

Prehistory in Myth-Memory

A mythographic approach to Neolithic Anatolia

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Introduction



Both Çatalhöyük and Göbekli Tepe are culturally important, as primarily settlement and primarily sacred dwellings respectively. Both reveal a plethora of symbolic data. Not only are the location in the area currently believed to be the land of many vital 'firsts', they are in proximity to Mesopotamia and Egypt. This two cultures are academically verified as 'the first civilisations', yet the notion of symbolic continuation could present the possibility that Anatolia was an original, potent cultural influence on the two.

In recent years, academia is opening its' worldviews to encompass more hermeneutic avenues of discussion. In order to reveal the spirituality of ancient Anatolians through early mythographic writings and rituals, the rigid categorisations of disciplines and perspectives had to be rejected. A more encompassing, empathetic model is applied in order to understand the transmission of symbolism through time in the eyes of the natives who kept them alive. Through the interdisciplinary study, a combination of methods and perspectives can be utilised for the quest of prehistory in myth memory.

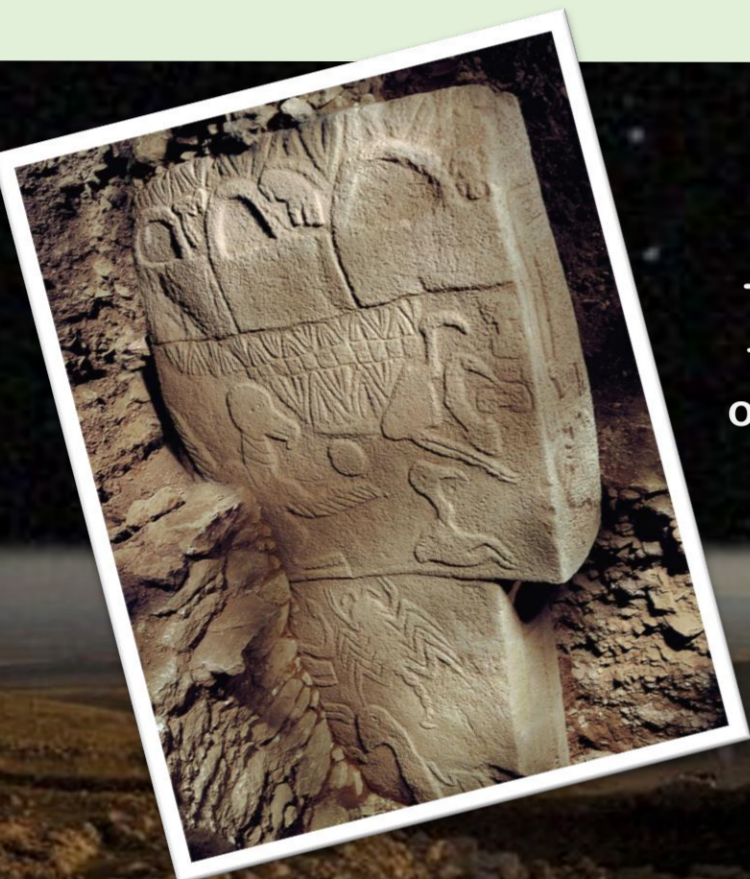
This speculative study wishes to express the impact mythographic work can have on prehistoric archaeological data, and does so by seeking, and identifying, symbolic continuation and imploring requirement for further enquiry into the topic.

The 'Fertile Crescent' region which houses the two chosen sites, Çatalhöyük and Göbekli Tepe, has been identified as the epicentre of civilisation. The abundance of this region exploded after the Younger Dryas period and allowed the development of settled hunter-gatherers. Permanent dwellings dating to the Neolithic are scattered across the Anatolian landscape. The levels of intricacy and capability these communities display has caused the rewriting of history.

It was originally believed that the invention of agriculture occurred prior to settlement and cultural complexity. The two chosen sites indicate the error of the above statement. Their uncovering reveals a history previously mysterious to academia, and calls for a re-evaluate interdisciplinary discussion.

Evidence shows that complex spirituality and advanced settlement architecture was occurring prior to the invention of agriculture – in fact, it is arguably the *cause* of the innovation that gradually led to 'civilisation' as we know it.

The rise of symbolic representations, whether geometrical, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic or mysteriously abstract, and increasingly solidified entanglement of spirituality into secular coincides with drastic socio-ideological changes of civilisation emergence. This cultural change was transmitted through trade and contact to long-distant lands and had long-lasting impact on human history.



Göbekli Tepe

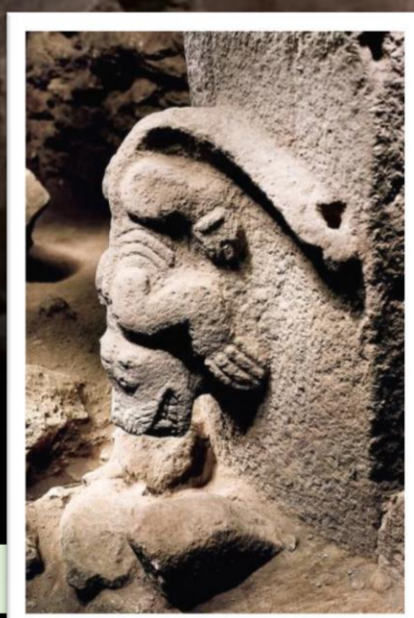
This 'Mountain Sanctuary' dates to 9900-8880 BCE, making it the oldest known temple. Strangely, it was intentionally destroyed and buried.



The rich and diverse symbolism, presented in mixed artistic styles, is predominantly zoomorphic. Anthropomorphic representation appears in figurines and statues rather than on the pillars themselves.

Even some graffiti!

Obsidian finds are rare, but all artefacts are of high quality. Seals found are similar to Hittite seals.



Evidence shows a plethora of animal bones, but a limited amount of human bones. Rituals were not focused on sacrifice, but on socialisation; they were drinking beer! This was the epicentral location for communities of the region gathering for feasting and, likely, trade of ideas and innovations.

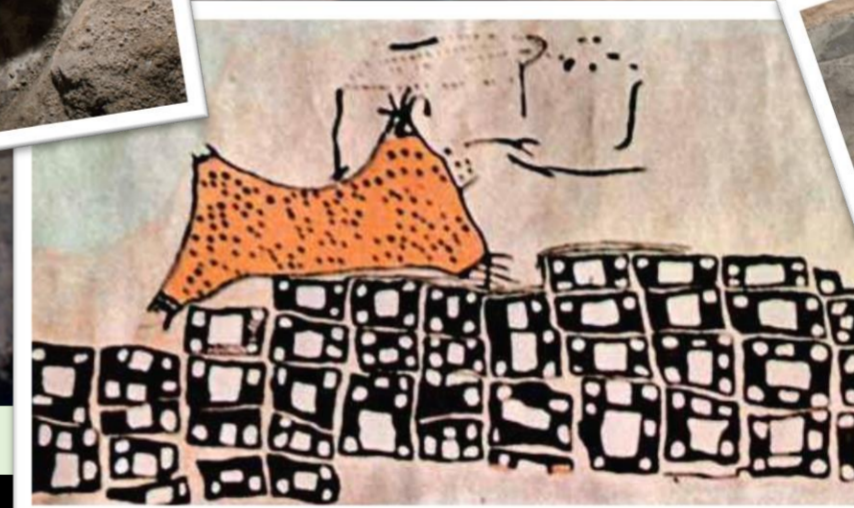
Çatalhöyük

This 34 acre town located on the Konya Plain dates to 7400-6000 BC and is well preserved. The mudbrick houses architecturally mimic caves and encompass both sacred and profane under one roof. Below the floors, they buried their dead. On their walls, they implanted bucrania. Symbolic focus is on the wild, dangerous and fatal.

Finds include:

- Leopard claw
- Plastered skull
- Zoomorphic figurine corpus
- Artwork – including volcano and animal scenes
- Female flagged by felines
- Large quantities of obsidian

Some of the houses seemed to be embedded with deeper purpose than others. These 'history houses' are seemingly connected to post-mortem rituals, displaying a multitude of skeletons. Their importance is emphasised by evidence of several reconstructions of architecture and artwork. It has been argued that the bucrania were protecting the dead.



Methodology



Unfortunately, there is no unified discipline for mythography, meaning no cohesive definition nor approach. This ensured an interdisciplinary methodological approach, touching into the realm of anthropology, archaeology, biology, history, linguistics, philosophy, and sociology.



Furthermore, the prior discourse has a Eurocentric position, and an emphasis on social evolution. A lot of theories are reductionist and limitational in their totality, but many offer notions of great importance.

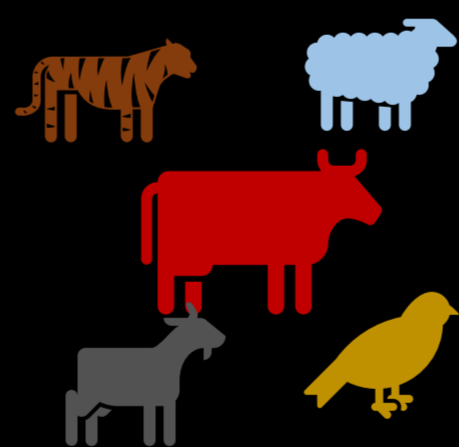


Many scholars advocate for the creative and complex, long-lasting and deeply embedded unifying and defining, vital and vastly varied, mechanisms that myth provides to peoples. They are the architectural archetypal manifestation of social, ecological, biological requirements of the time. They can be used to express social conventions or cultural histories, albeit fantastically and warped through time.



They adapt and evolve with people, transgress epochs of time – as evident by the influence of Greek myth in contemporary culture. Arguably, spirituality and its' symbols could be ingrained genetically, to a degree. Undeniably, myth has a profound impact on cultures and people and is more insightful and important to our knowledge acquisition of the past than initially believed.

Symbolism in Myth-Memory?



The connection between human and beast is shown in the symbolism at the sites. This is displayed through artefacts and architectural elements. Göbekli Tepe has an impressive display of taxonomical knowledge. Çatalhöyük has predominantly bull (horns), leopard and bears (claws and teeth) and vultures (skulls, primarily featured with headless humans). Bulls feature heavily in early civilisations, identified within Egypt, Crete, the cultures under the umbrella term of Mesopotamia and even contemporary India.

The indication of mask usage, strong connection to nature represented by symbolism and rituals connected so strongly with the symbolic architecture all indicate a culture influenced heavily by spirituality, possibly through the mediation of a shaman. Indications of shamanism are also found within the architecture, indicating the complexity of these peoples and the planning of their urban centres. Shamanism is often associated with hunter-gathering cultures, and creates a hierarchal structure primed for that seen in ancient Sumer and Egypt.



Nature is embedded within these sites. It's possible that Göbekli Tepe is a megalithic manifestation of astronomical knowledge. There is a curious connection to the constellation Taurus, who is said to have been the origin of a meteor shower around the time of Göbekli Tepe's construction. The architecture of Çatalhöyük is reminiscent of a cave system. This closely relates to tales of the Underworld, yet the volcano imagery invites queries concerning the relationship between these people and cultures. This is further enhanced by the heavy use of obsidian, particularly in ritual use.

Is this also evident within myth-memory?

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