concerning lithic industry, the so-called Jerf el Ahmar "plaques" with incised signs (Stordeur, Abbès 2002: 591, Fig. 16/1-3), also found in Körtik Tepe, have been discovered, as well as zoomorphic Nemrik type stone "sceptres", which we have evidence of in Hallan Çemi, Nevalı Çori, Çayönü, Mureybet and Jerf el Ahmar (Dietrich *et al.* 2012: 685, Fig. 9), and that could actually have different meanings, depending on their framework.[10]

Naviform cores, retouched blades, scrapers, burins and sickles have been found at each stage of production; even if arrowheads of the Byblos and Nemrik type are quite common (Schmidt 2002b: 24), Large Byblos, El-Khiam and Nevalı Çori points are not, in contrast with the massive presence of these in the oldest layers (EPPNB) of the site of the same name, where the T-shaped pillars were found. The great availability of these arrowheads in Jerf

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[7] Among the findings of Level III fillings are lithic findings, such as arrowheads, blades and cores, wild botanical species, such as almonds, pistachios and wheat, and a large amount of wild animal bones: careful analysis revealed a rich fauna of non-domestic species, which includes wild cattle (20%) and onagers (10%), Persian gazelles (43%) and wild boars (8%), goats (11%) and deer (8%) (Peters *et al.* 1999: 35). Other studies have made it possible to verify, through intra-species comparisons of the bone weight parameter, that for example in cattle is related to body weight, that the *Bos taurus primigenius* contributed to 50% of the total meat consumed, while the gazelle, the most hunted animal, only 15% (Peters, Schmidt 2004: 207-208). Different investigations indicate this amount of bones found (about 30000) as the cause of the high amount of phosphate found within the Level III sediments (Schmidt 2006b: 345). Human remains are found among the bones, too.

[8] E.g. the gigantic pillar (6.9m) found on the northern plateau (DAI 1997: 551, Fig. 1). In the site of Karahan Tepe a 4.5m pillar was discovered too ready to be removed from the rock (Moetz, Çelik 2012: 706, Fig. 4).

[9] The 'T' pillars have been interpreted as stylizations of individuals following the discovery of the so-called "Urfa man" in Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle (Çelik 2014a: 20; 2014b: 102).

[10] E.g. in Körtik Tepe two type of zoomorphic Nemrik sceptres have been discovered, the first kind made of hard stone and partially worn, with a clear functional purpose, and the second one made of chlorite, with no trace of use and perhaps linked to the ritual sphere, found in funerary furnishings (Özkaya, Coşkun 2011: 97, 122, Figs 24-25).

el Ahmar (PPNA) raises doubts about a possible chronological explanation, which can be the case for the Helwan type points, also present in the Aswad variant, found in the levels of Göbekli Tepe's PPNA (Schmidt 2000b: 52). Instruments of type Çayönü and points Palmyra, Amuq or Ugarit were not found in Göbekli Tepe.[11]

The first structure to be discovered was Enclosure A, also called the "Snake Pillar Building" (Schmidt 2000b: 49). It contains six T-shaped pillars *in situ*, three of which bear relief motifs: Pillars 1 and 2, about 3m tall each, feature respectively a relief depicting snakes and a ram, and a bull, fox and crane and a *bucranium* (Fig. 2). Pillar 5, whereas, roughly 2.1m tall and arranged like an orthostat, continues the ophidian theme.

A bench was found between Pillars 1 and 2, while a number of sculptures were found in the fill debris, including a lithic mask, an *ithyphallic* lion, the head of a wild boar and an animal bearing a human head (Schmidt 2000a: 8-11). At the moment the remaining Pillars 3, 4 and 7 show no sign of figures but their presence should not be ruled out as the structure has not been completely excavated (Schmidt 2007b: 272, 274).

Thanks to the 14C analysis of plant remains (wood charcoal of *Pistacia sp.* and *Amygdalus sp.*) the enclosure has been dated to 9000 cal BC (Kromer, Schmidt 1998: 8). The results are in line with lithic remains found, amongst which there are El-Khiam, Helwan and Aswad-type arrowheads which indicate a chronological period dating back to the PPNA (DAI 2000: 593). In addition to this ancient period, the structure shows more recent enclosure modifications, still dating back to PPN, which can be determined by the arrangement of the rectangular-shaped wall preserved to the west and located at a higher level than the floors of the structure itself (Schmidt 1997: 8-9).

The "Fox Building", or Enclosure B, has an internal diameter approximately less than 10m and is located at the north of Enclosure A (Schmidt 2002a: 8-9, Fig. 1; 2013: 81, 88, Fig. 9) and houses a total of 11 pillars.[12]

Central Pillars 9 and 10 both show signs of a relief depicting a fox (DAI 2002: 664, Fig. 2). They are about 3.5m tall and weigh 7 tonnes each (DAI 2003: 171). The remaining pillars are placed around the perimeter within the circular stone wall and in a radial position compared to the two central pillars, apart from Pillar 15 which is parallel to the two. On the southern face of Pillar 6 there are reliefs of a reptile and a snake (Schmidt 1999: 13, Fig. 5), while Pillar 14 also shows a fox on the right side and a snake on the back (Schmidt 2007b: 274, Pl. 2).

A terrazzo floor was found in the central part of the structure, with an exposed area of a few square metres, as well as a lithic plate fixed on the floor in front of the central eastern pillar which almost forms part of the enclosure itself and is most likely linked to some activities associated with the use of liquids. Investigations carried out in Trench L9-67 confirmed the existence of a second circular stone belonging to the enclosure, whose access way seems to be confirmed by the discovery of a porthole found *in situ* that presents reliefs of two foxes at the side of a *bucranium* (Dietrich 2017: online article; Schmidt 2010a: 250).

If the radiocarbon dating of a fragment of pedogenic carbonate from Pillar 8 of Enclosure B establishes a date no later than the EPPNB for this backfilling – that is about 8960 ± 85 BP (Pustovoytov 2002: 4) – a dating later than 8430 ± 80 BP[13] is established for the burial of Enclosure C, the "Enclosure of the wild boar"[14] (Figs 3-4).

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[11] It was established to address the issue of lithic finds here, without splitting it between Level III and II: in fact, in literature the finds are classified as belonging to one or the other level, when they probably belong to their respective fill debris. If, as hypothesized, the Enclosures A-H of the Level III are older than the rectangular rooms of the Level II, it is not said that the filling of such buildings is equally anterior. Moreover, according to the latest datings, scholars suggest a probable contemporaneity between the enclosures of Level III and those of Level II, at least during a phase of occupation of the site (Dietrich *et al.* 2019a: 4-6). It should also not be forgotten that the backfilling at both levels was not taken from a virgin soil, but in turn presents both PPNA and EPPNB remains. A confirmation of this comes from the lithic finds of Enclosure H, which shows the presence of Nemrik and Byblos points (EPPNB), but the total absence of El-Khiam and Helwan points (PPNA), discovered instead in several buildings of Level III, as stated in Dietrich *et al.* (2016: 65). To associate, therefore, a find at a specific level is an operation that is anything but elementary.

[12] In Schmidt (2007b: 272) is said that a further pillar may have been lost as a result of illegal excavations that partially damaged the circular building.

[13] To better understand the dating methodology used, please read Pustovoytov (2003: 24-27) or Pustovoytov, Taubald (2003: 25-32).

[14] See the representations in the form of engravings, all-round reliefs or protomes of figures 4 (Pillar 27), 3 (Pillar 35) and 6 (between Pillars 39 and 28) in Schmidt (2008b: 29-31).

It stands as a series of concentric circles with a total diameter of 30m, of which the two most internal ones have pillars (Schmidt 2007b: 276). As it stands, we know that there are two central pillars, followed by eleven pillars in the first circle and eight in the second one (Dietrich *et al.* 2014: 12, Fig. 3).

Unlike the other structures, Enclosure C has significantly undergone iconoclastic actions chronologically not well identified.[15] The excavation of a pit of more than 10m in diameter in its central part resulted in the destruction of the twin pillars (P35 and P37) into many pieces. In front of this central pillar, that was originally more than 5m high and bears a relief of a bull, two pierced stone plates, a rudimentary vessel and the sculpture of a wild boar with a fragmented base (Fig. 5) – all made of limestone – were found. A twin sculpture was found close to Pillar 12 belonging to the second circle, this too with a damaged base. This evidence allows us to hypothesize their arrangement on one of the faces of the pillars as an original high relief, similar to the spectacular sculpture of the predator on Pillar 27 found in the first circle.

In addition to the wild boar, the animal symbol of this enclosure, many effigies of an undefined predator appear – perhaps a large feline such as a leopard or a canine – along with depictions of ducks and bustards (Peters, Schmidt 2004: Fig. 13). The theme of the snake, cherished in structures A and D, is totally absent. During excavations, it was no surprise when hands and fingers soon became visible on Pillar 40 and geometric bas-reliefs representing symbols in the form of a "H" and a "U" on Pillar 28 (Schmidt 2008b: 31-32).

One of the main features of this building is the lack of a terrazzo floor, hallmark which so far has only been found in the so-called "Rock temple", now referred to as Enclosure E.[16] In fact, the two structures lay directly on the bedrock, reached in Enclosure C at the height of 796.60m a.s.l. – the same as the limestone plain that surrounds the site (Schmidt 2008b: 27) – and have the same two pedestals of about 30cm which are pierced centrally to better anchor the supported pillars to the surface (Schmidt 2007b: 273; 2008b: 27-28). Within these grooves, traces of stone and mud filling were found, which were used as a "buffer" (Schmidt 2011c: 219, Fig. 2). It is believed that these two enclosures are the first and oldest created in Göbekli Tepe due to the presence of this rocky floor.[17] The lack of suitable space for the buildings would have resulted in the subsequent overlap of structures, which in turn would have developed the need to think up alternative methods for making the floors through the use of cemented limestone surfaces called "terrazzo" that imitated the previous use of the rocky layer (Schmidt 2007b: 276).

Initially the access way to the structure was characterized by a narrow passage – a "*Dromos*" - between two parallel walls made of massive stone sheets worked on all sides, the biggest of which protrudes towards the inside of the corridor and suggests a connection to the original opening or portal. After having fallen into disuse, this porthole was walled, as witnessed by the two lower rows of a block wall preserved *in situ*. On the southern facade of this porthole-stone, just below the opening that led visitors into the entry of the enclosure, a limestone slab with a flat relief of the animal symbol of this complex was found: a wild boar lying on its back (Schmidt 2010a: 253, Fig. 26). A little more on the southern side, a large U-shaped monolith was discovered, of which the column on the left presents the sculpture of a predator, that sits at the top like a guardian, while the one on the right was not preserved at all (Dietrich *et al.* 2014: 11).

The third element that forms the access way to the enclosure is made up of a stairway (eight steps have been discovered as it stands) that, it is believed, was necessary for overcoming the difference in level due to the original entrance, about which we still know very little (Becker *et al.* 2014a: 5).[18]

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[15] It could be an event dated to Level II or Level I as reported in Schmidt (2002a: 9) or it could simply belong to a post-Neolithic era of uncertain dating, as reported in Schmidt (2008b: 27). This destructive action was accompanied by fire, as witnessed by Pillar 35, the eastern one, whose lower side, preserved in situ in a vertical position, shows signs of a fracture caused by intense heat.

[16] A circular perimeter of 10m in diameter is the only thing visible of Enclosure E: in fact, no pillars or walls have been found, but only an "imprint" dug a few centimetres into bedrock, which brings to light a carefully worked rocky floor, a kind of pre-terrazzo-like floor, and a low bench running along the sides (Schmidt 1995: 9; 2006c: 109). Due to its special position in the western part of the mound, it is impossible to establish any stratigraphic relationship with the excavation areas investigated so far and the other structures.

[17] Even though in Schmidt (2010a: 240, Fig. 2) Enclosure E is associated with the Structures F and G and dated to the hypothetical intermediate Level II/III.

[18] A similar staircase has been found in Trench K10-24, not far from Enclosure H (Dietrich *et al.* 2014: 14, Fig. 8).

Although Enclosure D was initially called the "Enclosure of the crane", there does not seem to be a marked iconographic preference for this bird which features beside depictions of snakes, foxes, wild asses, insects, spiders, bulls and gazelles. It is configured as an ovoid structure of 20m in diameter with thirteen pillars, perhaps fifteen originally (Schmidt 2007b: 275), dated to EPPNA, 9675-9314 cal BC (Dietrich, Schmidt 2010: 82-83).[19]

The depictions of animals are combined with those of abstract symbols, an "H" shape, a crescent moon, a *bucranium* and anthropomorphic elements. For example, on the two central pillars of about 5.5m in height and weighing 10 tonnes, arms and hands clasped on the abdomen are perfectly visible, as well as a belt and a sort of leather sack or cape at the waist (Schmidt 2010a: 244, Fig. 9) and a necklace in the form of a *bucranium* on the neck.

Between all the pillars discovered until now, P33 and P43 possess the most complex and singular reliefs. Pillar 33, for example, shows depictions of different birds on the eastern face, three buzzards on the head and three large cranes on the trunk above a motif of wavy lines (Fig. 6) that were initially interpreted as a stream (Schmidt 2002a: 11) which in the rear margin of the pillar flows into heads of snakes (Schmidt 2011a: 184). Above the water and between the cranes, H-shaped pictograms and small foxes with miniature markings are depicted (Schmidt 2011a: 199).

The images continue on the front of the pillar where there are reliefs of a spider, other snakes, a six-legged insect, an "H" symbol and a series of motifs in an arc in the central area, while the margins are rich with geometric motifs of a triangular nature. Finally, the western side presents a relief of a fox with snakes emerging from its chest that spread around towards the front face of the pillar.

The entire surface of Pillar 43 is covered with motifs amongst which stands out a large vulture looking towards the centre of the building (Fig. 7). This bird holds up its right wing while the left wing points forwards, in the direction of another bird. Above these two, a third bird, a snake and two "H-shaped" symbols bind to a pattern of concentric triangles and small squares. Between these two features, in a central position compared to the pillar's face, there is a spherical element, maybe a solar disk.

Directly above the band of triangles three large objects in the shape of a "padlock" are visible, each one depicting an animal, and at the top of these another band of triangles is present.

On the body of the pillar, however, there is the relief of an enormous scorpion, a fox and a snake arranged to the left and encased by the stone wall. Another bird carries a beheaded and ithyphallic human that, together with the presence of other dangerous animals, could be an indication that the individual suffered a violent death (Schmidt 2006a: 39-40).

A final characteristic of Pillar 43 concerns its placement that is exactly between Trenches L9-68 and L9-69, in the precise point on which the terrace wall associated with Level II passes (Schmidt 2008a: 420).

Having hybrid characters, since they present similar characteristics to both the enclosures of Level III[20] of the south-eastern area and those of Level II[21] excavated mainly in the north-east, Enclosure F (Dietrich *et al.* 2012: Fig. 12) of Göbekli Tepe is located on the western side of the hill and it was discovered just under the surface in Trenches K09-77/87.[22] It has a diameter of 10m – equal to that of Enclosure B (Dietrich *et al.* 2015: 100) – and features pillars that are fragmented in the centre due to the proximity of the surface.

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[19] The discovery of a small fragment of clay plaster, belonging to the stone fence (Trench L9-68), has allowed the extraction in the laboratory of the quantities of charcoal needed to date the structure to 14C, which is thus older than Enclosure A.

[20] This structure recalls the oldest buildings both for the circular shape of the enclosure, with two central pillars and different perimeters, connected by stone benches (Dietrich *et al.* 2012: 690, Fig. 612), and the presence of a terrazzo floor (about 80cm below the benches). The south-west (and not south-east) orientation is the distinctive feature.

[21] As in earlier buildings, the pillars of Enclosure F are smaller in size (they reach a maximum of 2.15m with Pillar XXXV) and are therefore indicated by Roman numerals.

[22] In particular, Enclosure E is attributed to Level II in some works (Schmidt 2007b: 271, Fig. 9), between Layer II and Layer III in other publications (Schmidt 2010a: 240, Fig. 2), or remains as an uncertain construction, connected to Level IV, in some others (Dietrich *et al.* 2014: 12, Fig. 2). This peculiar hybridism, shared with a building found in Harbetsuvan Tepesi with a diameter of 20m (Çelik 2014a: 13), does not allow a clear stratigraphic placement of the structure.

From an iconographic point of view, the structure does not particularly differ from the enclosures of Level III, presenting zoomorphic reliefs such as foxes (Pillar XXXVII: Schmidt 2007b: 276-277), wild boars and birds (Pillar XXXIV) and V-shaped motifs and sculpted arms on Nevalı Çori type pillars (Schmidt 2009b: 165-166). Extremely interesting is the flat relief with a 25cm high sculpted male figure with a long neck discovered on the back of Pillar XXV (Schmidt 2009b: 177, Fig. 4). In addition to being iconographically connected to the beheaded and *ithyphallic* figure of Pillar 43 of Enclosure D, the motif of this pillar, which presents a new genre of vestment-type decoration, continues across to another fragment of the same pillar that shows the relief of a dog measuring about 10cm.

Enclosure F is not the only structure to appear in the so-called "undefined" layer. In fact, a few metres to the west of Enclosure D but at a decidedly higher level lies Enclosure G that has not been excavated yet. In addition, to the north of the latter there is a clear sequence of layers and structures of a mainly circular shape that together form what was recently defined as the "first nucleus of settlement", probably destroyed following the erection of complexes C and D.

All these structures could belong to an older "Level IV" (Schmidt 2011b: 47-48) that is currently unknown[23] (Notroff *et al.* 2016: 67, Fig. 5.1).

Discovered thanks to the geomagnetic investigations conducted in the north-western depression of the hill, Enclosure H possesses a circular/ovoid layout of about 10m in diameter, a couple of central pillars and, as of today, seven perimetral pillars that preserve the usual iconographic traits (Dietrich *et al.* 2016: Fig. 6). As with the other structures of Level III[24], the presence of a second circle of external walls would indicate an older phase of construction (Dietrich *et al.* 2016: 58). Just like Enclosure C, it seems to have undergone iconoclastic and destructive work in antiquity, probably preceded by modifications during usage, shown by the evidence of the reuse of Pillars 66 and 69[25] that present an atypical orientation that may indicate a secondary use (Clare *et al.* 2018: 123), with the long side towards the interior of the enclosure and given that they are surmounted by a limestone slab.

From the iconographic point of view, the general predominance of incision over relief is significant and this is perfectly demonstrated by Pillar 56 with a total of 55 animals that bear witness to a vacuous artistic horror. Some of the animals recognized are birds of prey, cranes, ducks, snakes and some mammals, possibly felines.

If Pillar 57 can be remembered for the presence of a unique relief depicting a scolopendra (Becker *et al.* 2014a: 6), Pillar 66 deserves interest not for the animals depicted (a couple of bulls or deer), but for its dramatic theme instead. According to academics, the features of the animals could represent a moment of extreme suffering, such as approaching death, or death itself [26] (Dietrich *et al.* 2016: Fig. 13).

The last consideration tied to this building concerns the traces of plaster and clay mortar discovered in some points along the wall. The ease with which this enclosure was devastated by atmospheric agents, especially rain, could certainly have been countered by long term restoration and promoted by ritual communal ceremonies (Clare *et al.* 2018: 131), but could also direct us to a hypothesis of an upper cover that could have protected the enclosure's interior from bad weather, up to the moment of the "ritual burial" (Dietrich *et al.* 2016: 59).

To sum up, the dating of structures A, B, and C, D allows us to establish that the Göbekli Tepe structures were not all constructed at the same time but some more recently than others (Dietrich *et al.* 2016: 65).

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[23] E.g. Trenches L9-59/79/88/89/97/98/99, L9-58, where Enclosure G is located, and K09-77/87 to which Enclosure F belongs.

[24] Chronologically speaking, to the present day there are three radiocarbon dates for Enclosure H, one coming from the clay plaster found on the stone wall between Pillar 54 and Pillar 66 (8520 ± 60 cal BC), two from the filling of the structure (8650 ± 50 and 8680 ± 80 cal BC). These data, therefore, suggest that the construction of the building took place before the LPPNA, while its burial after the EPPNB.

[25] The reuse of pillars has also been found in other buildings, such as P21 in Enclosure D and P36 in Enclosure C.

[26] For more information, see the frescoes found by J. Mellaart in Çatalhöyük, depicting scenes of deer and uro hunting (Hodder 2006: 197, Fig. 84 and Tab. 15; Mellaart 1962: Tab. XVa).

Level II

The buildings of Level II are generally characterized by a rectangular plan, small size (about 3 x 4m) and a terrazzo floor.[27] These buildings date back to the 9th millennium BC during the EPPNB[28] and occupy the empty space between the structures of Level III, except for small areas, where they partially overlap the oldest layers (e.g. Trenches L9-66). Their location is linked to the creation of a terrace raised above Level III, delimited by a wall enclosing the area of the south-eastern depression of the A-D buildings.[29]

The T-shaped pillars found in Level II are smaller (1.5m average height), as well as less common, inside the buildings. They are mainly located in a central position, although they are totally absent in many buildings and they follow the Roman numbering, so that they are distinct from those of the older layers. As for the circular structures of the oldest Level III, no evidence of domestic activities, such as fireplaces and ovens, has been found so far (Notroff *et al.* 2016: 66), even if there are little documented stone bowls[30] arranged on the floors (Schmidt 2010b: 259, Fig. 4) and stone rings whose function is unknown, similar to that found among the Central American cultures of the Colombian period (Schmidt 2009b: 168).

The main structure of Level II, found in Trench L10-71 in the north-east area, called "Lion Pillar Building", most probably not a complete building but a cellar-like structure (Schmidt 2000b: 49), shows a rectangular room with walls up to 2m high. Four pillars lie in a central position arranged in two rows, while the other four stand along the perimeter (Dietrich *et al.* 2016: Fig. 3).

The inner pillars located to the east reveal flat relief representations of lions with their jaws wide open and leaping as if to catch a prey, while the other two are bare. One of the perimeter pillars along the south wall show arms and hands and has significant similarities with the pillar found in Nevalı Çori. Its placement inside the wall obviously establishes a subsequent reuse compared to its first realization.

In the space between the two pillars with flat reliefs, a stone slab has been discovered with a motif that is completely foreign to the site: it is a depiction of a woman squatting with open legs, in an undefined situation, probably connected to the sexual sphere (Fig. 8). The peculiarity of this figure concerns not only the theme that emerges, but also the anomalous technique used for its realization: the graffito engraving. For this reason, it may not be part of the original decoration of the building (Schmidt 2010a: 246).

On the terrazzo floor, at a depth of about two meters, stone slabs have been found: it is likely to think that they are the remains of a fallen roof. Although it is not certain yet whether to consider the building underground or semi-underground, the discovery of another room at its south, including a pair of pillars without relief, could confirm its belonging to a larger structure (Schmidt 2011a: 245-246).

The Sites of The Urfa Area

In any case, terrazzo floor-like buildings, T-shaped pillars and the circular enclosures are not unique to Göbekli Tepe. As a topic still relatively untouched, sites like Karahan Tepe, Ayanlar Höyük, Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle,

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[27] Rectangular buildings of about 4m x 7m whose function is unknown, characterized by walls made of large stones, flat and unfinished, without access and therefore probably semi-underground, were also discovered in Harbetsuvan Tepesi (Çelik 2014a: 14).

[28] To date, the buildings of Level II are those belonging to Trenches K09-97, L09-07/17/27/37/47 located in the south-west of the hill, and those in the south-eastern depression of Trenches L9-55/56/57/59/69/60/70/80/95/96 and L10-51/61/71. According to lithic deposits and radiocarbon dates, the *Löwenpfeilergebäude*, for example, should be dated to the EPPNB-MPPNB (Schmidt 1997: 9). The latest radiocarbon analyses performed in Dietrich *et al.* (2013: 38-40, Tab. 1 and Figs 2-3) date Layer II to 8880 ± 60 14C-BP, 8241-7795 cal BC, with a 95.4% level of reliability.

[29] This element is clearly visible, for example, in L9-79, where a staircase was also found (Schmidt 2002a: 9-11, Figs 6, 10), and in L9-68 and L9-69, exactly where Pillar 43 of Enclosure D was placed (Schmidt 2008a: 420).

[30] These large bowl-like limestone basins were found, for example, in Trenches K10-79, L09-07 and L9-70 and had animal bones on the bottom. However, the extracted filling samples did not give positive results in regard to the presence of possible organic remains (Schmidt 2012a: 326 and 328, Figs 10-11).

Sefer Tepe, Hamzan Tepe, Harbetsuvan Tepesi, Kurt Tepesi and Taşlı Tepe, are dated between the end of the PPNA and the beginning of the PPNB (Çelik 2014a; 2014b; 2016b) and are located in both the province and within the margins of the area, in the districts of Viranşehir, Siverek and the central district on the highlands overlooking the Harran Plain (Çelik 2006: 24; 2014a: 12; 2015b: 354), all share these characteristics which let us suppose the existence of an influential cultural *facies* in this area.

Their location, size and diversity in the lithic assemblage would seem to be connected to the function assumed by each site. For example, Karahan Tepe compared to Harbetsuvan Tepesi, considered its satellite settlement and whose position was designed for controlling the Harran Plain, primarily monitored the interior areas of the Tektek Mountains. The positions of both sites guaranteed a suitable environment for the so-called "Trapping areas" (Çelik 2016b: 422) – areas set aside for hunting - as evidenced by the number of flint artifacts discovered.[31] The lithic data concerning Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle on the contrary bear witness to a rather important manufacturing place for the production of blades used in the agricultural field, as logic deduces for a site located in the north-west corner of the Harran Plain (Çelik 2011b: 142-145).

The presence of small temporary settlements and satellite sites,[32] orbiting up to a maximum of 15km from the major centres Karahan Tepe, Sefer Tepe and Ayanlar Höyük, was probably proof of the importance of these macro centres. Furthermore, the fact that Taşlı Tepe is located at about the same distance from Sefer Tepe, Karahan Tepe and Göbekli Tepe could indicate that the settlements with the T-shaped pillars were distributed in the region according to predetermined agreements or for the purpose of establishing different areas of competence and borders between the territories (Çelik *et al*. 2011: 230).

All the sites built on bedrock exploited the geological structure of the region with its limestone nature, especially for architectural purposes. Mere archaeological surveys, some of which were conducted during illegal excavations, have revealed the existence of basin-like pools carved in bedrock for the collection of rainwater (Çelik 2003: 44-48; 2010: 262, Fig. 6; Güler, Çelik 2015: 23), circular enclosures and T-shaped pillars, some of which are visible on the surface and preserved *in situ*.[33] If, on the one hand the size of these pillars, about 1-2.5m (Çelik 2000a: 4-6; 2014a), do not find comparisons with Göbekli Tepe – except from the more recent Level II and especially in Enclosure F (Hauptmann 1991/92: 28; Hauptmann 1993: 56, Fig. 16; Schmidt 1997/98: Fig. 15; 2002a: 8, Fig. 7) – it is true that the 8m high cultural layer of Karahan Tepe and its 16 hectares (Çelik 2015a: 449), the 14 hectares of Ayanlar Höyük, along with the round enclosure with a diameter of about 20m with T-shaped pillars of Harbetsuvan Tepesi,[34] suggest us that the oldest levels, contemporaries of Göbekli Tepe III, lie a few metres under the surface (Çelik 2017: 363-364).

From the artistic point of view, the pillars discovered in these sites share the features of those found in Göbekli Tepe but with some exceptions. Some of the 266 T-shaped pillars found in Karahan Tepe,[35] for example, present depictions of animals[36] but none for the moment show incisions of arms or hands, characteristics otherwise

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[31] The comparison between the amount of arrowheads found in Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe reveals a strong unbalance towards the latter site, 40% more, probably due to the presence of "Trapping areas" in the Tektek mountains. The massive presence of this stone is believed to be due to the proximity of the settlement to some deposits (Çelik 2011a).

[32] Reference is made to Mınzilit Isa, Mınzilit Feris, Mınzilit Hıleyil and Asagı Yazıcı Güney Mevkii for Karahan Tepe (Çelik 2015b: 358-359); Curna Henzir, Vari Nebi, Ömer Altundağ Tarlası, Sırtki Hesey, Çillo 1, Çillo 2 and Oççik for Ayanlar Höyük, and Kuş Harabesi Kuçe Çamçak Tepe, Inanlı Tepe, Kocanizam and Başaran Höyük for Sefer Tepe (Çelik 2015a; Güler *et al.* 2013). These settlements are temporary, or small with circular buildings, and hardly show architectural remains. The only exception so far is the site of Kocanizam in the Viranşehir district, where a limestone slab identified as the body of a 'T' pillar was found (Güler *et al.* 2013: 296).

[33] In Hamzan Tepe, for example, both T-pillars and two circular buildings that can be defined as civic or domestic were discovered, one of which has a diameter of about 4.5m and walls 1m x 30-40cm thick in a single row of stones (Çelik 2014a: 14). There are no similar structures built with this building technique, but the round building is an architectural tradition that can generally be observed in settlements dated to the EPPN (Sicker-Akman 2001: 389-394).

[34] With such a diameter, this structure is almost twice as large as the Enclosure F of Göbekli Tepe (Çelik 2016b: 427 and Figs 5-6).

[35] The number of T-pillars seems to be directly proportional to the number of scrapers found; the increased presence of this element in the Karahan Tepe site compared to Göbekli Tepe would be a significant factor in this respect.

[36] In detail, snakes (Çelik 2016c); fragmentary composition of rabbit-gazelle-rabbit-gazelle-another animal (Çelik 2011a: Fig. 12).

seen at Harbetsuvan Tepesi and Kurt Tepesi (Çelik 2014a). Surely the most characteristic element of the stelae found in these sites but not shared universally[37] is the wide tie shaped groove with a "*chevron*" motif at the top.[38] At the moment the only *bucranium* discovered on the body of one of these 16 pillars was found *in situ* at Sefer Tepe (Çelik 2006: 24 and Fig. 3; Kürkçüoğlu, Kara 2005: 62-63), while the relief of a belt is attested on one of the 14 pillars of Harbetsuvan Tepesi. At the present time there is no trace of reliefs of animals around the pillars but the discovery of a fragment of a feral head, probably belonging to a large feline (Ercan, Çelik 2013: Figs. 3a, 3c), connected to the site of Ayanlar Höyük, would seem to confirm its presence (Ercan, Çelik 2013: 53-54, Figs 3a-d; Schmidt 2007a: 128, Fig. 23; Hauptmann 2007: 162, Fig. 20).

Amongst the small findings that characterize these sites, there are the so-called chlorite vessels with the probable function of whetstones (Ercan, Çelik 2013: 48-29, Figs 1a-d) - examples of which were found in other sites of the period such as Hallan Çemi, Çayönü (Çambel 1974: 373, Fig. 14; Rosenberg 1999: 12, Fig. 3), Demirköy, Göbekli Tepe (Köksal-Schmidt, Schmidt 2007: 101), Karahan Tepe and Körtik Tepe (Çelik *et al*. 2011a: 246; Coşkun *et al*. 2010: 61, Figs 2a-b; Özkaya 2009: 5, Figs 7-8; Özkaya, Coşkun 2011: 90-93 and Figs 15-21, 26), probably the site where they were originally from - anthropomorphic *ithyphallic* statues and Totem poles (Karahan Tepe, Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle), portholes (Ayanlar Höyük, Karahan Tepe) and Blanchard phallus-like limestone sculptures (Hamzan Tepe). Examples of terrazzo floors were found not only in Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle,[39] but also in Karahan Tepe (Çelik 2000b: 7; 2011a) and Ayanlar Höyük (Çelik 2011b: 158, Fig. 16).

DATA ANALYSIS

Animalistic Art and Totemism

The existing link between the sites investigated up till now can be made not only from an architectural point of view, with the presence of the T-shaped pillars, circular enclosures and terrazzo floors, but even more from an artistic point of view. The most significant elements are certainly the relief incisions of animals on the *stelae* and, as pointed out, figurines, round reliefs and zoomorphic reliefs found in the filling of the structures or the totemic compositions that reveal a rather sophisticated artistic streak (Figs 9-10).

The importance that these depictions possess is to be understood from the characterizations of the circular buildings at Göbekli Tepe, whose habit was to make one animal prevail over the others. In Enclosure A, for example, the snake dominates, in B the foxes take over, in C the wild boars are the protagonists, while in D the birds (and the snakes) have an important role. The direction of their gaze towards the interior of the enclosures seems to have a specific reason.

From a stylistic point of view, the repetition of motifs and iconography that extended beyond the site would seem to confirm the existence of a true class of specialized artists belonging to the same cultural tradition (Schmidt, Köksal-Schmidt 2014: 76). This fact is evident both inside Göbekli Tepe, whose foxes represented on the

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[37] In Taşlı Tepe, for example, the pillars found have no reliefs or engravings of any kind.

[38] It recalls the motif of Pillar 18 of Enclosure D in Göbekli Tepe, but it's considerably different (Çelik 2015b: 358; Schmidt 2010a: 243, Fig. 8).

[39] The emergency excavation of a 15m long section has brought to light four terrazzo floors, two of which have been exposed: in particular, the Terrazzo floor I, preserved in the lower part of the section and made without particular attention, is just over 3m long and is bordered to the south by an irregular heap of stones probably coming from a wall, which is not visible to the north. Under the floor is visible a layer of pebbles, placed as a "buffer", reaching a thickness of 25cm. It was not possible to identify the floor plan of the structure to which the floor belongs, but 3 door-sockets were found close to each other. Terrazzo floor II, unlike the previous one, was built very diligently and seems to be the floor of a round building of about 2m in diameter, preserved only in half. It is relatively thin, having a thickness of about 2cm, and its surface is well levelled and burnished. Along the external perimeter, the floor is raised perpendicularly, and this suggests the presence of an original plaster wall along the perimeter. Among all the floors, a total of four stones have been found with a circular recess 12cm in radius and 3-5cm in depth, which could be either door-sockets or simply post holes, such as those placed at regular intervals in the "Lion pillar Building" of Göbekli Tepe (Çelik 2011b: 141-142).

pillars, for example, are all created following the same figurative canon, both beyond its confines and in the other settlements in the region of Urfa. At Karahan Tepe for instance, on two pillars that were the victims of marauders, reliefs of snakes were found, one with a triangular head and zigzagged body,[40] similar to those discovered at Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt, Köksal-Schmidt 2014: 74-75, Figs 1-5; Schmidt 2000a: Fig. 5; Hauptmann 1993: 59, Fig. 19) which are based on the same famous lithic bowls of Körtik Tepe. Whilst another one, with a round head and wavy body (Moetz, Çelik 2012: 705, Fig. 3), resembles other engraved representations on stone found at Jerf el-Ahmar (Stordeur *et al.* 1996: 2, Fig. 2).

Even the anatomical neglect of the ophidians, that in the light of comparison with other animal families is without doubt predetermined[41] (Dietrich *et al.* 2012a: Fig. 10), extends to all the region and bears witness to an artistic unity on a large scale founded on extensive knowledge of the specific animalistic traits and their naturalistic yield.[42]

Art that aims to faithfully reproduce reality has taken a step further, aiming instead to represent a dream-like and mysterious component. Knowing that, it is easy to understand the discovery of pansexual figurines that refer in shape and contents to the T-shaped pillars, examples of which have been found in Gaziantep (Çelik 2005: 29, Figs 1-3) and Kilisik,[43] the so-called Urfa Man from Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle (Fig. 11), and the totem poles of Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2012a: 34-36, Figs 6-8; 2014: 330, 335, Fig. 3) and Karahan Tepe,[44] sculptures that present the juxtaposition of different figures, animals and humans, along the vertical axis (Dietrich *et al.* 2019b: 23, Fig. 5) and that identify the guardian spirits of specific parental units or social organizations, such as clans or tribes[45] (Fig. 12).

Without dwelling on the narrative-iconographic aspect of such compositions,[46] it is very evident that they constitute the reflection of belief and practices tied to a specific conception of the natural and supernatural world whose access was the prerogative of mediums and shamans, through the possible use of both hallucinogenic drugs, along with techniques including sensory deprivation, physical pain, meditation, fasting, etc.[47], and also thanks to rituals that required disguising themselves as animals during scripted ceremonies.[48]

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[40] Perhaps representing Levantine vipers, a dangerous species for humans (Peters, Schmidt 2004: 183).

[41] Among the rather evident details which are absent for this typology of reptilians, it is enough to think about the scales, the teeth or the tongue, well present in other reliefs of bulls, wild boars and foxes, for example. The sketch of these figures and their caricature could be apotropaic (the lack of attention to the anatomical details of this reptile would have contributed to reduce their strength or keep them away from the settlements) or symbolic (being a subject very represented during the PPNA, it was enough to outline just the traits to communicate directly to the observer the message he wanted to transmit).

[42] This is the case of the birds represented at Göbekli Tepe, of which 20 different *species* have been identified; each of them is well characterized and easily recognizable. In this regard, one of the most unusual relief, preserved in the Museum of Şanlıurfa, shows the figure of a standing bird, having short legs and a small tail, traits that seem to place it among the Sphenisciformes.

[43] It is a small anthropomorphic sculpture in the shape of a 'T' found in a small village at the foot of the Taurus, about 85km north of Nevalı Çori: of the famous pillars it shares the angle of the arms and the position of the hands on the front edge and has a long nose, based on a model of lithic masks, also miniaturistic, found in Göbekli Tepe, probably used within mythopoietic rituals closely related to death (Dietrich *et al.* 2018). Between the hands of the figure appear the head, interpreted by H. Hauptmann also as a phallus, and then the body of a second person, which ends with a hole in the bottom. On the lateral faces we can see, however, those that H. Hauptmann himself describes as legs that join the arms of the first individual. The composition ends with a rather evident hole (Hauptmann 2012: 19, Figs 9-10). According to M. Verhoeven's interpretation, the two figures could be either asexual or represent bisexual or female individuals. In the latter case, the larger figure, squatting, would have given birth to the smaller one, also of female gender, if the hole were interpreted as a vagina (Verhoeven 2001: 8).

[44] Another famous example is the one discovered in the site of Nevalı Çori within the so-called "Cult Building", reassembled by the archaeologist K. Schmidt (Hauptmann 1999: 76).

[45] The totem can take the form of a plant, insect, animal, bird or mythical entity: the belief that a group has a particular relationship with its totem, usually seeing it as a sacred ancestor, and therefore subject to special taboos and ritual observances, is called "Totemism" (Darvill 2002).

[46] See Köksal-Schmidt, Schmidt (2010: 74-75, Fig. 1).

[47] Leone (2002: 63-69; 2009: 102-106) discusses the subject in greater depth.

[48] With regard to these practices there are both figurative evidence, where the anatomical component of the animal differs

Therefore, it appears plausible to state that within these societies the animal world did not take the form of a different domain that was separate from the social or supernatural world but represented becoming one with them according to a holistic vision of the world called "Ecosophy" (Årem 1990: 115). A summary of this type could derive from a sort of innatism modulated not by knowledge, from the moment that these derive from experiences based on the senses, but on cognition (Chiesa 2012: 40). It then follows that in the first place the animals are equipped with a range of attitudes, habits and behaviours similar to those of humans for a variety of mythological and cosmological reasons and acquire, thanks to these, the role of "owners and guardians" of determined places, such as, for example, the enclosures of Göbekli Tepe and, more generally, the "Communal Buildings" of the PPNA/EPPNB.

Secondly, the constant zoomorphic presence reflects both a constant and physical dependence on the animal world and the immaterial need for it to guide and determine many practices of routine daily life, as if its transformation into reality was a metaphorical and a concrete equivalent aimed to absorb its vital energy and power (Whittle 2003: 93-95).

It is in this perspective that, according to A. Marciniak, some places could have been used within ceremonies and feasts and could have been connected to rituals possibly tied to the understanding of the surrounding world, such as special "arenas". These community constructions would have allowed the conceptualization, creation, renewal or renegotiation of the "man-animal" relationship and allowed for reflection on these symbolic categories (Reynolds 2011: 177). One similar conclusion was reached by T. Watkins who defines these arenas as "Theatres of memory", within which social relations between individuals unfold and both material and pragmatic knowledge and beliefs, including holistic ones, are learnt by living in close contact with natural phenomena (Watkins 2006: 15).

The depictions of animals on the T-shaped pillars and on the three-dimensional sculptures of Göbekli Tepe should therefore suggest to us that in these buildings parallel worlds of powerful animal and human communities could meet (Boric′ 2013: 59) and debate on themes such as society, family and fertility, making use of mythical storytelling too (Whittle 2003: 101). The importance of these realizations, which is often ignored, is in fact tied to the "animated" character which is intrinsic to them: in summary, Neolithic Man built artificial and inanimate environments and filled them with symbols to make them suitable for his sustenance, in order not to renounce his relationship with Nature from which he had learnt everything. Instead he made it converge with every aspect of life within his habitation, therefore creating an extension of it.

The domination of one animal over the others within the different structures, maybe represented by the figures on Pillar 43 as well, could indicate that the animal guide/totem belonged to a specific family or clan. From this perspective it is likely that different clan formations could have been based in Göbekli Tepe, each one edifying a communal building that reunited the group during collective ceremonies with the dwellings of clan leaders/shamans, the so-called "delegates of knowledge",[49] giving life to a primordial form of settlement, according to the model hypothesized by I. Hodder for Çatalhöyük.[50]

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significantly from reality - see, for example, Pillars 33 and Pillar 43 of Göbekli Tepe and the fresco of Çatalhöyük in House 21 of Level VII from Mellaart (1963: 95-98) - and material evidence, e.g. the plastered skull with the attached mandible of a wild boar found in Çatalhöyük (Twiss 2006: 10, Fig. 5). We suggest to interpret these data as evidence of animal disguises within esoteric-ritual contexts (Lichter 2016: 73).

[49] "Cultural memory always has its special holders: they include shamans, bards, griots as well as priests, teachers, artists, writers, scholars, mandarins or as always they want to call the delegates to knowledge" (Assman 1997: 28).

[50] According to I. Hodder, the main reason why these people gathered in such an agglomeration was that they could help each other in case of need and lack of resources, both with protection against external danger and the supply of food in case of shortage: in such situations, it was, in fact, much more convenient for the inhabitants of a house to be able to count on the help of neighbours and return the favour where necessary: "*The leopard changes its spots: recent work on societal change at Çatalhöyük*": December 2013 conference, https://vimeo.com/82267556.

Communal Buildings and History Houses

Following what has just been said, it is clear that it is not easy in the case of these enclosures to separate the symbolic component from the functional one, even if the archaeological data suggest variable solutions that certainly derive from different traditions and also from the availability of usable raw materials.

In fact, it is no coincidence that the latest reconstructions of the buildings of Göbekli Tepe, which irrefutably sanction the presence of wooden coverings[51] that gave access to the structures, are very close to those of the Community Buildings discovered in Jerf El Ahmar[52] or those of the Cult Building of Nevalı Çori made by H. Hauptmann (Figs 13-14). Some of the common features of these so-called Communal Buildings of the PPNA/EPPNB, which have an incredible symbolic value, are carved pillars, plans and distinctive architectural features, peculiar characteristics such as notable dimensions, walls with niches, terrazzo floors, benches and platforms for sitting next to the walls (Özdoğan 2010: 30). In addition, the predilection for the semi-underground construction of these structures must not be forgotten, as the latest developments have confirmed that this occurred in Göbekli Tepe as well.[53]

Therefore, this kind of correspondence states that the expressive variety of these types of enclosures, all having a communal character, is not due to the natural manifestation of the sacred place (Kornienko 2009: 95), but depends exclusively on the availability of local raw materials.

It is now accepted evidence that it was important for such structures to possess a strong symbolic design and to be built in a "ritualistic" way so to speak. The presence of skulls under the pillars of Jerf El Ahmar (Stordeur 2000: 2) or at the foot of the "Tower" of Jericho, the burial of a woman embracing a plastered skull in Çatalhöyük as a foundation deposit and the zoomorphic presence on the pillars in the province of Urfa, are just some examples of this extended sacred and holistic vision of the world, totemic or shamanic, as has been stated.

On the model of Çatalhöyük, different scholars agree with giving a definition of "History houses"[54] to these dwellings that are particularly rich from the iconographic and "ritual" point of view. According to I. Hodder and C. Cessford, for example, who give a take the definition of the "House society" elaborated by C. Levi-Strauss,[55] within a society that does not develop any form of writing, the house itself was the tool that allow the mechanisms of reproduction through the construction and preservation of a collective memory (Hodder, Cessford 2004: 31). According to E. B. Banning, the House societies perpetuated themselves through real or imaginary relation-

[51] Kurapkat (2014) clearly specifies the different building techniques and the various materials used according to the area of origin of the structures, in particular Neolithic and Anatolian. In particular, he reiterated the reasons why there is no evidence of wooden remains of superstructures in Göbekli Tepe, i.e. the fact that in most regions of the Near East neither conditions of permanent humidity nor absolute aridity capable of preserving the botanical remains prevail. He also definitively established that the stone architecture preserved on the site could provide proof of an original cladding of structures from the wooden roof on its own and in turn he developed a model of the cladding of the buildings. He was also responsible for explaining the extraction of the pillars from the quarry and their transport in situ (Kurapkat 2014: 81-82).

[52] Both the Communal Building of the village 1/east, a direct reminiscence of House 47 of phase III of Mureybet (Cauvin 1977: 28-30, Figs 10-11), and the Communal Building of the village II/west (EA 30), both radially divided into cells and benches, had central wooden pillars supporting a flat earthen roof, laid on a wooden structure (Stordeur 2000: 2).

[53] There are many examples, such as the buildings of first phase in Çayönü or the Skull Building, those located in Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 1995: 91, Figs 3-4), the Cult Building in Nevalı Çori and houses in Jerf El Ahmar and Mureybet III in Syria. In Göbekli Tepe rather pronounced evidences were found, among which the ladder found at the beginning of the access corridor to Enclosure C that probably could be reconstructed as a hypogean *dromos*.

[54] At Çatalhöyük, the buildings that stood out from the others for their size, the richness of their wall paintings, installations such as bucrania, multiple burials and multi-level reconstructions (Lercari 2017), were those that aimed to preserve and perpetuate the memory of a family, to transmit its history, and in which domestic rites and the care of ancestors were provided (Hodder, Pels 2010: 178).

[55] In the definition of the anthropologist it is noticeable a departure from the models of classification of kinship towards a "house" understood as a legal person in possession of an estate, able to reproduce itself through the transmission of its name, its goods and rights (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 187). The transmission of houses and objects within them builds a memory and constitutes social unity. According to Hodder (2006: 165-167), many events take place inside houses, from more practical ones (e.g. replacing an older wall with a newer one) to more ritual ones (e.g. foundation or burial), all aimed at building "histories".

ships founded on maintaining this collective memory (Banning 2011: 643-646). Therefore, the conservative and encyclopaedic use that architecture in all its forms could have had in this period is not to be excluded. In fact, the material world is the substance thanks to which "(...) people create their own meaningful, biographical texts" (Hodder, Hutson 2003: 212).

Amongst the characteristics of these houses in Çatalhöyük, we must remember the repetitiveness of the pictures and sculptures from one level to another in the site, the works of continuous reconstruction and restoration and the long duration of their lives within the history of the settlement. The evidence of pillars being reused within the enclosures of Göbekli Tepe, literally moved from one structure to another, which at their turn underwent progressive narrowing following the addition of new stone circles,[56] as well as the latest dating that sanctions a probable contemporaneity between the enclosures of Level III and those of Level II at least during a phase of occupation of the site (Dietrich *et al.* 2019a: 4-6), certainly suggests a definition of "History houses" for the "circles" of Göbekli Tepe as well.

In Çatalhöyük these structures which merged domestic function and "ritual" practices were, on the other hand, flanked by the more elementary ones, considered to be simply dwellings. Micromorphological analysis of the deposits on the floors have shown in fact that activities associated with the preparation of food, its consumption and the processing of obsidian, etc., took place even in these more elaborate enclosures (Matthews *et al.* 1996: 317).

What recently emerged from the studies conducted in Göbekli Tepe on plant remains, in particular the phytoliths derived from grasses, and confirmed by the heavy presence of grindstones (a good 7268) also in enclosures of Level III, such as Enclosure D (Dietrich *et al.* 2019a: 25), has highlighted the existence of ritual practices tied to the consumption of cereals and alcoholic beverages, contextually with the collective ceremonies and banquets. As a result, the idea of an integrated vision of domestic and ritual activities in the site begins to powerfully take hold amongst scholars (Clare *et al.* 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

"Chiefdoms" of PPNA?

The main purpose of this paper was to provide a general overview concerning the T-shaped pillar's sites: in the first place, new developments in excavations at Göbekli Tepe were considered, which led to the formulation of new theories re-evaluating the previous idea of an open-air "Hunter-gatherers' Sanctuary" in favour of a more likely stable settlement, covered and (semi-)underground buildings; secondly, we discussed about the importance and the need of investigating other sites with the same attributes in order to reach a better comprehension of the Göbekli Tepe site itself.

Archaeological evidence relating to the presence of numerous other sites with common features within the same region suggest at least a similar function for the same sites, which probably divided the territory of the province of Şanlıurfa, by defining specific boundaries and areas of influence. Archaeological findings investigated so far have established a predilection for hunting habits at Karahan Tepe, located on the limestone plateau of *Tektek Dağları* to monitor the inland areas of the Tektek Mountains, and Harbetsuvan Tepesi in full control of the Harran plain; the settlement of Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle is meant to be strictly linked to agricultural activities.

The "hierarchy theory" concerning the sites with T-shaped pillars is far from reality, we just need to consider the strategic position of these sites and the number of satellite settlements also discovered in the area of influence of Sefer Tepe and Ayanlar Höyük: according to this previous view, Göbekli Tepe should be the head of an amphictyony of "satellite" sites, being the most important and extensive sanctuary (9ha), with the most impressive stratigraphic deposit (15m) and his central and strategic position (Schmidt 2001: 11).

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[56] I. Hodder sees in the concentric circles of the walls a reference to a multi-stage renovation modelled on Çatalhöyük and believes that the space between the walls, which has not yet been entirely excavated, can accommodate burials (Banning 2011: 643-646).

Archaeological surveys established 16 hectares of extension for Karahan Tepe and 14 hectares for Ayanlar Höyük; both settlements own cultural layers of debris of about 7-8 metres (which could very well host semi-underground circular buildings, as in Level III of Göbekli Tepe), and also archaeological findings[57] and stone industry[58] show similarities between these sites and Göbekli Tepe. In the light of these considerations, even if we cannot exclude the hypothesis of amphictyony linking these large settlements, Göbekli Tepe's supremacy must be rejected.

About Göbekli Tepe's society, we argued that it was made up of several families and clans, headed by guardians of "collective memory and cultural identity" holding the cult of the ancestors, the myths of that specific *gens* and the power of the animal totem, which the communal monumental building was dedicated to.

Assuming this social structure for the other sites having buildings with T-shaped pillars as well, we can accept that around 9745-9314 cal BC (the earliest date of the Enclosure D) several communities belonging to the same cultural *facies* settled in the area of the current province of Şanlıurfa and gained strategically significant stations for hunting and controlling the territory, such as the plateaus, the Euphrates valley and the Harran plain (Fig. 15).

Chiefdoms are autonomous political units that include a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief (Carneiro 1981: 45), whose emergence can well be regarded as the leading line of politogenesis, as predecessors of contemporary societies. This term of anthropological derivation has been recently updated, considering various evolutionary alternatives to the classical politogenesis.[59]

The definition of "chiefdom analogues", in particular in the sub-category of "polysettlement analogues united by horizontal links", well represents the sites with T-shaped pillars of the PPNA in Anatolia: non-hierarchical systems of acephalous communities with a salient autonomy of small family households, like the ones that were described among the Apatanis of North-East India, or the Pueblo Indians of the northern New Mexico (Grinin, Korotayev 2011: 296-297), or the horizontal egalitarian society proposed by M. Frangipane for the subsequent Halaf culture (Frangipane 2007).

Archaeologically speaking, we have evidence that the settlements of Sefer Tepe, Karahan Tepe, Göbekli Tepe, Taslı Tepe are about 30km apart from each other, almost following a firm and pre-planned layout: bearing in mind that they are also generally founded on or near plateaus (Erim-Özdoğan 2011: 229), we can assume, as anticipated, a division of the territory following natural boundaries (Güler *et al.* 2013: 297).

The distance between Karahan Tepe and Harbetsuvan Tepesi of 7km, however, allows us to argue that the latter site was probably a "satellite" settlement of the first one, in order to control the Harran plain. Moreover, the similarity between the pillars of the two settlements clearly indicates a contemporaneity and the existence of bondings between the two sites (Çelik 2014a: 21).

Archaeological evidence, comparisons between sites and buildings, iconographic representations, statuary, ritual practices and anthropology, all of this suggests us to formulate a theory, according to which several clans, led by leaders which were able to "read" and interpret the messages of nature and their ancestors, the shamans, settled in several centres in the current province of Şanlıurfa around the second half of the 10th millennium.

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[57] For example, the 266 pillars discovered on the surface of Karahan Tepe; the chlorite vessel and the fragment of a feline statue by Ayanlar Höyük; the pillar with *bucranium* of Sefer Tepe; the presence of both circular buildings and pillars at a Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle and at Hamzan Tepe and the discovery of terrazzo floors all over the sites here.

[58] The analysis of the lithic industry found out at Göbekli Tepe on the surface or during the first surveys dated the site to the EPPNB-MPPNB, not attesting to any Byblos point, later spotted. Also, the discovery of fragments of decorated lithic vessels (Beile-Bohn *et al.* 1999: 62, Tab. 26), at that time only found at Hallan Çemi (Rosenberg 1993: 128, Fig. 9), but well-known today from the site of Körtik Tepe, suggested a date between 10500 and 8600 BP, then the PPNB (Schmidt 1995: 9). The same considerations can be found in all the reports currently available for the sites in the Urfa area where T-shaped pillars have been found on the surface.

[59] Grinin, Korotayev (2011: 291) subdivide all the diversity of the medium complexity polities into two major types, named chiefdoms/chiefdom-like polities and chiefdom analogues: "*Chiefdom analogues, that can be defined as polities or territorially organized corporations that have sizes and functions, which are similar to those of chiefdom-like polities, but that lack any of their other characteristics, such as high levels of hierarchy and centralization, presence of formal leader, organized system of resource control, political independence, 17 and so on.*".

Architectural elements with a high mysterious connotation inside the houses, the so-called "T-shaped pillars", anthropomorphic figures perhaps representing the founding ancestors, are said to be the hallmark of this cultural *facies*.

Advanced techniques for working limestone, easily found in the area, has allowed them to create monoliths and statues of great artistic value: the knowledge, traditions and memory of these communities were thus permanently imprinted in the monumental houses that they built, as real "prehistoric libraries".

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Fig. 1: Sculpture of the predator of Pillar 27, Enclosure C (Public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GobeklitepeHeykel.jpg, edited by Christopher C. Caletti).

Fig. 2: The central Pillar 2 of Enclosure A (CC BY-NC 2.0 betabloker, https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/a227dec2-0662-4442-ad5c-8ddc8c7c2c98).

Fig. 3: Overview of Enclosure C (CC BY-NC 2.0 betabloker, https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/b45e0927-9f76-4e8f-b5ce-0aa84cb9c680).

Fig. 4: Enclosure C in detail: central pillar with fox-relief and perimetral Pillar 27 with high-relief of a predator and flat-relief of a boar (Photo by ZEKERIYA SEN on Unsplash, edited by Christopher C. Caletti).

Fig. 5: Sculpture of a wild boar with a fragmented base from Enclosure C (CC BY-SA 4.0 Dosseman, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=87320502).

Fig. 6: Pillar 33 (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 gordontour, https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/37fd4fd5-7740-46a8-8f96-c7027dbdf4b6).

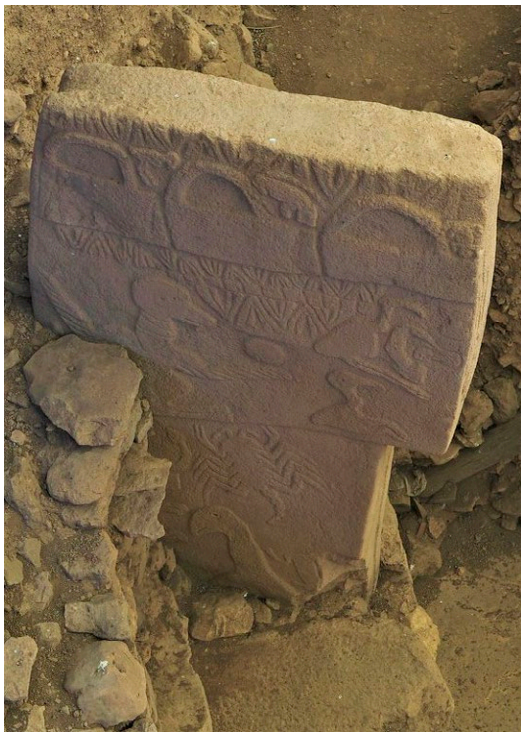

Fig. 7: Pillar 43 of Enclosure D (CC BY-SA 2.0 Ai@ce, https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/61902b25-e6a4-4541-8289-6abb67225849).

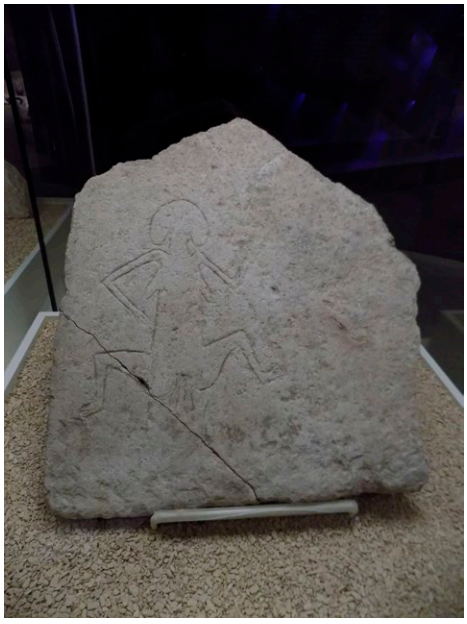

Fig. 8: Lion Pillar Building: stone slab with a female motif (CC BY-SA Cobija https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C5%9Eanl%C4%B1urfa_M%C3%BCzesi_Neotilik_%C3%87a%C4%9F_buluntu.jpg).

Fig. 9: Sculptures from Göbekli Tepe: wolf-head sculpture (top left, CC BY-SA Dosseman, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b0/Urfa_museum_Animal_statuette_sept_2019_4754.jpg), reptile-head sculpture (bottom left, CC BY-SA Dosseman, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d9/Urfa_museum_Animal_statuette_sept_2019_4758.jpg), lithic mask (right, CC BY-SA Cobija, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/%C5%9Eanl%C4%B1urfa_M%C3%BCzesi_Neotilik_%C3%87a%C4%9F_insan_heykeli_par%C3%A7as%C4%B1.jpg), edited by Christopher C. Caletti.

Fig. 10: Relief from Göbekli Tepe (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 Pilar Torres, https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/8cd9abb4-88b4-4628-ba7f-7450ac376d56).

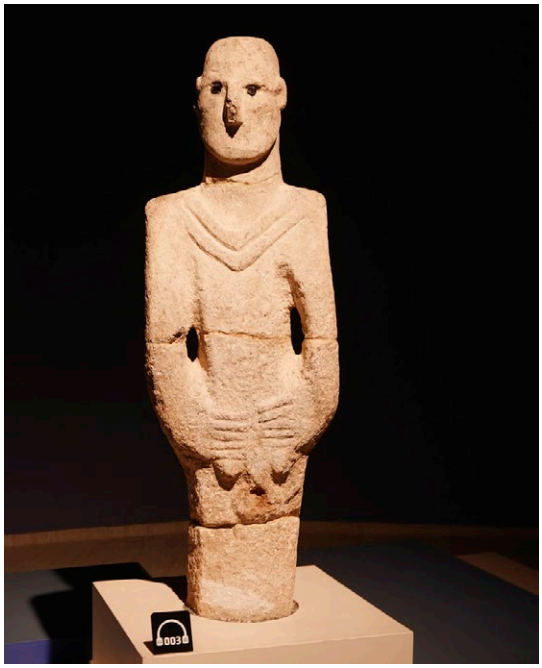

Fig. 11: The so-called "Urfa man" from Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle (CC BY-SA 2.0 Ai@ce, https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/703fcd4d-bd47-43a1-91e3-14351550914f).

Fig. 12: "Totem poles" from Nevalı Çori on the left (CC BY-SA Dosseman https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urfa_museum_Totem-like_head_sept_2019_4855.jpg, edited by Christopher C. Caletti) and Göbekli Tepe on the right (CC BY-SA Cobija https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C5%9Eanl%C4%B1urfa_M%C3%BCzesi_Neotilik_%C3%87a%C4%9F_totem.jpg, edited by Christopher C. Caletti).

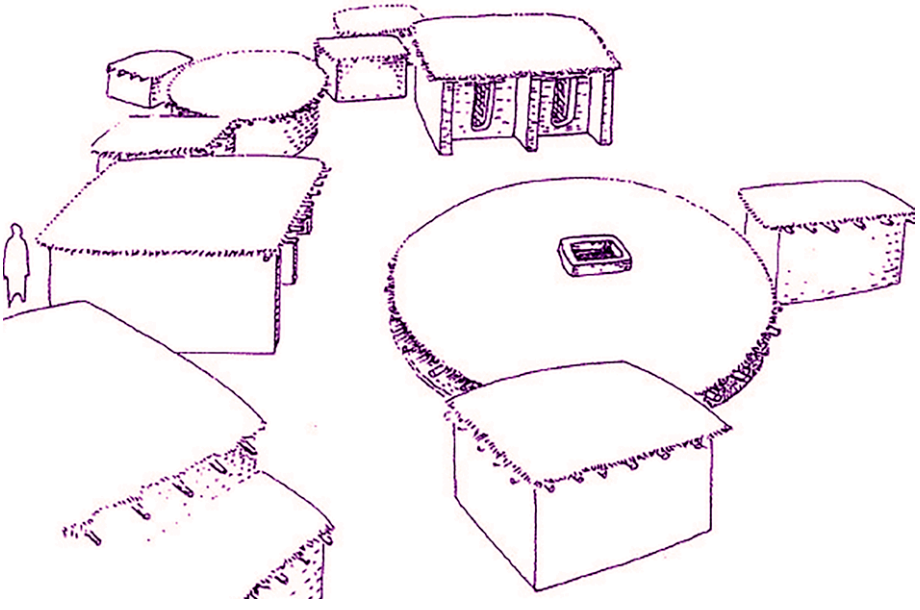

Fig. 13: Village II-West of Jerf El Ahmar (Stordeur 2000: Fig. 3, edited by Christopher C. Caletti).

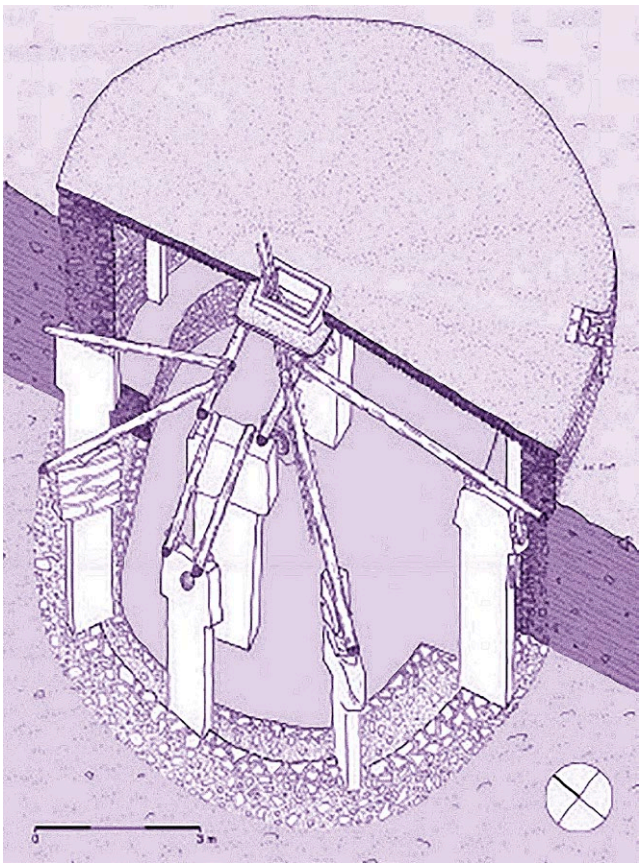

Fig. 14: Reconstruction of the covering of Enclosure B in Göbekli Tepe (Kurapkat 2014: Fig. 2.21, edited by Christopher C. Caletti).

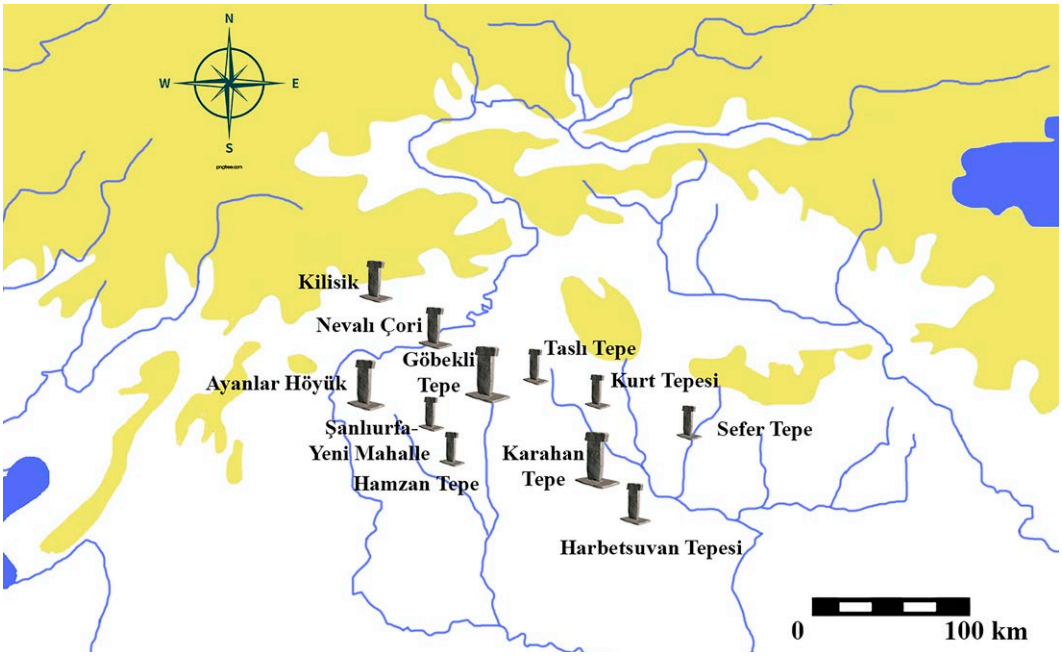

Fig. 15: Current distribution of sites with T-shaped pillars (©Christopher C. Caletti 2019).