

**ARCHAEOLOGY  
AND  
FERTILITY CULT  
IN THE  
ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN**



edited by  
**ANTHONY BONANNO**

**ARCHAEOLOGY AND FERTILITY CULT  
IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN**

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PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE FIRST  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT  
MEDITERRANEAN



THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA  
2 – 5 SEPTEMBER 1985

edited by  
ANTHONY BONANNO



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## PREFACE

As convenor of the conference at which these papers were presented, I count it as a further privilege as well as a pleasure to introduce this collection. Most of the contributors are too well known to need commending to the world of scholarship. The others are well-established scholars in their respective fields. All have profited from each other's company during the conference; in the same way, we hope, they will continue to benefit from the same company in this publication.

I would have felt it my duty to sum up the proceedings of the meeting, commenting on the contribution of each paper and, preferably, on the discussions that followed the delivery of the papers. But to do that would have meant extending the length of this foreword beyond the acceptable limits. To discuss only the highlights of the conference, on the other hand, would have involved the risk of offending several speakers by ignoring their valid contributions. One or two comments of a general nature, nonetheless, seem to be quite in order.

We are aware – as we were aware from the very start – that the long stretch of time, from Neolithic to Roman, and the number and diversity of cultures covered by the theme of the conference might possibly involve a somewhat superficial treatment of the subject. Fortunately this was not the case since the speakers succeeded in penetrating the core of the problem while maintaining a broad view of the period in question.

It can be said that for prehistory the field remains divided between two conflicting views, one supporting wholeheartedly the existence of a universal belief in an all-pervading and all-embracing Mother Goddess – of which the fertility cult is just one, albeit important, aspect – and the other questioning the very bases of that theory. But there seems to be a greater disposition for further dialogue and attenuation of entrenched positions. On the other hand, the fertility content in Near Eastern and Classical religions remains indisputable, even from the evidence brought forward in this publication. The conference proved to be also, and not accidentally, of special significance to Maltese archaeology. A further, non-religious, function for Malta's prehistoric temples has been suggested by two speakers – an opinion shared by myself and expressed elsewhere.

The distribution of the papers in this volume differs slightly from that followed in the course of the conference. Instead of leaving all the papers concerned with prehistoric religion in one group, it was judged more appropriate to collect those on Maltese prehistory under a separate heading. Papers related to Greek and Roman religions are grouped together for balance.

No efforts have been spared on the editor's part to standardise the format of the papers and at the same time to see them through the press as quickly as possible. For this purpose a note for contributors was circulated; but to discipline scholars must be one of the most daunting tasks one can possibly face. Hence the delay in delivering the complete text to the printer and the few divergences in the format of some papers. In one or two cases, admittedly, the references in note form seemed convincingly unavoidable, and we are infinitely grateful to those who had to take great pains to comply with our requirements.

One paper presented at the conference and some sections from a couple of others had to be sacrificed for editorial reasons. Regrettably the same lot befell a substantial number of illustrations provided by some authors. The conference members will certainly miss the paper by Marija Gimbutas in this volume. In view of her express wish not to have her article published along with that of another speaker at the same conference I very much regret I had no other choice but to accede.

While renewing my thanks to the individuals and institutions listed in my opening address, in particular UNESCO, the American Centre (Malta) and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, I wish to express my gratitude to Mid-Med Bank Limited for their contribution, and Mr John Pollacco of Special Interest Travel for his constant moral and practical support during the preparations for the conference. Finally, I would like to thank Dr L. Seychell and Mrs C. Depasquale for their help in proof-reading the French texts and Mr Joe Spiteri for his assistance in the preparation of the plates.

15th October 1986

A. BONANNO

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## OPENING ADDRESSES

### Address of Professor George P. Xuereb, Rector of the University of Malta

I welcome you on behalf of this Athenaeum. I have much pleasure in seeing among you a number of renowned scholars in the field of Archaeology. But I am equally pleased in welcoming younger scholars, some at the beginning of their career, others well on the way of establishing a scientific reputation. A warm welcome to you all. We sincerely hope that all the participants, both local and visiting, will profit from the exchange of ideas in a friendly atmosphere inside and outside this Conference Hall.

The University of Malta has made a late entry in the field of Archaeology. One recalls with much satisfaction that Temi Zammit, the distinguished Maltese archaeologist, was Rector of the University of Malta between 1920 and 1926, that in the years 1938 - 1939 John Ward Perkins, then at the beginning of his brilliant career, was appointed Professor of Archaeology. Furthermore, John Evans's work on the prehistoric antiquities of these islands in the fifties, published in his widely read *Malta* (1959) and his monumental *Survey* (1971), was monitored by a Committee formed to administer a grant made available to this University by the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas and chaired by the Rector, Professor J. Manché. It is against this background that we feel particularly satisfied that this initiative, the organization of this Conference, came from our University.

The University of Malta has been striving in the past two decades to promote Mediterranean studies in all disciplines, whether historical or of immediate, contemporary significance. This Conference thus forms an integral part of this programme.

It is my earnest wish that during your informal discussions you consider the possibility of setting up an organization to promote occasional meetings on other themes of Mediterranean Archaeology and, perhaps, to strengthen the academic standing of Archaeology within this institution. I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that you will have my most active support in this matter. This assurance we firmly give; we do so for a number of reasons.

We accept a continuing relevance of the Humanities — we subscribe to Owen Chadwick's view that the humanities have an enduring place in our intellectual culture. Graduates need flexible intellectual skills — the humanities can provide these skills as they provide the values, inherited or formed, necessary for their fruitful application.

The mind has an innate freedom and, of this, the Athenaeum is a guardian — we are the source of nourishment and encouragement — we are to safeguard freedom of the mind so that it follows the argument wherever it leads, so that it studies pertinent questions and provides the answers that further enrich human inheritance.

I wish you success in your workings with the words by which the old Romans used to inaugurate important events: "Quod bonum, faustum, felix, fortunatumque sit".

### **Address of Dr. A. Bonanno, Conference Convenor**

After the Rector's welcome on his own behalf and on behalf of the University I wish to convey to you my own welcome in my capacity as Convenor of this meeting and on behalf of the Conference Organizing Committee.

I feel I should begin this short address with a word of explanation about the theme of the Conference: "Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean". I must admit that when the proposed title was first sent out to various scholars for their advice, more than two years ago, we were not aware of the complexities involved, but we kept ourselves open to suggestions. In connection with this the Organizing Committee is most grateful to Professors Evans and Renfrew and to Dr Trump for their precious advice on the wording of the title of the Conference and for their encouragement in the initial stages of its organization. We appreciate very much the presence of Colin Renfrew and David Trump among us and we cannot but regret the absence of John Evans in view of the encouragement and help he gave us and of his remarkable contribution to Maltese archaeology.

What do we expect to achieve by this meeting? From the very start it was felt that the whole idea of what I prefer to call 'Fertility Syndrome', rather than 'Fertility Cult', was in an urgent need of a re-appraisal in the light of recent archaeological research and discoveries and without ignoring the useful contributions made by other

disciplines, like anthropology. We tried to bring together some of the major authorities on the subject so that they would be able to exchange their views — in some cases diametrically opposed ones — in a congenial environment. If a consensus, however limited, is not reached, the whole problem could perhaps be redefined and placed in a new perspective in the hope of providing a sounder and firmer launching pad for future research and methodology. After Peter Ucko's deadly blow to the theory of *the* Fertility Cult (the idea of a worship of a goddess of fertility diffused throughout the Mediterranean, and beyond), the astounding discoveries of Çatal Hüyük, so pregnant with overt fertility symbolism, short of providing support to the established thesis, must have made the supporters of the anti-thesis — one would expect — a little less sweeping in their condemnation. As chairman of the Conference, however, I feel I should desist from committing myself further on the subject.

Since the Fertility Cult theory owes its origins ultimately to the study of the religions of the proto-historical and Classical civilizations it was judged that these Mediterranean cultures should not be omitted, and authoritative scholars in their respective fields were called on to share with us the results of their researches.

But why Malta? There are several reasons for choosing Malta as the venue for the Conference. But I shall limit myself to three. In the first place, because the idea of holding such a meeting was conceived here. Secondly, because we feel we have got something to give and do not want, therefore, to remain on the receiving end. Thirdly, because the rich artistic repertory of our prehistoric past, which has so often been interpreted in 'fertility' terms, seems to us to be crying out for a serious, objective study. Malta's prehistoric figurines have remained far too enigmatic, and for far too long.

We had several interesting suggestions regarding the format of the programme, to all of which we gave serious consideration. We eventually arrived at the conclusion, that the programme as presented to you this morning was the best one in the circumstances.

The preparations for this meeting have not been easy. There have been obstacles to overcome. As any of you who have ever been involved in the organization of such meetings will know very well, there are moments when one wonders why on earth one gets involved in anything of this sort. But your presence here today is our reward. We are very happy indeed to have you with us, and we shall do our utmost to render the atmosphere as homely and as comfortable as possible. In

case of difficulties the members of the Organizing Committee and of the Secretariat will do whatever is in their possibility to help.

In this country we do not have a tradition of State support for the humanities, nor do we have the governmental mechanisms which would enable the State to sponsor a conference of this sort. We do not have the equivalent of a National Research Centre, as you have in France and Italy, for example. We earnestly hope that this embarrassing state of affairs will change, the sooner the better. I am sure that several of my colleagues have at some stage or other been deeply embarrassed, as I have been repeatedly in the past two years, by our inability to reciprocate the sort of generous hospitality which we ourselves so often receive abroad. We are, therefore, very grateful to all those institutions and individuals who have given us financial or practical aid on this occasion. Among these allow me to single out the University of Malta for patronizing the Conference, UNESCO for making a generous grant available, the American Centre (Malta) for meeting the travel expenses of our American guest speaker and other participants hailing from the United States, and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura for doing the same for our Italian guest speaker.

A final word of personal gratitude to the individual members of the Organizing Committee and to the guest speakers for accepting our invitation and for consenting to assume the extra burden of chairing the various sessions.

*Organising Committee:*

Dr A. Bonanno  
Mr J. Ciappara  
Dr T. Gouder  
Professor C. Farrugia

Mr J. Pollacco  
Mr A.M. Schembri  
Dr G. Wettinger  
Ms F. Craig

## **SECTION I: PREHISTORY**

# THE QUESTION OF FERTILITY CULTS

Emmanuel Anati

## I. USES AND ABUSES OF THE TERM

The term "Fertility Cult" has been fashionable for the last three generations of anthropologists and archaeologists, and may at times have been used and abused too readily. Also, the term is very general and is open to personal evaluations and interpretations. The word *cult* implies beliefs and rituals or at least performances. When used, the term should be defined both in terms of concepts and of ritualistic behaviour involved.

There is no doubt that both ancient and modern cultures are concerned with human procreation which may be seen either as a positive or as a negative result of sexual relations, or may not be related at all to sexual activities. Another common concern is the fertility of the land and the abundance of hunting and fishing resources. However, specific information on beliefs and practices concerning "Fertility Cults" in the ancient Mediterranean and elsewhere prior to the Bronze Age is scanty and in need of further analysis. Concerns relevant to fertility may be part of more complex conceptions regarding nature and the supernatural.

It has been somehow customary to talk of 'fertility cult' any time a figure is found which stimulates our associations with sexual or erotic themes. The same association may even emerge with a simple female figurine. This attitude was followed by several of the major advocates of a sort of "Universal" prehistoric religion focusing on the cult of the "Mother Goddess" (Crowford 1957; James 1959). Such attitude reaches conclusions which can hardly be proven, and has resulted in the collection of an immense quantity of materials defined as "evidences" of fertility cults, out of which a very small percentage has clearly been determined as having this purpose.

The term "Fertility Cult" implies a ritualistic performance meant to promote fertility of nature or human procreation, and it is quite rare to find archaeological evidence demonstrating that such performances have indeed taken place. Even in such explicit cases where specific representations appear of copulation and pregnancy in anthropomorphic figures, or rain and sun are represented in connection with vegetation, the motivation of the depiction may not necessarily be that of promoting fertility.

Out of the numerous images left behind by prehistoric man which have been related to the fertility cult, indeed only very few are explicit, such as those from the rock art of Camonica Valley, which depict scenes of ploughing a field, associated with acts of copulation (Anati 1982a: 304). These scenes, which belong to the first millennium B.C., depict one man in the act of ploughing, that is, penetrating the earth with the plough, which is carried by two powerful animals, either oxen or horses. Close by, a human being is shoveling the earth while being penetrated from the back by another man. Such scenes describe a clear performance which implies some sort of beliefs connecting an agricultural activity with a sexual performance.

Just one such specific association would be inconclusive, but when the same combination is repeated several times in the same way, on different rock surfaces, then there is a good probability that it describes a concept expressed by a performance meant to stimulate the fertility of the field. On the other hand, a scene of ploughing alone or a scene of copulation alone should not necessarily lead to the same conclusions. Incidentally, the same practice of provoking the fertility of the field by having sexual intercourse on them before or after or during ploughing, is still a widespread habit in India and among other populations with Indo-European roots.

In the same general context, that is, in the rock art of the Camonica Valley from period IV-C, which goes back to the 8th-7th century B.C., several other scenes of erotic character are found. They include sexual intercourse with donkeys and with dogs, scenes of masturbation, and plain scenes of intercourse between two human beings.

There is no doubt that all these depictions illustrate customs or wishes of the persons who produced them. Despite several hypotheses, however, there is no unanimous consent as to the possible relationship between the depicted performances and the ideologies and conceptions of a fertility cult. (Anati 1982a: 301).

## II. THE ART OF HUNTERS AND ITS CONTENTS

In all continents, hunting societies have left behind a wealth of art production with specific connotations, particular to their mentality (Anati 1984: 13-56). Usually, animal figures bear an overwhelming role. A few animals are particularly emphasized and must have played a conceptual role far beyond their economic importance. Most of this "hunter's art" has no scenes of descriptive or anecdotal character. The



earliest scenes we know are hunting scenes, and they appear, in all continents, only at a late and evolved stage in the sequence of the art of hunters. Previously, figures may be either isolated or related to each other by conceptual associations. Often animal figures are connected with ideograms the significance of which is not as yet fully understood. (Anati 1983a: 91-108). Such overall patterns, which are common in all continents, are typical also of Palaeolithic art in Europe, which is mainly concentrated in France, Spain and Italy, with minor clusters in other countries around the Mediterranean basin and in Central Europe.

Both mobiliary art and rock art in caves and in the open air have revealed vigorous masterpieces which are very appealing to our 20th century taste. Like most groups of such art in other parts of the world, it is evident that one of the conceptual characteristics of hunter's art finds its roots in a dual approach to nature, where masculine and feminine elements meet, combine, and interact to create a harmonious whole (Anati 1981: 200-210). This is particularly evident where large panels of many figures allow the study of associations, as emphasized already by André Leroi-Gourhan, Annette Laming and others (Leroi-Gourhan 1965: 114 ff; Laming 1962 289-291).

This art also includes clearly masculine and feminine symbols. In some cases they are naturalistic depictions of *phalli* and *vulvae*. Also animal associations reveal a complex symbology of sexual values and a combination of animals in the same composition may have sexual connotations. At the moment it does not seem possible, however, to determine if these kinds of associations are related to a fertility cult. The current tendency is to view them as expressions of an allegoric mythological world which must have occupied the minds and concerns of their makers (Anati 1983a: 116-118).

The obvious depictions of sexual organs undoubtedly reveal an interest in sexuality, but do not seem to provide direct evidence of a cult. It is worth stressing that erotic concerns do not necessarily concern fertility and procreation. In some cases, like in the cave of Tito Bustillo in northern Spain, a special corner of the cave decorated with several vulvar figures has been thought to represent an angle reserved to women, and in such case the *vulvae* would simply be the specification of the sex to whom this portion of the cave was reserved. Another corner of the same cave is decorated with depictions of game animals, and it was likely a corner reserved to men.

Similar situations are known in the rock-shelters and caves of

Central Tanzania, which were used by hunting societies for instructing and educating young men and women towards initiation and puberty rites. There, preparing for a full adult life included, among other things, the teaching of sexual behaviour and the interaction and cooperation required for a couple to live in harmony. Some teachings concern procreation and how to avoid it, but there is no evidence of fertility “cults” despite numerous erotic paintings and figurines.

As for the mobiliary art, the Palaeolithic period in Europe has left behind a wealth of incised and painted tablets as well as plastic figurines (Delporte 1979).

Associations between animal figures and symbols reveal the presence of a well defined symbology reflecting the dualistic view of the world, typical of hunting societies, as I have analysed elsewhere (Anati 1981; 1983a; 1983b). Assimilations and connections are particularly evident in two repetitive patterns. One them associates the stick or “batonnet” as a male symbol, to a mouth of certain animals, a feminine symbol. Another pattern is assimilating the bison and the human female. This again, reflects an overall symbology connected with the ideological structure of Palaeolithic hunters. However, attempts to identify in it a cult of fertility are of dubious legitimacy.

Human depictions are more common in mobiliary art than in rock art and more common in the figurines than in the plaquettes (Vialou 1982; Guthrie 1984). While in the plaquettes animal figures are far more numerous than human ones, in the plastic figurines there are more humans than animals. They are of both sexes, with a predominance of feminine figurines which are known in the popular literature as “Venuses”. It is questionable however, whether the numerous attempts made at analysing only feminine figurines in terms of a hypothetical cult of a “Mother Goddess” disregarding the human male as well as the animal figurines, are to be taken seriously.

In several instances, authors have referred to them as a proof for a fertility cult but, despite a profusion of theories, yet no one has demonstrated what kind of performance, concept, and ritual would be behind such a “fertility cult”. Very few of the female figures are shown to be pregnant. While most of them have prominent breasts and buttocks: this may just reflect no more than the concept of beauty of their time.

From this very quick summary it appears that while sexual awareness and perhaps also sexual problems may emerge from Palaeolithic art, it is hard to find in it any concrete evidence of “fertility

cults". In fact this consideration is in harmony with what we know about more recent hunting societies. They may at time have concerns about animal reproduction to assure their subsistence, and there may be evidence of a resort to magic and incantations, such as the depictions of ostrich eggs by the Australian aborigenes meant to stimulate the reproduction of this animal. But there is no evidence of a true fertility cult of animal reproduction.

It has been suggested, for European Upper Palaeolithic, that the so-called "Venuses" may reflect a widely spread reverence for a mythical ancestral "matron". This is not impossible but it cannot be proven as yet. In any case, a hypothetical cult of a "Primordial Mother" would not necessarily imply a fertility cult (Anati 1983a; 102-104).

### III. EARLY POST-PALAEOLITHIC EVIDENCE

We have seen that there is no concrete evidence of fertility cults among hunters societies and, in particular, in the Palaeolithic age of Europe and the Mediterranean. The wish to raise the population of the human group seems to be a character of sedentary populations. Likewise, a wish to increase the fertility of the soil can interest only agricultural societies.

As mentioned, Palaeolithic man may have done something to insure the reproduction of wild livestock. Rather than a cult, this may be considered as a sort of practice of magic. It is a part of a much wider and more complex concept expressing the search for a relationship between the human and the animal world, and also the search for a logical and phenomenological frame for natural surroundings. As discussed elsewhere, a view of the cosmological concepts of the Palaeolithic hunters is gradually emerging (Anati 1983a: 116-118).

Mesolithic people relied for their food source primarily on collecting, as well as fishing and hunting small game. We find frequent net-like patterns in their rock art and other graphic productions representing the hunting and fishing artifacts. Their concern seems to be addressed more to the efficiency of the tools they produced than to practices intended to make the forces of nature produce more food. To date in fact there is no direct evidence of performances connected with fertility cults in the European Mesolithic (Harrod 1983: 229-308; Marshack 1983: 111-120).

Another type of culture which in Europe is partially contemporary to that of the Mesolithic, is usually referred to as Epi-

Palaeolithic (Anati 1982). Its art is characterized by a predominance of a figurative art of belated Palaeolithic traditions in such areas as the Spanish Levante, the Alpine region, northern Scandinavia and the Central Sahara, producing at times depictions of erotic character (Anati 1982a: 143-151).

Figures describing human copulation in the Alps, sexual intercourse between two animals in northern Norway and Sweden, or depictions indicating a clear connection between sexual performances and successful hunting in the Sahara, may reveal beliefs and practices indicating the concern for virility and fertility as elements favouring the vigour of natural resources and economic prosperity. Scenes of sexual intercourse are common in the rock art of North Africa and of the Near East (Mori 1975; Malhomme 1959; 1961; Anati 1963: 191 ff.). Some of them, like one at Kilwa in northern Arabia, are certainly belonging to Hunting-Gathering societies; others are the production of later pastoral groups.

Figurines from the Natufian culture of Palestine include a copulating couple and a few phallic objects of stone which are certainly an expression of their interest for sex, but provide no explicit evidence for fertility cults. Phallic pestles may indicate a connection between virility and the abundance of food. It is significant that this eroticism of the Natufian culture is uncommon in Early Post-Palaeolithic cultures and is found here at the setting of the beginning of a food producing economy, in a culture which in fact, in economic terms, could be considered Proto-Neolithic rather than Mesolithic (Garrod 1957).

The birth of food production generated new kinds of concerns for the fertility of the land and brought forth a process of raised interest in the augmentation of the size of the group, thus favouring efforts in this direction.

The Epi-Palaeolithic cultures and other cultures usually developing in marginal areas showed concern about sexuality, the Mesolithic cultures, with the exception of the Natufians, seem to be little concerned with sexual representations. The Neolithic period develops a taste and an interest for this kind of depiction, revealing a new and much more sophisticated and "intellectualized" approach to the problems of human reproduction and of fertility of the fields (Frankfort 1958).

#### IV. THE BIRTH OF AGRICULTURE AND CONNECTED IDEOLOGIES

Early Neolithic in the Mediterranean and surrounding areas has produced a great many art objects and several cult-sites, including temples. Pre-pottery Jericho, the earliest fortified town we know of, had several buildings devoted to worship and cult, and some aspects of their beliefs and rituals have emerged (Kenyon 1970: 1-17). Among other things, skulls modelled and buried in the worship place seem to reflect a special attention to the veneration of ancestors. In another public building, a trinity of mythical beings, including a bearded man, a woman and a child, seem to indicate the concern this people had for family life, to the extent of producing a prototype. Some colleagues have suggested the presence of a fertility cult, but so far the archaeological discoveries are not explicit in this sense.

The important Anatolian sites of Çatal-Hüyük and Hacilar, excavated by James Mellaart, have provided a great wealth of art and cult objects (Mellaart 1967). Among other things the so-called "Lady of the animals" appears as some sort of mythic "matron", which was a reference point for the people who worshipped there. It may have the connotation of an ancestral "Mother of the Tribe", who subjugated the totemic animal, had intercourse with it and gave birth to the archetypal child. She was worshipped in the broader context of a complex myth of origin, which finds other aspects in the beautiful frescoes of Çatal Hüyük. In such context, though he is probably less important, a male ancestor is present as well (Mellaart 1967: 180).

Another interesting aspect at Çatal Hüyük is the presence of a birth-giving lady in the context of an impressive room with series of horned cattle heads. This seems to be one of the earliest known direct examples in the Mediterranean area of a concern for fertility and procreation, idealised in such a way as to offer adequate basis to consider the presence of some sort of cult or worship connected with fertility. The ox and the ox-horns later became clear symbols of fertility, and this may well be a very early example of such association. Incidentally this association, which is particularly evidenced in later cattle-breeding societies, has preserved its core in the etymology of the Hebrew word for "fertility" *pirion* — which derives from ox — *par*. In fact Çatal Hüyük may have been an early site of development of cattle domestication.

Further north, in the Danube valley, another important Early Neolithic site yielded numerous art objects which are likely to be

connected with the cult. Lepenski Vir, excavated by Dragoslav Srejovic, had some sort of protecting spirits in the form of stone statues inside the huts (Srejovic 1969: 1975). In each hut the family consumed its meals around the fireplace, in the company of the ancestor spirit. Some of these spirits had peculiar shape: at least one of them has the united characteristics of a fish and a human face. The people of Lepenski Vir lived of fishing in the Danube river and it has been suggested that this ancestral face, half-human, half fish, may synthesize their relationship with the supernatural world and express their concern for maintaining good relationship with their mythic cousins, the fish, who provided them with food. In the same site, another statue has an egg-like form, with a high relief of a vagina. Both concerns for food-getting and human reproduction seem to be evidenced in this Early Neolithic site.

Increasing concern for sexuality as shown by figurines and other art objects, became common in full Neolithic time in various cultures in Israel, in North Africa, as well as in Spain and Italy. Along with it there is evidence for water and the sun taking an increasing place in symbology and concern. The ritual collection of dripping water in the Scaloria cave in Italy and various cases of rock art connected with water sources in the Canary Islands and elsewhere seem to indicate a certain connection between water and life, a concept that has survived into contemporary cults (baptism etc.) (Beltran 1975: 209-220; Radmilli 1975: 175-184; Tiné 1975: 185-190).

While Egypt, Mesopotamia and other early centres of urban and literate civilization were developing sophisticated ideologies and cults, where the frequent erotic connotations may have in some cases been connected with the stimulation of fertility, the general trends seem to be those of commemorating and stimulating natural and supernatural forces of various kinds, mythical patriarchs and matrons. The wealth of archaeological material reveals the search for attaining economic plenty, social security, military strength, beauty, and prestige. The wish to increase procreation may be present occasionally, but looking at the general image provided by the immense material discovered by archaeology as well as at the early literary sources, the fertility cult as an isolated element was apparently not a common trend.

The worship of mythical ancestors, both male and female, is, however common in several incipient and early agricultural societies, as evidenced by the Jericho trinity, by the matron of Çatal-Hüyük, by the fat lady of Malta, and by numerous figurines spread over the entire circum-Mediterranean areas, as elsewhere, in Neolithic times.

Considering the diversities revealed by the documentation from various areas, it is hard to view it as a singular phenomenon. There is a common denominator, as all these examples lead to a common archetypal reference to mythical ancestors, the idealized mothers or fathers of the ethnic group, and this is not just a Mediterranean element, it is a universal element found in many populations of all continents.

In various cases, there is preference for male “patriarchs” or female “matrons”. But there are also androgynous or asexual images, which are particularly numerous in clay figurines (Ucko 1968).

The concern for idealizing the prototype of a relationship with mythical or real “dream-time genealogy” seems to be a well known universal pattern, from the book of Genesis to the myths of origin of numerous tribal societies around the world. Ancestral spirits and images are worshipped in tribal societies in all continents, and no doubt this was a pattern common in the ancient Mediterranean as well.

To what extent, however, this pattern was connected to some kind of fertility cult remains an open question. In addition, the association of the ancestral “Mother” of the tribe to “Mother Earth” may have some general denominator common to many food producing societies which acquired local characteristics and diversifications. The available archaeological evidence in the ancient Mediterranean should be analysed in a broader view of recurring patterns and paradigms.

The study of phenomenology may reveal archetypes and universal elements. Considering the known visual material, it is questionable whether we can actually define the characteristics of a so-called “Mediterranean world”. Rather, the art works, places of worship and cult objects appear to be expressions of the elementary mental processes of association, filtered through local cultural and conceptual patterns.

## V. ARCHETYPES AND PARADIGMS

What are generally called “fertility cults” involve concepts and performances which may be subdivided into two major categories: those concerned with the fertility of the land and those concerned with human fertility. At times, both categories are present together. As we have seen, the quest for success in hunting and fishing activities has only sporadically produced concepts and practices which can be included in the “fertility cult” category.

The concern for the fertility of the land is a universal trend of agricultural societies. Magical or religious rites to stimulate rain, or to increase the production of the fields, take forms which follow some general universal principles.

Most ancient societies, like modern ones, must have been faced with an ambivalent attitude towards sexual relations: the natural biological need of performing coitus on one side, the refrain necessary to avoid undesired offspring on the other. Apparently today this is an almost universal pattern with only a few exceptions usually limited to strongly patriarchal groups of extended families. This appears to affect both agricultural and pastoral societies where the raising of children means increasing labour forces. Besides such specific cases, sterile persons may wish to undertake some special action to provoke the miracle of having children, but they are a small minority.

Three fundamental paradigms seem to emerge: I. All societies today, and certainly all food producing societies in all times, are bound by sexual taboos, limiting and conditioning the sexual life of their peoples through what we usually call "morality". This has always caused some sort of repression which took shape in artistic externalizations, in the visual arts, in poetry, in music and dance. But all this seems to have little to do with fertility cults. Rather it has to do with repressed sexual imperatives, with needs for intimate human relations and for affection, and appears to be a universal paradigm.

II. The quest for understanding the dynamics of nature, the wandering and typically human queries *why?* and *how?* again appears to be a universal characteristic of humankind, ever since man left behind works of art reflecting his need to discover the mysterious laws of nature. This means at least since the appearance of *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, some 40,000 years ago. Since this time the eternal problems of birth and death have always preoccupied men all over, and this again is a universal paradigm. It is connected with the human need to understand phenomena rather than that of putting into action magic or religious performances to incentivate them. Again, this has little to do with a cult of fertility.

III. The quest for origin is reflected by creation myths in almost every society in the world. The reference to ideal images of mythical ancestors, male or female or both, is another universal paradigm. Also in this third case, there is not necessarily a relation to fertility cults.

While fertility cult practices connected with food production are part of the ideology of several agricultural societies, those focusing on



human procreation are more problematic; there are examples, but they are sporadic, and do not seem to reflect general patterns. From this general survey of the problem it would seem that rituals and practices to prevent human fertility may have been, frequently, as widespread as those intended to promote fertility.

A question to be left open is whether most of the evidence that has been attributed so far to fertility cults (minus the few conclusive cases), should not rather, be referred to one of the three universal paradigms just mentioned.

### *Summary*

The term "Fertility Cult" has been very fashionable for many years now, and may at times have been used and abused too readily. Also, the term is very general and is open to personal interpretation. There is no doubt that both ancient and modern cultures are concerned with human procreation and with fertility of the land and the abundance of hunting and fishing resources. However, specific information on beliefs and practices concerning "Fertility Cults" in the ancient Mediterranean and elsewhere prior to the Bronze Age, is scanty and in need of further analysis. Concerns relevant to fertility may be part of more complex conceptions regarding nature and the supernatural.

The Fertility Cult, as an isolated element, was apparently not a common trend. The worship of mythical ancestors, both male and female is, however, common in many prehistoric and tribal societies. In various cases there is a preference for male "patriarchs" or female "matrons". In addition, the association of the ancestral "mother" of the tribe, and the "mother earth" may have some universal connotations which acquired local characteristics and diversifications. The available archaeological evidence in the ancient Mediterranean should be analysed in a broader view of recurring patterns and paradigms. The study of phenomenology may reveal archetypes and universal elements.

Considering the known visual material, it is questionable whether we can view the ancient Mediterranean as a single cultural unit and whether we can actually define the characteristics of a so called "Mediterranean World". Rather, art work, places of worship and cult objects appear to be expressions of the elementary mental process of association, filtered through local cultural and conceptual patterns.

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