GÖBEKLI TEPE – NEOLITHIC TEMPLE OR MONOLITHIC SLAUGHTERHOUSE?

by

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This work is dedicated to Professor Klaus Schmidt (11 December 1953 - 20 July 2014)

DECLARATION

I declare that GÖBEKLI TEPE - NEOLITHIC TEMPLE OR MONOLITHIC SLAUGHTERHOUSE? is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

Carel Willem Hendrik Boshoff 18 November 2023

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ABSTRACT

Göbekli Tepe is an ancient site in upper Mesopotamia recognised as an artificial mound by K Schmidt in 1994. Circles comprising large monolithic stones, described as T-pillars, were interpreted by Schmidt as ‘monumental’ and he identified the site as a sanctuary. This theory was expanded upon by numerous academics and others and soon Göbekli Tepe became known as a ritualistic centre or even a religious site or temple. The prevailing interpretation may be challenged on the premise that the construction of Göbekli Tepe had a different purpose altogether, a premise supported by environmental, geographical, archaeological and anthropological evidence, hence the topic of this proposal: was Göbekli Tepe indeed a Neolithic temple or simply a utilitarian construction used for something as mundane as a monolithic slaughterhouse, a circular building constructed of large pillars and used for the slaughter of animals and concomitant activities?

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INTRODUCTION

During 1963, Peter Benedict, an American archaeologist, surveyed the site and first described Göbekli Tepe as 'a complex of round-topped knolls of red earth with slight depressions between, located on a high limestone ridge rending SE' (Schmidt 2000:45,46). Benedict did not undertake any excavations. When Klaus Schmidt visited the site in 1994, he recognised it as an artificial mound and with his knowledge of other megalithic[1] sites in the area it was easy to identify Göbekli Tepe as one of these (Schmidt 2000:46). Schmidt was the first archaeologist to excavate the site after realising its importance.

Schmidt describes how this ancient site in upper Mesopotamia 'overlooks the springs of the Balikh to the east [called Ciilap çay in the region], the Harran Plain to the south and the hills around Urfa to the west and north. Coming from Mardin, Göbekli Tepe is a dominating landmark for a distance of more than 20 km' (Schmidt 2000:46). This area forms part of the Levant (in modern-day Syria and Southeast Turkey

1.1 DATING OF GÖBEKLI TEPE

The Ice Age ended approximately 11 620 BP (Before Present) which places Göbekli Tepe right at the beginning of the Holocene era[2] (Scarre 2013:40). The rapidly changing climate brought about a proliferation of plant and animal life, making the cultivation of food and a sedentary lifestyle possible (Scarre 2013:40-41). The Younger Dryas was a climatological event during the period of 12 900 - 11 600 years ago (Cheng et al 2020:23408).

Göbekli Tepe consists of an early layer numbered III that is dated to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A[3] (PPNA) period, a later layer, number II, is dated to the early and middle Pre-

1. Schmidt used this term to denote a site containing large stone structures (Schmidt 2000:46).
2. 'Holocene Epoch, formerly Recent Epoch, younger of the two formally recognized epochs that constitute the Quaternary Period and the latest interval of geologic time, covering approximately the last 11 700 years of Earth's history' (Agenbroad & Fairbridge 2022:Online).
3. 'The Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) is the earliest Neolithic period in Southwest Asia (circa 11 600 to 10 200 years ago) situated between hunting and gathering and sedentary farming societies. It is generally considered as the key period in the shift to management and production of resources, wherein increasingly sedentary communities start to produce food to extend the period of occupation at a site, with one of the main economic developments in the PPNA being the cultivation of wild cereals. Social changes are as

Pottery Neolithic B[4] (PPNB) period. Eight enclosures numbered A - H in the chronological order of excavation have been uncovered to date (UNESCO 2017). Carbon dating puts the oldest part of the site (Enclosure D) at 11 720 BP - 11 320 BP (the late twelfth millennium BP) (Scarre 2013:220) and the youngest part a thousand years later at 10 570 - 7020 BP (Gates 2011:13-15). Figure 1.1 shows Enclosures A to D. This period falls within the Neolithic era.[5]

The later level II at Göbekli Tepe, with smaller circles than the circles from the preceding level I, small oval huts, and rectangular houses, are placed at PPNB. Some scholars consider these dates as too early (Gates 2011:25). However, Gates does not elaborate on his comment.

Figure 1.1 Southern view on the main excavation area (UNESCO 2017)

significant as economic ones, enabling communities to both increase in size and live together for longer periods, and, arguably, it is these social changes that drive the economic developments. Architecture is an important facet of the early Neolithic, providing evidence for an increasingly sedentary lifestyle; changing social structures; and, in the growth of communities, a motive for the development of food production' (Finlayson et al 2011:8183).

4. PPNB, 9620 BP (Edwards 2016:69)

5. Neolithic, also called New Stone Age, 'is the final stage of cultural evolution or technological development among prehistoric humans. It was characterized by stone tools shaped by polishing or grinding, dependence on domesticated plants or animals, settlement in permanent villages, and the appearance of such crafts as pottery and weaving' (Lotha 2023:Online).

1.2 A CHANGE IN FOOD PROCUREMENT

An abundance of flint arrow points found at the site all date from PPNA. No points have yet been found from PPNB. It is unclear if the use of the structures at Göbekli Tepe may have changed or that the abundance of these arrow points made the production of further arrow points unnecessary (cf.3.3). It may also be ascribed to a change in hunting techniques and weapons, related to a change in prey away from larger animals to smaller animals such as fox, hare and birds like the partridge (Scarre 2013:205). This would make the use of arrows less frequent.

1.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Göbekli Tepe differs from PPNA settlements preceding it such as Tell Abu Hureyra and Mureybet or indeed those dated at the same era such as Nevali Cori and Asikli Höyuk. PPNA settlements such as Abu Hureyra, Tell Es-Sultan (ancient Jericho), Jer el Ahmar and Çayönü have in common small circular mud brick dwellings, signs of cultivation of crops (Gates 2011:17), the hunting of wild game (Gates 2011:18) and specific burial customs (Kornienko 2009:83) where bodies are buried under the floors of the houses (Scarre 2013:220). For example, in Jericho, the houses were made of mud bricks (Gates 2011:17-18) and in earlier subphases at Çayönü[6] they were made of tree branches covered with a mix of mud, straw, or grass and perhaps dung, with floors below ground level. All the above elements, namely a planned settlement, agriculture, and religion (Gates 2013:25) came together in Çatalhöyük[7] (9320 - 8220 BP) (Scarre 2013:216-217). Göbekli Tepe is different from the former in that it comprises of large stone circles formed by large stone monoliths with T-shaped chapiters as integral part of the pillars.

Houses were often deliberately abandoned by their occupants and filled in (deliberately covered with earth) (Gates 2011:20). In Göbekli Tepe the circles also appear to have been filled in deliberately.

PPNB settlements were characterized by back-to-back square or rectangular structures built of stones, mudbrick, and wood-and-clay (Belfer-Cohen 2020:4). Contemporary structures show an increase in the use of lime-plaster and the perpetuation of other

6. 60km north of Diyarbakir in south-eastern Turkey (Gates 2011:19).
7. Situated on the Konya plain in south-central Turkey (Scarre 2013:215).

building methods such as the lining of floors of special structures with slabs (Belfer-Cohen 2020:4).

Göbekli Tepe consists of megalithic (cf.1.1) stone structures and not mud brick or wattle and daub constructions, as well as a number of non-monumental buildings. The main feature of the stone structures in Göbekli Tepe is the presence of T-shaped pillars (UNESCO 2017). Some of the pillars at Göbekli Tepe are adorned with smaller animals such as reptiles, birds, carnivores, and herbivores. The iconography consists mainly of animal imagery bas-reliefs, as depicted in Figure 1.2, anthropomorphic figures, and hybrid human-animal creatures (Ramsayer 2012; cf. Chapter Six). A number of sculptures were further discovered in the fill debris (Schmidt 2000:49). The only other site discovered to date with similarly shaped T-pillars is Nevali Çori (Schmidt 2000:46; cf. 7.3.2).

Figure 1.2 Pillar with iconography showing a fox (Schmidt 2000:48)

The structures at Göbekli Tepe display elements of settlements from both the PPNA and PPNB such as circular construction (Schmidt 2000:49) as in PPNA and rectangular constructions in close vicinity of the enclosures (UNESCO 2017).

The importance of Göbekli Tepe as an archaeological site lies in the fact that although Göbekli Tepe spans a period falling within both the PPNA and PPNB, the construction of the different enclosures differs vastly from that of buildings in surrounding settlements dating from the same period, mainly by the absence of housing and the presence of monumental monolithic pillars at Göbekli Tepe. The reasons for this difference could assist in determining the possible utilisation of the buildings at Göbekli Tepe.

1.4 GEOGRAPHICAL IMPERATIVE

It is important to note that Göbekli Tepe is situated at the junction of two differing and contrasting ecological zones, as is the Neolithic site of Qermez Dere (Watkins et al 1989:19). The reason for choosing these specific sites may shed light on the functions of the structures. Göbekli Tepe is situated 5 km from the flood plain of Harran (as indicated above) and in the middle of that area of the Fertile Crescent where pre-domestication cultivation of cereal took place (cf. Figure 1.3).

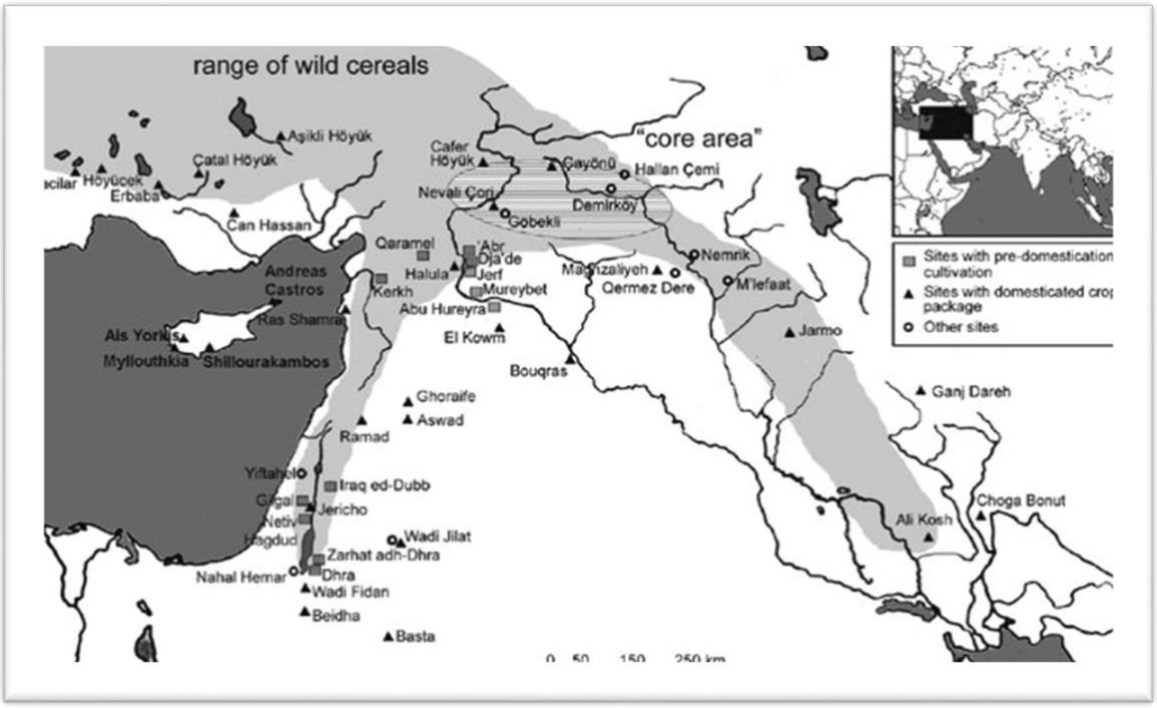

Figure 1.3 Map of early Neolithic sites in the Fertile Crescent (Fuller et al 2011)

The importance of wetlands as well as their commercial importance are often underestimated in the formation of Neolithic communities (Menotti and O'Sullivan 2014). Göbekli Tepe may well have had a hitherto unknown function in the economy of the area during the time of its occupation. The site differs vastly from other contemporary sites in the region and Schmidt interpreted Göbekli Tepe as probably not utilised for residential use (Schmidt 2000:46). This theory should be investigated.

1.5 PREVAILING THEORY

Schmidt estimated that only 5% of the site is excavated and that the rest is left for future archaeologists to discover when new and more advanced archaeological methods are developed (Schmidt 2000:53).

Schmidt, who surveyed the site from 1994 until his death in 2014, was of the opinion that Göbekli Tepe was 'the oldest yet found and excavated place of cultic activity' (2000:46-47). He was of the opinion that the site had a ritual background, but his theories would soon be expanded upon by the popular press to that of a cult building or 'the world's oldest temple' (Schmidt 2000:47). This is currently the most widely accepted theory about the site. Schmidt's supporters include Hasan Özalp of the Sivas Cumhuriyet University in Sivas, Turkey. He wrote as recently as 2019 'What does Göbekli Tepe, the world's oldest temple, tell us in terms of religion and theology?' (Özalp 2019:159).

1.6 ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

As more research on Neolithic society in the Levant becomes available in the fields of archaeology, agriculture, geography, iconography, climatology, environmental science, and anthropology, it is becoming clear that an alternative theory is not only possible but desirable. A case in point is E.B. Banning's theory that Göbekli Tepe was a settlement with housing, based on his observation that structures at Göbekli Tepe are much larger than other residences found at other settlements; this implies that these structures each housed more than one group residing in the same structure (Banning 2011:619-660). He postulates that this would have a number of implications such as the division of labour, the creation of wealth and an indication of status (Banning 2011:639). The theory advanced by Schmidt is that the site was developed for ritual purposes and built by different groups of hunter-gatherers, rooted in ritual practice (Schmidt 2000:49). Schmidt

does not offer any explanation for his conclusion that ritual was involved in either the process or the reason of the construction of Göbekli Tepe. If a credible alternative theory were to be established, it would assist in the understanding of Neolithic industry and trade in the Levant.

During the PPNB, the southern Levant experienced substantial summer rainfall as well as rain in winter, which by the end of the PPNB became warmer and dryer (arid). The weather changed to rainy winters and dry, hot summers, as experienced today in the Levant (Horwitz et al 1999:64). The change in climate brought about a change in available food sources and necessitated a change in food procuring methods. This in turn may be the reason for the circles at Göbekli Tepe, a theory which should be explored.

A major shortcoming in previous interpretations of the site is that it was not considered within a broader geographical and environmental background. The influence of climate and climate change leading up to and during the existence of Göbekli Tepe and the influence this must have had on the population of hunter-gatherer societies associated with it might not have been considered sufficiently. This might have led to incomplete hypotheses and a fragmentary understanding of Neolithic society.

The prevailing interpretation of the terrain as a temple or religious site may be challenged on the premise that the construction of Göbekli Tepe had a different purpose altogether, a premise possibly supported by environmental, geographical, archaeological and anthropological evidence, hence the topic of this proposal: was Göbekli Tepe indeed a Neolithic temple or simply a utilitarian construction used for something as mundane as a monolithic slaughterhouse, a circular building constructed of large pillars and used for the slaughter of animals and concomitant activities?

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is: What was Göbekli Tepe's main function? Were the structures at the terrain indeed used for religious practices (hence the term 'Neolithic temple') or could it have been utilised for something else - for instance a facility for the butchering of hunted animals and associated industries - hence the term 'monolithic slaughterhouse'?

This leads to further research questions:

- Could a critical analysis of existing theories lead to a different interpretation of the terrain at Göbekli Tepe?
- Does the archaeological and empirical evidence only validate the theory that Göbekli Tepe was a religious structure, or does it support other possible theories?
- Was the specific choice of location for the construction of Göbekli Tepe a result of geographical imperatives and the climate at the time of its construction?
- What was the nature of food procurement in the South-Western Levant prior to and during the occupation of Göbekli Tepe?
- Does the iconography on the T-pillars found in the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe only warrant the conclusion that the terrain was developed for ritual practices or are there other plausible deductions possible?
- Could a comparative study of surrounding Neolithic settlements and large constructions dated to the time of the occupation of Göbekli Tepe assist in the understanding of Göbekli Tepe as a settlement?

1.8 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

When Göbekli Tepe first came to my attention, it was already dubbed a sanctuary and a ritual center, and in popular terms even a temple. In considering this interpretation I realised that there was no god associated with these monumental structures. This raised doubts as to the correctness of these assumptions, as well as to the question that if not a religious site of some kind, what was Göbekli Tepe really constructed for and what was the relevance and importance of this development?

1.9 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this study is to revisit the popular theory that the Göbekli Tepe terrain is the ‘oldest temple in the world’. This theory developed after Klaus Schmidt stated that ‘the religious importance of the structures could hardly be denied’ (Schmidt 2000:45).

A re-evaluation of the empirical evidence as documented by earlier researchers will be undertaken to establish whether a different interpretation of the site is possible. Further physical investigation at Göbekli Tepe is regulated due to its status as a World Heritage site. Earlier interpretations of the function and use of the terrain at Göbekli Tepe do not

take cognisance of the broader geographical, climatological, environmental, and human societal context in which the terrain is situated. In this study, the terrain will be considered against this broader context. The iconography and the archetypal T-pillars the theory is found on will also be examined.

An investigation into food production will also be undertaken. The role of hunter/gatherer societies in transition to farming societies in this process will be examined. A brief comparison with surrounding Neolithic settlements and temples of later ages will be undertaken as part of the human societal context at the time of construction and utilisation of Göbekli Tepe.

1.10 HYPOTHESIS

A *multi-disciplinary approach* to available evidence from archaeology, agriculture, geography, iconography, climatology, environmental science, and anthropology might illuminate more than one possible explanation for the constructions at Göbekli Tepe. Further investigation may reveal more information as to the reasons for the construction of the monolithic stone structures and other buildings on the site as well as provide some insight into Neolithic society at the time of the occupation of Göbekli Tepe.

By studying empirical evidence from the site and determining why it was classified as a temple, the monolithic stone structures and the construction of the site, the archaeological deposits, the petroglyphs carved on the pillars, the surrounding area, the lack of clear agriculture, climatology at the time, environmental aspects and the people of the time will be considered.

A hypothesis that a central production facility for the obtaining of meat and skins and associated industries was part of a sophisticated system of procurement and distribution previously unimagined for the time, will be examined.

1.11 METHODOLOGY

This study is approached from the perspective that the prevailing interpretation of the site as a religious temple is not necessarily the only or the best interpretation based on the empirical data from the site and surrounding settlements. Research and interpretation

are in constant flux and the approach to archaeology changes over time. These changes influence thought processes regarding the relationship between what is discovered at a site and the scholars who interact with the site.

This study seeks to interpret the terrain in different ways in correlation with what was and what is being discovered there along with case studies of similar sites.

In the words of Tilley as quoted by Johnson, ‘There is no fixed meaning, and we must remember that images cannot in fact be reduced to words. …I do not present a proper conclusion because this is an impossibility’ (Johnson 2010:111).

1.11.1 Approach to research questions

This study is a qualitative one. A *qualitative study* is ‘an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied’ (Aspers and Corte 2019). This study will also include a *comparative analysis* of data provided by fieldwork at a given terrain (in this case Göbekli Tepe) and comparing the results with the analysed data from other sites from the same period such as Nevali Çori and Çatalhöyük.

A *multi-disciplinary approach* will be applied by incorporating the following disciplines: archaeology, agriculture, geography, iconography, climatology, environmental science, and anthropology as well as a review of available literature. The importance of these approaches for the current study is described below.

The approach to all archaeological sites depends on the different schools of thought and knowledge of the archaeologists of the time such as Schmidt and other earlier archaeologists. This would have been a major factor in the shaping of the current prevailing interpretation of the terrain of Göbekli Tepe.

An *archaeological approach* is performed in a number of ways. An archaeological study of an area is performed with a survey technique that is used to identify a possible archaeological site. Once a site is identified, excavations can begin to take place and once that is done and a site or artefacts are identified, further studies can be undertaken from the context it is within (Greene and Moore 2010:56, 101-109). Since the part of the

site of Göbekli Tepe that is being studied is already excavated and documented, the research carried out there will be examined.

Agriculture followed shortly after the hunter-gatherers' first forays into a sedentary lifestyle when the evolution of hunter gatherer societies moved in the direction of the exploitation of more bountiful and probable food reserves (Marean 2016). The interpretation of Göbekli Tepe and the reason why it was established happens against the background of the Agricultural Revolution.[8]

The *geographical approach* attempts to explain why Göbekli Tepe was established in its specific location and not elsewhere (cf. Knitter et al 2019:1-2) and takes into consideration the landscape and the prevailing climate at the time. With this approach it is considered how Göbekli Tepe developed to encompass the human activity possibly enacted there in relation to features of the landscape within which it was formed. Renfrew suggested that this approach be called 'Geoarchaeology' (Renfrew 1983:317). It offers a different perspective on the geospatial location of Göbekli Tepe.

The *iconography* of Göbekli Tepe was used by Schmidt to identify each enclosure and each enclosure has different animals when compared to the rest (Schmidt 2000:49-51). Iconography is the study of images and their possible symbolic meanings, and various interpretations of the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe will be considered to attempt to deduce the possible use of Göbekli Tepe.

The *environment* of Göbekli Tepe is influenced by the climate at the time, and the landscape explains the location of Göbekli Tepe and its setting. Research has been undertaken on the current landscape and how the landscape affected the occupation of Göbekli Tepe at the time of its establishment (Knitter et al 2019:1-16).

Climatology is the study of the weather and how different weather patterns work (Rohli and Vega 2013). The *climatological approach* assists in understanding the factors

8 The Neolithic Revolution, a term first used by Gordon Childe to explain the start of agriculture in the Near Middle East, Europe and the Americas (Lorenzetti 2022).

influencing the fauna and flora in the area and serves to inform the *anthropological approach*.

An *anthropological approach* will be applied to understand the interaction of humans with each other and the environment. Anthropology is the study of human behaviour and their culture (Prasojo 2013:294). It is important to identify the needs of the people at Göbekli Tepe and to help understand the structures (and their functions) that were built in addressing this.

1.11.2 Chapter layout

Chapter Two: Critical analysis of existing theories. The work of Klaus Schmidt, who first realised the importance of the terrain, as well as theories by other archaeologists and anthropologists such as Edward Banning will be analysed, and the conclusions reached by them will be critically discussed. Other literature on the subject will also be analysed. The following questions will be addressed in this chapter:

- What was the basis for Schmidt's initial conclusion about the terrain as well as other theories of Banning and others?
- What would a study of other literature on Göbekli Tepe reveal about the basis for the existing theories?

Chapter Three: Archaeological and empirical evidence. An overview of available literature regarding archaeological surveys of the Göbekli Tepe terrain as well as empirical evidence gleaned from this overview will serve as the basis for this chapter.

Reliance is being placed on available literature on the site. Göbekli Tepe is still being excavated by a team of archaeologists who publish new findings from time to time, adding to the body of knowledge all the time. The following questions will be looked at:

- Does the preliminary report by Klaus Schmidt support the conclusion that Göbekli Tepe was a ritualistic centre?
- Were observations made by Schmidt such as the abundance of arrow points on the terrain, the size and shape of the T-pillars and the iconography explored by

him sufficiently considered as the basis of a possible different interpretation of the site?

- Could the ‘intentional backfill’ of the site be interpreted differently?
- Are later observations distinguishable from the initial observations by Schmidt and to what extend were these observations influenced by the work done by Schmidt?
- Could a re-evaluation of the empirical evidence as documented by earlier researchers lead to a different interpretation of the site?

Chapter Four: Geographical location and climate. People did not settle in sites on a whim. As Wolf Schneider put it: ‘A progressive horde could eventually give up nomadic existence after having found such a fertile valley, which, if necessary, could be successfully defended. These people settled down. They gave up living in tents or caves and built the first houses of stones, mud, and branches’ (1963:27).

In an 1896 essay, architect Louis Henry Sullivan wrote: ‘Form ever follows function, and this is the law. Where function does not change form does not change’. (Sullivan 1896:408) Bearing this in mind, there is a reason why Göbekli Tepe was built where it was built and a reason why it was built in the form it was built.

The oldest structures at Göbekli Tepe date from 11 600 BP, more or less corresponding with the end of the Younger Dryas and the occupation there lasted for approximately 1760 years before the site was abandoned (Scarre 2013:40). The following questions will be addressed in this chapter:

- In the absence of a written account, the form and function of the structures at Göbekli Tepe have to be deduced from all available information. Could the geographical location of the site explain the function/s of the structures?
- What was the reason for building the structures at this specific location?
- Was the weather at the time relevant to the development of the site?
- Would a new interpretation, taking into consideration the wider geographical, climatological, and environmental setting in which the site is situated, come to a different conclusion?

Chapter Five: Anthropological considerations. Life in the Southern Levant during the time of the occupation of Göbekli Tepe was undergoing profound changes. These changes have been popularised by the term ‘Agricultural Revolution‘. Göbekli Tepe might have played a major role in this transition and may have had more to do with food production and its concomitant products and less with religion. The site will be considered in this context. The following questions will be addressed in this chapter:

- What was the nature of food production in the South-Eastern Levant leading up to the construction of Göbekli Tepe?
- Was food production a motivation for the development of the site?
- How does this correspond with the transition of hunter/gatherer societies to farming societies?
- Were the activities at Göbekli Tepe limited to a single activity, or did they entail other activities supplementary to a main activity?
- Was a central production facility for the obtaining of meat and skins part of a sophisticated system of procurement and distribution previously unimagined for the time?
- What was the context in which fragments of human skulls were discovered at Göbekli Tepe?

Chapter Six: Iconography. Special attention will be given to the iconography on the pillars of the monumental buildings at Göbekli Tepe. The mainstream accepted theory is that this iconography points to the ritual nature of the buildings of Göbekli Tepe and this theory will be critically discussed by answering the following questions.

- What is the nature of the iconography found at the site?
- What is the possible purpose of this iconography?

Chapter Seven: Comparative Settlements. Parallels between the constructions at Göbekli Tepe and buildings and large constructions at surrounding Neolithic settlements will be considered to determine which similarities, if any, exist between the different sites.

- Would a comparative study of surrounding Neolithic settlements shed light on the architecture found at Göbekli Tepe?
- Can the knowledge of what is known of temples from a later era be interpolated to the structures found at Göbekli Tepe?

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

1.14 LIMITATIONS

Since the elevation of Göbekli Tepe to the status of World Heritage site, any new physical research at the site was of necessity curtailed (UNESCO 2017). Limitations are imposed by the extent of the site that remains unexcavated. Literature pertaining to the geographical and climatological conditions during the period of occupation of Göbekli Tepe has only recently started to appear and become readily available. Reliance will, of necessity, be placed on data from the period prior to the terrain being declared a World Heritage site but any new discoveries at Göbekli Tepe will of course augment the current available information.

1.15 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.15.1 Primary sources

The main primary source that will be used is the *Göbekli Tepe, Southeastern Turkey a Preliminary Report on the 1995 - 1999 Excavations* (2000) by Klaus Schmidt which contains the observations made by Klaus Schmidt who excavated at the site of Göbekli Tepe during that time. His field notes explain each archaeological observation of the site which he wrote down in this report. Here, Schmidt also comes to the initial conclusion that the iconography found on the T-pillars is associated with ritualistic purposes.

Information about the terrain and location can also be found within the '*Göbekli Tepe: Nomination for Inclusion on the World Heritage List' report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO*) (2017). This report has very detailed information about the surrounding area and the site itself.

Göbekli Tepe: A Brief Description of the Environmental Development in the surroundings of the UNESCO World Heritage Site by Daniel Knitter et al (2019) represents some of the

most recent research done on the topic of the environment of Göbekli Tepe during the Younger Dryas period.

Timing and structure of the Younger Dryas event and its underlying climate dynamics (2020) by Hai Cheng et al contains recent research done on the topic of the Younger Dryas event and helps to explain the topic with verified research performed on the topic.

A Stone Age Sanctuary in South-Eastern Anatolia (2012) by Klaus Schmidt is another collection of observations made by Schmidt during his time of excavations at Göbekli Tepe.

1.15.2 Secondary sources

In the introduction the following sources were of assistance: *The Oxford handbook of wetland archaeology* (2014) by Francesco Menotti and Aidan O'Sullivan gives insight into the archaeology for wetlands and this is used to explain the surrounding area of Göbekli Tepe at the time; The *Introduction to Anthropology* (2013) by Zaenuddin Prasojo is a very basic overview of what anthropology is and why it is important*; Ancient cities - The archaeology of urban life in the ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome* (2011) by Charles Gates and *The Human Past* (2013) by Chris Scarre describes the culture of the Neolithic people and expounds on the Neolithic setting of the site of Göbekli Tepe and some of the surrounding sites with great detail*; and Archaeology: An Introduction* (2010) by Kevin Greene and Tom Moore showcases basic archaeological background in all the chapters provided.

For a critical analysis of the existing theories the following books are invaluable: *Göbekli Tepe Genesis of the Gods* (2014) by Andrew Collins argues that Göbekli Tepe is the 'Garden of Eden' and that it was constructed by the Nephilim*; So Fair a House: Göbekli Tepe and the Identification of Temples in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East (2011)* by Edward Banning gives an alternative theory that the structures of Göbekli Tepe could have been used as housing*; What Does Göbekli Tepe, The World's Oldest Temple, Tell Us In Terms Of Religion And Theology?* (2019) by Hasan Özalp examines Göbekli Tepe from the philosophy of religion and religious symbolism*; and in Decoding Göbekli Tepe with Archaeoastronomy: What Does the Fox Say?* (2017) by Dr Martin Sweatman and Dr

Dimitrios Tsikritsis, the authors interpret the symbolism of Göbekli Tepe according to alleged astronomical events.

The following books are crucial for investigation of the archaeological and empirical evidence: *The role of cult and feasting in the emergence of Neolithic communities new evidence from Göbekli Tepe, southeastern Turkey* by Oliver Dietrich et al (2012) explains the role of possible feasting that took place at Göbekli Tepe with reference to evidence found at the site. This offers background information for the religious approach*; The birth of religion* (2011) by Charles Mann vaguely explains the temple theory with unproven assumptions; *Notes on the Cult Buildings of Northern Mesopotamia in the Aceramic Neolith Period* (2009) by Tatiana Kornienko explore the uses of cult buildings and their functions during the Neolithic period and links Göbekli Tepe to a cult building. *Establishing a Radiocarbon Sequence for Göbekli Tepe, state of Research and New Data*, by Oliver Dietrich et al (2013) is a detailed undertaking of the radiocarbon dating performed at Göbekli Tepe; *and Göbekli Tepe: Agriculture and Domestication* (2014) by Peters et al considers the possible contribution of Göbekli Tepe to the establishment of agriculture.

The most important books used for the geographical and climate issues are the following: *Climatology* (2013) by Robert Rohli and Anthony Vega describes a broad overview of what climatology is; *Timing and structure of the Younger Dryas event and its underlying climate dynamics* (2020) by Cheng et al explores the Younger Dryas and its causes and effects are examined and placed in the chronological transition of time since the end of the last Ice Age; *Evidence for food storage and predomestication granaries 11,000 years ago in the Jordan Valley* (2009) by Ian Kuijy and Bill Finlayson argues that a more sedentary lifestyle followed the availability of grains and the storage thereof; and *Transformations in an early agricultural society: Feasting in the southern Levantine Pre-Pottery Neolithic* (2008) by Katheryn Twiss examines the occurrence of feasting in Pre-pottery Neolithic times. *The demythologization of landscape: landscape research in the context of prehistoric societies – the example of the Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe* (2021) by Ricarda Braun debunks the theory that Göbekli Tepe was build in it's location to be seen from afar and shows that the location was rather chosen for the view over the Harran Plain. This supports the view that Göbekli Tepe supported hunting rather than being a sanctuary.

The following books are important for the anthropological considerations are: *Gazelle behaviour and human presence at early Neolithic Göbekli Tepe* (2013) by Lang et al which considers the high-density occurrence of gazelle in the immediate surroundings of Göbekli Tepe*; Meat outside the freezer: Drying, smoking, salting and sealing meat in fat at an Epipalaeolithic megasite in eastern Jordan* (2019) by Spyrou et al elaborate on the small-scale storage of meat as a fairly unexamined component of the mobile lifeways of hunter-gatherers in the Southern Levant during the Late Upper Palaeolithic to Middle Epipalaeolithic; and *Hunting and Gathering* (2020) by Thomas Widlok discusses social structures of hunter-gatherer groups as influenced by hunting and gathering.

The following books are extremely useful as a key to iconography found on the T-pillars at Göbekli Tepe: *Megalithic Totemism of the Individual: A New Analysis of Göbekli Tepe's Monumental Pillars* (2012) by Nate Ramsayer describes the animal symbolism and argues that the T-shaped pillars are in fact totems because of the animal iconography; *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols and their Meanings* (1994) by David Fontana says that all symbols have meaning, provided they are considered against their context; and *Animals in the Symbolic World of Pre-Pottery Neolithic Göbekli Tepe, South-eastern Turkey: A Preliminary Assessment* (2004) by Jorvis Peters and Klaus Schmidt postulate upon the stone figurines, sculptures and decorations found at Göbekli Tepe.

The following books are important for a comparative study of Göbekli Tepe and its surrounding settlements: *Qermez Dere and the early aceramic Neolithic of N. Iraq* (1989) by Trevor Watkins describes the site of Qermez Dere, a Neolithic site which is looked at to help explain the location of Göbekli Tepe; *Beyond Daily Bread: Evidence of Early Neolithic Ritual from Göbekli Tepe* (1998) by Klaus Schmidt describes thoughts on the symbolism found at Göbekli Tepe; and *Karahan Tepe: a new cultural centre in the Urfa area in Turkey* (2011) by Bahatin Çelik provides a comparison between symbolism found at Karahan Tepe and other comparative sites with specific reference to Göbekli Tepe.

CHAPTER TWO
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EXISTING THEORIES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The origin and use of the structures at Göbekli Tepe forms the subject of numerous and wide-ranging theories. The theory developed by Klaus Schmidt, that Göbekli Tepe is a ritual site, is considered to be the authoritative work on Göbekli Tepe and is used and quoted widely by most authors on the subject, such as Özalp, Banning, Collins, and others.

The work by Schmidt, *Göbekli Tepe, Southeastern Turkey: A Preliminary Report on the 1995-1999 Excavations* forms the basis of the discussion in this chapter. Seven main publications will be considered in this chapter, namely:

- *What Does Göbekli Tepe, The World's Oldest Temple, Tell Us In Terms Of Religion And Theology?* By Hasan Özalp
- *So Fair a House: Göbekli Tepe and the Identification of Temples in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East,* by Edward Banning
- *Decoding Göbekli Tepe with Archaeoastronomy: What does the fox say?* By Martin B. Sweatman and Dimitrios Tsikritsis
- *Göbekli Tepe: Genesis of the Gods: the Temple of the Watchers and the discovery of Eden,* by Andrew Collins
- *New Possible Astronomic Alignments at the Megalithic Site of Göbekli Tepe, Turkey* by Alessandro De Lorenzis and Vincenzo Orofino
- *Sirius and the project of the megalithic enclosures at Gobekli Tepe by Giulio Magli*
- *A sanctuary, or so fair a house? In defense of an archaeology of cult at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Göbekli Tepe* by Oliver Dietrich and Jens Notroff

The theories, as postulated by the above authors, will be discussed critically after a summation of each theory is given based on what the authors observed and the subsequent deductions they made at Göbekli Tepe and other comparable sites.

Considering these theories critically will allow for possible alternative interpretations of the purpose and importance of Göbekli Tepe as an archaeological discovery.

2.2 KLAUS SCHMIDT

Because Schmidt and his team excavated the site, they are likely to have the most in-depth knowledge of the site and what was discovered there. Schmidt interprets Göbekli Tepe as a hilltop sanctuary (Schmidt 2000:46), a place that was used for ritual feasting (Dietrich et al 2012:687). It was on this interpretation that the site was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 2016 (Şimşek 2016:Online). The press, such as the Bradshaw Foundation and The Guardian, did a lot to popularize this interpretation (Mangan 2017:Online).

2.2.1 Initial observations

Schmidt found large limestone slabs and fragments which he identified as PPN (pre-pottery Neolithic) megalithic architecture. He identified T-shaped pillars similar to the terrazzo building of Nevali Çori, a site excavated prior to the excavations at Göbekli Tepe but which postdates Göbekli Tepe by 1000 years (Schmidt 2000:46).

The limestone slabs and pillar fragments were distributed all over the mound and the mound itself was situated in an unusual topographical setting (Schmidt 2000:46). Schmidt noted that the pillars were arranged in several circular configurations that vary in size. He excavated and numbered the first four structures, dated them and identified anthropomorphic features on some of the T-shaped pillars (2000:46). Schmidt did not expound on his observation that the topography found at Göbekli Tepe was unusual.

Schmidt is further of the opinion that because the T-pillars found at the site are anthropomorphic in nature it meant that rituals took place at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:48-49). He expands this opinion during further excavations and later archaeological evidence such as the anthropomorphic figures on some of the T-pillars found in Enclosure D (Schmidt 2010:244-247). Later inferences about a temple are merely assumptions made from these interpretations when Enclosure E was christened the ‘Rock Temple’. (Schmidt 2012:105).

Compared with other sites in the region and the placement of the site (cf. 2.2.3), Schmidt is of the opinion that Göbekli Tepe offers compelling evidence that the stone T-pillar circles are indeed 'specialized buildings'. It was unusual for the stone pillars at Göbekli Tepe to be conveyed from the quarry to be erected in the way they are as it would have needed a lot of manpower to achieve (Schmidt 2000:48). Such a feat would require co-operation between hunter gatherer groups in the area (Schmidt 2000:48).

Schmidt mentioned 'a rich fauna of species' based on the bones of a large number of wild animals found in and around the site (2000:47). He found several sickles, retouched blades and arrow points at Göbekli Tepe, noting that Byblos and Nemrik arrow points were the most common (Schmidt 2000:52-53). He acknowledges the presence of these different types of arrow points as part of his dating of Göbekli Tepe but does not elaborate on the presence of such a large number of these arrow points. The large number of arrow points were noteworthy, but Schmidt apparently did not pay attention to the significance of this aspect.

Schmidt states that the anthropomorphic T-shaped pillars could be seen as twins, or brothers, or sisters, based on mythology (Schmidt 2010:244). Schmidt does not mention which culture this mythology is based on and does not mention that the anthropomorphic T-pillars could show signs of a deity.

The large number of bones found at Göbekli Tepe may indicate the presence of feasting at the site, but it is not the only reasonable explanation for their presence (Schmidt 2000:47).

2.2.2 Observations during excavations

During the excavations at Göbekli Tepe Schmidt stated that 'the time was not ripe to recognize the real importance of the site' (Schmidt 2000:46). The focus then shifted to Çayönü, a site to the Northeast of Göbekli Tepe. Schmidt only moved back to excavate Göbekli Tepe after knowledge about Çayönü and Nevali Çori was gathered, (Schmidt 2000:46). Nevali Çori arrow points exist at Göbekli Tepe but are rare (Schmidt 2000:52). Nevali Çori and Göbekli Tepe share similarities in their iconography (Schmidt 2000:52) and Nevali Çori also has structures similar to those of Göbekli Tepe, most noticeably the T-shaped pillars (Schmidt 2000:52).

Schmidt compared the figurative decorations found on several shaft straighteners and stone slabs at Jerf el-Ahmar (Schmidt 2000:52) and Nevali Çori (Schmidt 2010:244) with iconography found at Göbekli Tepe and established a close comparison between the different images.

The emphasis on Çayönü and Nevali Çori before clear deductions were made regarding Göbekli Tepe means that the interpretation of Göbekli Tepe by necessity involved extrapolation. Since Göbekli Tepe is the older site, any interpretations of the site need to take cognisance of this extrapolation.

The presence of Nevali Çori arrow points at Göbekli Tepe could mean that these arrow points might have been developed at Göbekli Tepe, appearing at Nevali Çori at a later stage. This would date Nevali Çori arrow points to as much as 1200 years earlier than what is currently believed, since Göbekli Tepe is dated at 11 720 BP. A precise conclusion in this regard is difficult, seeing that the layers at Göbekli Tepe are not well defined (Schmidt 2000:48).

Schmidt is of the opinion that because some T-pillars found at the site in Enclosure D are anthropomorphic in nature, it meant that rituals took place at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:48-49). Any inferences about a temple are, however, merely assumptions made from later archaeological finds (Schmidt 2010:224, Scmidt 2012:105). Schmidt does not consider any other explanations for the iconography, such as that it may be mere decorations. The T-shaped pillars may have had a utilitarian use that Schmidt does not consider. Schmidt compares similar architecture between the two sites of Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori but does not take cognisance of the time lapse of a thousand years between the two sites. It must be remembered that Göbekli Tepe predates both Nevali Çori and Çayönü (cf. 7.3.1-7.3.2). Such comparisons may cast light on Göbekli Tepe but must be done with circumspection.

2.2.3 Comments

As stated above, Schmidt interprets Göbekli Tepe as a hilltop sanctuary (2000:46). Schmidt is of the opinion that Göbekli Tepe was built at the top of a hill to be seen from afar and concluded that it must be a place of importance; he therefore called it a ‘hilltop sanctuary’. He does not consider the possibility that the location of the site enabled the

visitors to the site to have a clear view of the Harran Plain or the significance of the view for the occupants of Göbekli Tepe (cf. 4.4.).

Göbekli Tepe cannot be compared with other Neolithic sites in the surrounding area because it is not similar to those sites (Schmidt 2000:46). The sanctuary theory originates from conclusions drawn of specialised buildings in other Neolithic sites. Because it has been accepted that those buildings are temples or religious activity centres, the same is being postulated about Göbekli Tepe. Schmidt's conclusions about Göbekli Tepe as a religious site are unconvincing. By not considering all the excavated evidence found at Göbekli Tepe not all possible theories are being explored.

Schmidt concluded that Göbekli Tepe had to have been used as a meeting place for hunter-gathers and not as a settlement on the assumption that people settling at Göbekli Tepe would have been a strain on the natural resources in the area (Schmidt 2000:48). This is a rather illogical conclusion, as the abundance of animal bones still at Göbekli Tepe more than 10 millennia later would point to the opposite.

Dietrich et al (which included Schmidt) also interpreted Göbekli Tepe as a place that was used for ritual feasting (Dietrich et al 2012:687). As far as feasting is concerned, Dietrich et al base their assumption on the presence of the large number of animal bones found at the site. They did not mention any other possible reasons for the abundance of animal bones at the site.

Schmidt's interpretation of the site has been accepted by several scholars and lay people over the years, including populists like Andrew Collins (2014) as well as scholars such as Hasan Özalp (2019), Manu Seyfzadeh and Robert Schoch (2019).

Because approximately 90% of the site remains unexcavated, little is currently known about Göbekli Tepe. There is still a lot of further research that has to be done there, the results of which may shed a different light upon the site.

2.3 HASAN ÖZALP

Hasan Özalp, who was influenced by the work of Schmidt, argues that the circular enclosures at Göbekli Tepe are temples and that Göbekli Tepe is a religious site (Özalp 2019:162). Özalp compares Göbekli Tepe with the cultures of the Southern Levant but these cultures are from a much later date than Göbekli Tepe (Özalp 2019:159-160). In his article, Özalp discusses the concepts of beliefs, ritual and symbolism based on philosophy in the region (2019:163). He does not mention any direct observation of the site.

Özalp refers to the history of the area and cities such as Urfa and Harran (2019:160) which were established thousands of years after Göbekli Tepe. He uses these examples to highlight the importance of religion in the area. Özalp further refers to the archaeological record of Göbekli Tepe. He argues that the site was the original location of the Garden of Eden. This argument is based on his interpretation of the history of the region, referring to the era when Adam, the first human being, was created. The region within which Göbekli Tepe is situated covers the Garden of Eden, according to Özalp. Özalp bases this on a passage of the Old Testament,[9] describing the locality of the Biblical Eden (Özalp 2019:160-161). This theory is also expounded by Collins (2014).

To support his theory that Göbekli Tepe was a temple, Özalp mentions that celestial bodies[10] may have been worshipped and that animal symbolism played an important role with these celestial bodies when compared with the stars (Özalp 2019:164-165). The problem with this theory is that he once again compares it with ideas of people of a much later time such as those mentioned in the Quran (Özalp 2019:165).

In a further theory, Özalp contends that Schmidt compared the site with that of a *dakhma* (Tower of Silence) where vultures would pick the bones of a deceased body clean (Özalp 2019:167). Özalp states that the symbolism of the site is hard to comprehend as the meaning is almost impossible to deduce, yet he attempts to describe the symbolism with symbols of other, later civilizations (Özalp 2019:169-170). Although later civilizations may

9 Genesis 2:8-14 King James version 1611.
10 Such as the sun, the moon, and the stars. Özalp uses the terms ‘celestial bodies’ sometimes to denote deities and other times to refer to the sun, the moon and stars, depending on the context of his use of the term.

reflect aspects of earlier civilizations due to diffusion,[11] this does not explain the origin of the aspect thus reflected in the earlier civilization. It may be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the specific aspect found in the earlier civilization but cannot serve to explain it (Cox 2001:113).

Özalp's theory departs from the premise that Göbekli Tepe is considered a religious structure since he refers to the structures at Göbekli Tepe as temples from the outset of his argument (2019:162). Özalp seeks to justify his position by attempting to find parallels between the inhabitants of Göbekli Tepe and people who came much later, such as the prophet Abraham, on the basis that they shared the same region, although not at the same time (2019:164). He refers to how heavenly bodies are viewed in books such as the Torah and Quran and extrapolates this to the inhabitants of Göbekli Tepe thousands of years earlier (Özalp 2019:164-166). According to Özalp, the Holy Scriptures, as well as archaeological, historical, and geographical research, indicate that the inhabitants of the region believed in celestial bodies (2019:164). He concludes that these inhabitants were interested in astronomy and astrology because the tradition of worshiping the stars existed in this region. He mentions Assyrian-Babylonian polytheism and Mandaeism (Özalp 2019:164). It can be argued that he is attempting to add an identity to a culture without one and there is no evidence to support this theory.

He states that the figures on the T-pillars (Özalp calls them 'obelisks'), as well as the number and structure of these monoliths, lead him to the assumption regarding astronomy and astrology. He makes no mention of the T-pillars without any iconography, nor does he offer any explanation for this anomaly.

Özalp explains the iconography of Göbekli Tepe through Babylonian and Sumerian ideologies[12] (Özalp 2019:170), which also came much later and after Göbekli Tepe.

11 The spread of ideas through contact between groups (Johnson 2010:19).
12 Sumerian - Ubaid period - ca. 7020 - 5520 BP
Protoliterate (Uruk) period - ca. 5520 - 4920 BP
Early Dynastic period - ca. 4920 - 4370 BP (Gates 2013:30)
Old Babylonian period - cal 4020 - 3550 BP
Isin-Larsa period - cal 4020 - 3780 BP
First Dynasty of Babylon - cal 3850 - 3551 BP
Hammurabi of Babylon - cal 3748 - 3706 BP (Gates 2013:52)

Özalp does not attempt to explain what Göbekli Tepe is. He merely assumes that these structures, which appear to have no residential purposes, were meant for religious purposes (Özalp 2019:162). Özalp states that evidence from data obtained at Göbekli Tepe based on the appearance of how the structures look, indicates that the people of Göbekli Tepe had a faith (Özalp 2019:164) but does not conclude as to the deity ostensibly being worshipped there. He based his conclusion on the fact that the structures consist of two large pillars placed centrally inside a circle consisting of 12 pillars with seats between the surrounding pillars. He concludes that rituals were performed at the center and watched by people. Özalp compares this with Greek and Roman theaters. Özalp provides no explanation or proof for his contention that rituals were indeed performed inside the circles (2019:164). The only element these two ideas have in common is that they are both circular structures. Özalp, by providing an unfounded explanation for the use of the circles, excludes any other interpretation. His emphasis on religion impacts on the validity of his theory and exhibits a pre-conceived conclusion based on concepts from much later eras as expounded upon by Banning (cf. 2.4).

2.4 EDWARD BANNING

Edward Banning sees the structures at Göbekli Tepe as possible housing structures, as opposed to a temple or specialized building, which are rich in symbolism (Banning 2011:619). It is not clear whether Banning's comments are derived from personal observation or not. Banning maintains that the symbols found at Göbekli Tepe are simply rich symbolic imagery (Banning 2011:619) and that that is not enough to provide evidence that the structure was used for religious activities (Banning 2011:625).

Banning compares the site with the Tammari people's Batammaliba architect style (Banning 2011:625). According to Banning, a Berber or Kabylie house is also rich in cosmology (Banning 2011:625). He uses these more modern-day examples where the cultural implications of the style and use of these buildings have already been explained.

At other sites in the vicinity of Göbekli Tepe certain spaces within Neolithic structures are identified as ritualistic in nature because of what was discovered there, such as Çayönü's 'skull building' and Tell Aswad's mortuary chamber (Banning 2011:619). Banning mentions that house decorations were found on the walls and floors at Mureybet, Ain

Ghazel, Ba'ja and Ghwair I (Banning 2011:626-627). Animal skulls and horns, such as animal skulls which appear to have hung inside the room on an interior wall opposite the entrance, were found at Hallan Çemi (Banning 2011:627) and at other sites too. Tell 'Abr 3 had aurochs skulls hidden within a bench inside a room identified as a communal building, but another was found in another room identified as a domestic dwelling (Banning 2011:627). Banning states that finding uncommon arrangements of animal skulls and horns in what is likely to be domestic buildings may be interpreted as decorations. He is of the opinion that it indicates a symbolic aspect of Neolithic houses.

Various interpretations of the circles at Göbekli Tepe are mostly based on the circular appearance of the structures found there, taking into consideration 'similar' structures dating thousands of years later. This inhibits other interpretations, especially any interpretation of a purely utilitarian nature. These other structures differ markedly from the circular structures found at Göbekli Tepe (cf. 7.3).

It is hard to verify what a space could represent without more direct evidence to make more accurate speculations; therefore, Banning's alternate theory is just as correct as any other non-temple theory. Banning avers that there is no definitive way to separate sacred spaces from residential living space (Banning 2011:619), an averment I agree with. He further states that all PPN sites are dealt with in this way across the Levant and beyond (Banning 2011:619).

Banning maintains that the site of Göbekli Tepe cannot simply be seen as a religious structure based on the conception that the lack of domestic signs proves that it is a temple (Banning 2011:623). He argues that specific places of devotion can be compatible with domestic use and that evidence of ceremony or pertinent symbolism does not necessarily imply specialized temples (Banning 2011:652). This highlights the problem with Schmidt's argument for a sacred space or ritualistic center.

Banning does not clarify why such an elaborate structure would be constructed for housing, since the workforce needed to construct Göbekli Tepe would be far greater than that for a few houses for people to live in. Communal buildings do not stand alone and do not function on their own. People need houses to live in and therefore many specialized buildings are surrounded by housing structures (Banning 2011:652).

In an article by Dietrich and Notroff (2015), Banning's assertion that Göbekli Tepe was used as housing or living spaces for people is refuted. In this article, the authors discuss Banning's position that many societies do not establish strict boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Banning then deduces that this 'entanglement' leads to a situation where seemingly mundane things, such as houses, could be sacred and that some sacred things could appear mundane (Dietrich and Notroff 2015:77). This implies that something that appears monumental, such as the stone circles at Göbekli Tepe, could in fact be nothing more than simple housing.

Dietrich and Notroff then explain in great detail what defines cult, ritual and religion, and what attributes define cultic buildings (Dietrich and Notroff 2015:81-82). They then apply Renfrew's sixteen archaeological indicators of ritual (Renfrew 1994:51-51) to Göbekli Tepe and conclude that there appears to be adequate evidence, checklist or no, to interpret Göbekli Tepe as a cultic place consisting of special buildings. They point out the problem of adequate terminology to define these buildings and the site as a whole. If the meaning of 'temple' for instance is meant as a technical term for specialized cult architecture, it could describe Göbekli Tepe. If the presence of a god is implied, as in the western use of the word, then 'sanctuary' would be a more neutral description. A third approach could then be the nomenclature 'special buildings' (Sondergebäude), free from cultural markers. The inescapable conclusion that Dietrich and Notroff reach is that 'the idea that Göbekli's buildings are 'so fair houses' is not supported by the evidence available so far' (Dietrich and Notroff 2015:87).

2.5 MARTIN SWEATMAN AND DIMITRIOS TSIKRITSIS

Martin Sweatman and Dimitrios Tsikritsis considered the iconography of a few selected pillars at Göbekli Tepe which, according to the authors, depict the theorized 'Younger Dryas Comet' event (2017:234) which was theorized by HGW Burchard (Burchard 2017:193-199). Sweatman and Tsikritsis considered Göbekli Tepe from an astronomical point of view and attempt to explain why Göbekli Tepe might have been used as an edifice for astronomical observation (2017:234).

Sweatman and Tsikritsis uses a program called Stellarium, a free open-source software program that can be used to track different constellations with a wide array of settings.

This program was used by the authors to mimic the sky during the time of Göbekli Tepe's occupation. According to Sweatman and Tsikritsis, there is no reason to question the accuracy of Stellarium (2017:238).

Doubt has, however, been cast over the accuracy of the Stellarium program in a case study by De Lorenzis and Orofino who found that several stars, including Sirius, were not displayed in their correct positions as recently as 4520 BP (2018:342).

Sweatman and Tsikritsis attempt to explain the symbolism found at Göbekli Tepe by using astronomical interpretation to link the symbols to modern day zodiac symbols (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:237-240). They attempt to demonstrate that Göbekli Tepe's symbolism is explained by astronomical events. The animal symbols are linked to the astronomical star patterns (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:239). It is believed that Göbekli Tepe was built atop the hilltop to monitor the night skies (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:243) and the events monitored here were recorded on the pillars of Göbekli Tepe. Examples of this can be seen on Pillar Forty-three where the headless man is indicated as a loss of life, and Pillar Eighteen, the fox, is tied to cosmological event (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:244). Pillar Two and Thirty-eight refer to the Taurid meteor stream which is hypothesized to be responsible for the Younger Dryas event (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:245). They argue that a major event happened around 12 910 BP and that this event is tied to a cometary encounter that led to a catastrophe (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:244). The theory for the Younger Dryas comet event is open for debate as there are many theories alleging that a comet hit the earth and that it caused the Younger Dryas event (Burchard 2017:193-199). There are also numerous theories that no such event ever took place (Daulton et al 2017:7-34).

Sweatman and Tsikritsis base their theory on an unproven opinion that a comet hit the Earth and caused the Younger Dryas event. This theory has been opposed by numerous scholars, as indicated. They further interpret their astronomical remarks based on modern day zodiac symbols which have no basis in fact. There is no proof whatsoever that these symbols were observed during the occupation of Göbekli Tepe. Lastly, the program they used to reconstruct the night-time sky is by no means accurate and it is disputed that their observations in this regard were correct. Sweatman and Tsikritsis' theories are based on very weak science and must at this stage be dismissed (cf. 2.5.).

2.6 ANDREW COLLINS

Andrew Collins is a leading exponent of some of the more far-fetched but popular theories regarding Göbekli Tepe which are mostly based on esoteric concepts. He is included in this chapter because of his influence on the popular views on Göbekli Tepe. Many of his theories are based on interpolation with later societies, religions, and folklore. Collins is a British writer and researcher and specializes in books that 'challenge the way we perceive the past.'[13] Some of the themes of his books include ancient astronomy, archaeoastronomy and the origins of civilisation. Collins' work can be seen as pseudoarchaeology[14] and sometimes borders on paranthropology.[15] His works include Alien Energy: UFOs, Ritual Landscapes and The Human Mind (2003), Gateway to Atlantis (2000) and Tutankhamun: The Exodus Conspiracy (2003). Andrew Collins is not an academic scholar, and his views should be seen as eccentric. His views must be considered with this in mind. The inclusion of Collins, based on his book Genesis of the Gods, aims to show to what extent Göbekli Tepe has captured the imagination of people outside of scholarly circles. His work, together with many other popular authors on the subject such as Graham Hancock, Laird Scranton and Erich von Däniken influence the popular mind. This narrative in turn impacts on decisions about the site such as declaring it a World Heritage site (UNESCO 2017).

Collins considers everything found at the site at Göbekli Tepe. He takes into consideration the T-pillars, the iconography and some of the artefacts such as the statues and tools (Collins 2014). It is hard to isolate an exact theory from Collins' considerations because he has multiple theories about Göbekli Tepe. Many of his theories come from other sites around the world, along with concepts from those cultures not necessarily relating to Göbekli Tepe. Basically, Collins sees Göbekli Tepe as a religious structure with rich symbolism.

Collins, like Schmidt, likens Göbekli Tepe to a comparable site, Nevali Çori (Collins 2014:24) when he compares the T-shaped pillars and the two central pillars found at Göbekli Tepe. He also makes mention of the terrazzo floor building of Çayönü which also

13. http://www.andrewcollins.com/page/articles/andrew_collins.htm
14. Unconnected topics and approaches which misapply, misinterpret, and misrepresent archaeological material in a non-scientific and often speculative way (Oxford Reference 2024:Online).
15. Paranthropology is the investigation of the paranormal (Dagnall et al 2016).

holds two central pillars (Collins 2014:27). Some of his more peculiar ideas include evidence that the people of Göbekli Tepe might have come from the Witów people who were part of the Swiderian culture in Poland (Collins 2014:171). These people hunted reindeer and eventually made their way to the Southern Levant. This is derived from following a trail of Swiderian stone tools found at other sites (Collins 2014:172-173), but not at Göbekli Tepe.

Collins tends to compare images of symbols with those of other civilisations' myths and legends - 'It looks like this, so it must be the same'. He spends a lot of time relating to cultures of a later time, many not related to the Southern Levant. He also attempts to connect astrology with the site (Collins 2014:60-105) similar to Sweatman and Tsikritsis.

Andrew Collins' book *Göbekli Tepe: Genesis of the Gods* provides quite a number of eccentric ideas that have little or nothing to do with the actual site. When it does relate to the site, it is usually in something insignificant such as the shape of a rock that could be compared with a different culture on a different continent. The more esoteric of Collins' theories are omitted here, since they do not relate to the constructions at Göbekli Tepe as such, for instance a relationship between Göbekli Tepe and the biblical Garden of Eden (Collins 2014:224-236). There are also references made to star constellations and references to Egyptian deities tied to ideas and symbols found at Çatalhöyük from the hole found at enclosure D (Collins 2014:108-109), but with no supporting evidence.

Collins refers to the theory of Magli that the twin pillars in enclosures B, C and D at Göbekli Tepe were aligned with the star Orion (Magli 2013:1-3) but dismisses the theory that Göbekli Tepe was used for astronomical observation (Collins 2014:80). In turn, Magli rebuts Collins' dismissal (Magli 2016:340), finding the proposals by Collins as well as Schoch (both non-scholars) to be less than convincing.

Magli argues that the alignment of the twin pillars in the circles of layer III is with the star Orion, the brightest star in the southern sky at the time. This star became visible in the southern sky during the 12th century BP, approximately the time period of the initial construction at Göbekli Tepe (Magli 2016:341). To test this hypothesis, it is necessary to have the exact dating of the circles found in layer III, which Magli concedes to be difficult (Magli 2016:341). He proposes that the vulture seemingly raising a circular object,

captured on Pillar Forty-three of Enclosure D, represents the ‘birth’ of Sirius in relation to the sunrise (Magli 2016:343-344).

Collins interprets the depiction of vultures on Pillar Forty-three in Enclosure D to indicate a ‘cult of the vulture’. One of these vultures is depicted as standing up holding its wings in a manner resembling human arms. It is depicted with bent knees and flat feet, interpreted by Collins as being a shaman in the guise of a vulture. From this, Collins conjures the ‘cult of the vulture’. He connects the vulture with the Cygnus constellation. This is remarkable, considering his opinion that Göbekli Tepe was not used for astronomical observation (Collins 2014:96-102).

The theories by Magli and Collins are literally the opposite of each other. Whereas Collins builds his theory on a north-westerly alignment, Magli does so on a south-easterly alignment. This is indicative of the challenges that go with astronomical interpretations that have very little supporting evidence from other sources.

Collins is of the opinion that the fox found at Göbekli Tepe‘s Enclosure D is represented by the star Alcor and is a representation of the devil (Collins 2014:129-130). Referring to the central pillars in Enclosure D, Collins interprets the figures depicted there as images of humans with fox-pelt loincloths. He considers an image on the belt of the figure depicted on Pillar Eighteen as a tenuous reference to a comet. He considers a link between the symbol of the comet and the fox-loincloth as a metaphor for comets. He speculates on this depiction being related to an alleged comet strike that caused the Younger Dryas event (Collins 2014:119-159). This theory was summarily dismissed by Schmidt (Collins 2014:162).

Collins’ ideas are theories about religious concepts from other cultures that he attempts to superimpose on Göbekli Tepe. This approach is dangerous, since cultures function differently over time (Foley and Lahr 2011). Collins does, however, consider matters such as time, structural function, the location of Göbekli Tepe, and the prevailing weather at the time and the influence that these could have on the site.

A hole found in a stone pillar in Enclosure D is interpreted by Collins as a sighting hole to see the star Deneb and that it functions as a *seelenloch,* an opening believed to allow

the spirit of a deceased person to depart through. According to Collins, this hole may also allow a shaman in an ecstatic or altered state of consciousness to pass through to the underworld or sky world (Collins 2014:85-88).

Collins expounds that the T-shaped pillars are a representation of what people looked like and that they form part of an otherworldly likeness (Collins 2014:114).

Sweatman and Tsikritsis developed some of Collins' ideas such as the connection between Göbekli Tepe symbolism and comets, referencing Collins in their work (Sweatman and Tsikritsis 2017:242).

De Lorenzis and Orofino also developed some of Collins' ideas. They went about their research in a much more orderly fashion, based on better science. They determined that the central pillars in four of the enclosures are oriented toward the setting point of the star Deneb[16] (De Lorenzis and Orofino 2015:42). They established that these alignments occurred in epochs (De Lorenzis and Orofino 2015:47), similar to the ones obtained by Dietrich, but not the same as those by Collins.

De Lorenzis and Orofino claim to have determined the probable astronomic alignments of two other enclosures at Göbekli Tepe, namely Enclosures F and A. According to them, the first alignment appears to point towards the rising point of the Sun on the day of the Harvest Festival. The second alignment points towards the rising point of the Moon at its minor standstill. They established this by extrapolating the respective declinations to the date of the construction established by Dietrich (De Lorenzis and Orofino 2015:48).

It is unfortunate that De Lorenzis and Orofino dilute the objectivity of their pure scientific approach by closing their arguments with remarks such as 'it is reasonable to think that the builders of Göbekli Tepe, by creating the site, wanted to transmit some of their cosmological beliefs to future generations and that, in particular, they intentionally oriented the central pillars of the enclosures towards some astronomical object' (De Lorenzis and Orofino 2015:48). They go on to state that 'the antiquity of this sacred place

16. Deneb, (Arabic: 'Tail' [of the Swan, Cygnus]) also called Alpha Cygni, one of the brightest stars, with an apparent magnitude of 1.25 (Gregersen 2009:Online).

is so amazing that it is extremely difficult to propose hypotheses about religion and the rituals that were carried out at the site apart from those already evidenced about the cult of the cycle of birth/death/rebirth of human life that was celebrated by them' (De Lorenzis and Orofino 2015:49). Although this may have been valid, there is no other evidence supporting this conclusion. In interpreting observations, the question is not only if the interpretation is valid but also if the interpretation is likely, based on the observed facts. Supporting evidence will help to substantiate the theory.

Although the work of Sweatman and Tsikritsis as well as that of De Lorenzis and Orofino and Magli have merit, it has to be considered against the very real possibility that the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe were roofed (Banning 2011:629), which, if correct, would make any conclusions about the stellar alignment of the pillars meaningless (cf. 3.4).

2.7 CONCLUSION

The theories expounded in this chapter offer unique perspectives of Göbekli Tepe. While the temple theory is the widely accepted one, other theories are also being offered. Most of these theories, however, are far-fetched with very little actual evidence that they consider location and climate at the time, as well as the age of the site. Klaus Schmidt's temple or hilltop sanctuary theory lacks any concrete evidence for a temple other than possible religious symbols and possible communal feasting, also that Göbekli Tepe is situated at the top of a hill like other religious settlements from a later age. Not enough archaeological evidence is considered in order to make a concrete conclusion about the nature of Göbekli Tepe, especially by comparison with surrounding settlements.

Hasan Özalp offers a wide range of different theories by comparing Göbekli Tepe to Greek and Roman times (Özalp 2019:164). Özalp's theories do not contribute to an understanding of Göbekli Tepe or the people of the Southern Levant. Özalp does not attempt to explain what Göbekli Tepe is, rather he considers how Göbekli Tepe led to other civilizations and religious ideas.

Edward Banning's housing theory attempts to explain the function of Göbekli Tepe. While Banning offers comparisons with other Southern Levant settlements he also compares it with other civilizations from a much later date than Göbekli Tepe. Communal buildings

do not stand alone and do not function on their own. People require houses to reside in and this in turn necessitates housing structures in close vicinity of specialized buildings.

The Martin Sweatman and Dimitrios Tsikritsis theory is based on the ‘younger Dryas Comet’ and is more focused on astrology than archaeology. It is an attempt to explain Göbekli Tepe’s symbolism by means of astronomical events. This theory is easily dismissed as it is based purely on conjecture (cf. 2.5).

Andrew Collins uses all available information about Göbekli Tepe but tends to compare it with other sites and cultures around the world and uses a more pseudoscientific approach in his theories. Collin’s theories are too broad, out of context and tend to digress information.

It must be said that although comparisons between sites may be helpful, this approach is always to be approached carefully, reminding oneself that cultures function differently over time (Foley and Lahr 2011). In dealing with comparisons, Hodder argues that material culture has a ‘partly nonarbitrary and partly non-referential nature’ and that ‘the meaning of material symbols are arbitrary’ (Hodder 1995:179). It is this arbitrary meaning that one has to be wary of in making comparisons.

All of the theories considered in this chapter demonstrate how broadly the information from Göbekli Tepe can be interpreted. By looking at the archaeological evidence found at Göbekli Tepe and by considering factors such as the weather at the time, the age of the settlement, iconography, other settlements and archaeological empirical evidence, a more plausible theory can be formulated.

By comparing the different theories proposed above, it is clear that a unifying theory cannot be formulated from the widely divergent ideas that the various authors hold. It is important to go back to the evidence and to consider a possible theory that holds true for all the known facts about Göbekli Tepe.

CHAPTER THREE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A number of interpretations of the archaeological and empirical evidence found at Göbekli Tepe have been put forward over the years. Some of these interpretations have developed into theories. These theories vary from plausible to flights of fantasy, and a unifying theory based solely on archaeological, anthropological and empirical evidence is yet to be formulated. An overview of available literature regarding archaeological surveys of the Göbekli Tepe terrain as well as empirical evidence gleaned from this overview will serve as the basis for this chapter. Special attention will be given to the work that Klaus Schmidt did at Göbekli Tepe.

By considering the available empirical evidence, a theory will be offered explaining the most likely reason for the erection of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. This theory will be developed in subsequent chapters where evidence dating to the time of Göbekli Tepe's occupation will be considered.

3.2 DOES KLAUS SCHMIDT CONCLUDE THAT GÖBEKLI TEPE WAS A RITUALISTIC CENTRE?

Most of the arguments that Göbekli Tepe was a ritualistic centre emanate from the observation of other excavated archaeological sites (cf. 7.3). Schmidt considered Göbekli Tepe to be a hilltop sanctuary, a place used for ritual feasting (cf. 2.2). Archaeologists use typology[17] to determine a certain type of artefact, and this can then be compared with another type of artefact. The three-age system is a term used to group certain time periods together and a similar system has been developed for the archaeology of the Neolithic: PPNA, early PPNB, middle PPNB and late PPNB (Steiner and Killebrew 2013:164-168). The study of Neolithic societies started with the excavation of Jericho by Kathleen Kenyon in 1950 (Steiner and Killebrew 2013:164) and many theories about Neolithic societies were developed as more and more sites were discovered (Gates

17. A classification system where artefacts are arranged in a hypothetical chronological order, for purposes of comparison (Greene & Moore 2010:24).

2011:13-17; cf. 2.4). Field reports of archaeological sites of the Levant paint a picture of how Neolithic people lived at these sites and the material culture they left behind.

Archaeologists attempt to place discovered settlements on a chronological timeline in order to understand how changes happen over time. They then develop different theories, attempting to arrive at a unifying theory. Settlements such as Jerf el-Ahmar, Tell ‘Abr 3 and Mureybet each have a specialised building that share similar features (Kornienko 2009:85) but observers fail to acknowledge the different time periods across these three sites. Sites younger than Göbekli Tepe may provide insights into what is found at Göbekli Tepe but cannot explain it. Sites such as Karahan Tepe, if reliably dated as older than Göbekli Tepe, may explain what is found at Göbekli Tepe, but it has not yet been reliably dated (cf. 7.3.8). It is dangerous to make assumptions retrospectively of an earlier site based on the attributes of later sites.

Jerf el-Ahmar is a small village in northern Syria on the West bank of the Euphrates dated to 11 600 - 10 500 BP (Scarre 2013:218), Tell ‘Abr 3 is located on the left bank of the Euphrates in the Syrian-Jazirah and is dated to 11 000 BP (Yartah 2004:141) and Mureybet was located on the edge of Euphrates and has different dates for different phases of occupation, the oldest level of the tell being dated to 10 500 - 10 300 BP (Calley 1984:35). These sites do not have T-shaped pillars, but they have ritualistic centres in the settlement. It demonstrates that T-shaped pillars were not a prerequisite for the presence of ritualistic centres, but that all the ritualistic centres in these sites were inside settlements. This differs from what is found at Göbekli Tepe (cf. 1.3) and contradicts the impulsive assumption that Göbekli Tepe itself was a ritualistic centre. It must be borne in mind that archaeologists do not agree as to what ritual and ritualistic buildings look like in the Neolithic and also in general (Banning 2011:619).

Göbekli Tepe is widely considered to be a ritualistic centre but does not have a surrounding settlement (Schmidt 2000:46). No structures akin to domestic structures were subsequently discovered at Göbekli Tepe (Dietrich and Notroff 2015:84) but discoveries during 2020 points to the presences of domestic structures. There is no conclusive evidence that these structures were used for permanent residence (cf.3.6). Archaeologists compare sites with each other in an attempt to form a conclusion about ritualistic practices. It would appear that what was found at Nevali Çori and Çayönü

influenced a retrospective interpretation of Göbekli Tepe, an approach which has the danger of coming to conclusions not based on the actual findings at Göbekli Tepe. Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori are often compared with each other (Scarre 2013:220) probably based on the similarities between the two but ignoring the dissimilarities.

Schmidt, based on his observations of Göbekli Tepe, concludes that Göbekli Tepe is a ritualistic centre (Schmidt 2000:46) and a sanctuary (Schmidt 2012).

3.3 THE ABUNDANCE OF ARROW POINTS ON THE TERRAIN, THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE T-PILLARS AND ICONOGRAPHY FOUND ON SOME T-PILLARS

Schmidt mentions that Helwan arrow points[18] are numerous at Göbekli Tepe and that they are used for dating (11 020 BP cal) (2000:52). 2996 pieces of excellent quality flint (Schmidt 2000:45, 51) were discovered at Göbekli Tepe but Schmidt does not comment as to why so many arrow heads would be used at a ritualistic centre.

An evaluation of the numerous arrow heads discovered at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:45) might indicate that hunting played a prominent role at the site. Schmidt mentions Helwan, Byblos, Nemrik, El Khiam and Aswad points (Schmidt 2000:51-52). Along with the arrow points mentioned by Schmidt, Caletii also mentions Nevali Çori points (Caletii 2020:98). It may indicate manufacturing of these arrow heads at the site but it is not clear whether these arrow heads were in fact manufactured at the site by different groups of hunters (explaining the diverse types of arrowheads found at the site) or whether they were brought in from different areas. A re-evaluation of the physical evidence may shed more light on the origin or origins of these points. The Helwan points that were discovered at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:51) were named after Helwan in Egypt where they were first identified. Very few of these points were, however, found at Helwan while the bulk of findings were in the Levant (Shirai 2002:123). This adds weight to the argument that the points discovered at Göbekli Tepe may have been manufactured there (Schmidt 2000:51). A comprehensive examination of the filling found in the various circles may provide further clues as to the manufacturing that took place at Göbekli Tepe. If these arrows were used for hunting game (Schmidt 2000:47), this might have served as food for feasting but could also have been for providing food for daily sustenance and for the

18. A type of arrow point first found in Helwan on the east bank of the Nile near Cairo.

provision of skins for various purposes. The sheer number of points would indicate a large undertaking of hunting, more than would be expected for infrequent feasting purposes.

Schmidt interpreted his observations of the T-pillars as being anthropomorphic in design but apart from that did not offer a hypothesis as to what concepts were intended to be expressed by the pillars (2000:49). Schmidt does mention that Göbekli Tepe could have been visited by gods, demons or ancestors but does not consider any practical use for the pillars nor explain his conclusion about gods, demons or ancestors (2000:49).

Schmidt notes different animals on several pillars in the various enclosures at Göbekli Tepe (2000:49-51) and compares it with two other Neolithic sites, Nevali Çori and Jerf el-ahmar, which display the same type of iconography (Schmidt 2000:52) but he offers no explanation for this similarity. It would be reasonable to consider later iconography to be influenced by earlier iconography, but this does not necessarily imply that it had the same function. I believe that much of the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe was merely decorative. It may have developed ritualistic meaning at a later stage where this iconography was found within settlements (cf. 6.2.) Schmidt compared T-shaped pillars form Nevali Çori with the T-shaped pillars from Göbekli Tepe and observes that some of the T-shaped pillars found at the two sites shared similarities such as ‘ties’, arms and fingers (Schmidt 2000:46).

The size and shape of the T-shaped pillars offer a plausible explanation for a special function, namely that they were designed for the purpose of providing strong pillars for a heavy roof. The T-heads would offer a far superior tying area for cross beams than a simple straight pillar. According to Dietrich et al, backfilling of the enclosures was done intentionally (2012:675). The backfilling of the site was seen as ritualistic, and no alternative theory is offered.

3.4 CAN THE ‘BACKFILL’ OF THE CIRCLES BE INTERPRETED DIFFERENTLY?

The material found in the circles was subjected to pedological analyses which may have allowed it to be dated. Schmidt could apparently not conclude as to the age of the site based on the pedological analyses, probably because of the mixing of different layers in

the ‘backfill.’ According to Schmidt there is no apparent reason for the intentional backfill of the site (2010:242).

Schmidt attributes the presence of the filling to a ritual practice that the people of Göbekli Tepe may have practised and that it may have been a repeated practice (2010:242). This theory is supported by Peters et al who say that the backfill was intentional, was done rapidly and was done ritualistically (Peters et al 2014:3065). Schmidt does not consider that the repeated collapse and rebuilding of a substantial earth roof would manifest in a comparable way. The backfilling material consisted of chips and pieces of limestone, flint, fragments of stone vessels, ground tools and small pieces of broken animal bones (Schmidt 2010:242). Schmidt does not offer any explanation for this. The possibility, however, exists that the circles had roofs (Banning 2011:629). The sheer size and strength of the T-pillars would suggest that they carried earthen roofs which may have collapsed numerous times during the occupation of Göbekli Tepe, resulting in a thorough mixing of the various strata that entered the site from displaced deposits higher up (Clare 2020:85-86). This would make dating of Göbekli Tepe and determining an accurate point in time extremely difficult. The subsequent build-up of earth over millennia would have further contributed to the ‘backfill,’ appearing to a present-day observer as intentional backfill of the entire site. The possibility that what was deemed backfill could have been collapsed earthen roofs was not considered by Schmidt at the time.

3.5 ARE LATER OBSERVATIONS DISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE INITIAL OBSERVATIONS BY SCHMIDT?

The symbols found at Göbekli Tepe constitute a major part of the argument as to why Göbekli Tepe was used as a place for cultic or ritualistic practices, since similar conclusions were drawn from other Neolithic sites found in the Levant. This is why these settlements, along with Göbekli Tepe, are considered cultic communities (Dietrich et al 2012:682). Comparisons with Jerf el Ahmar and Tell Qaramel feature snakes, scorpions, and birds similar to those found at Göbekli Tepe (Scarre 2013:219; cf. Figures 3.1-3.3) and what appears to be a net of snakes (cf. Figure 3.4). The premise is that these cultural images form part of a system of symbolic communications (Watkins 2004:5-23; Morenz and Schmidt 2009:3-31).

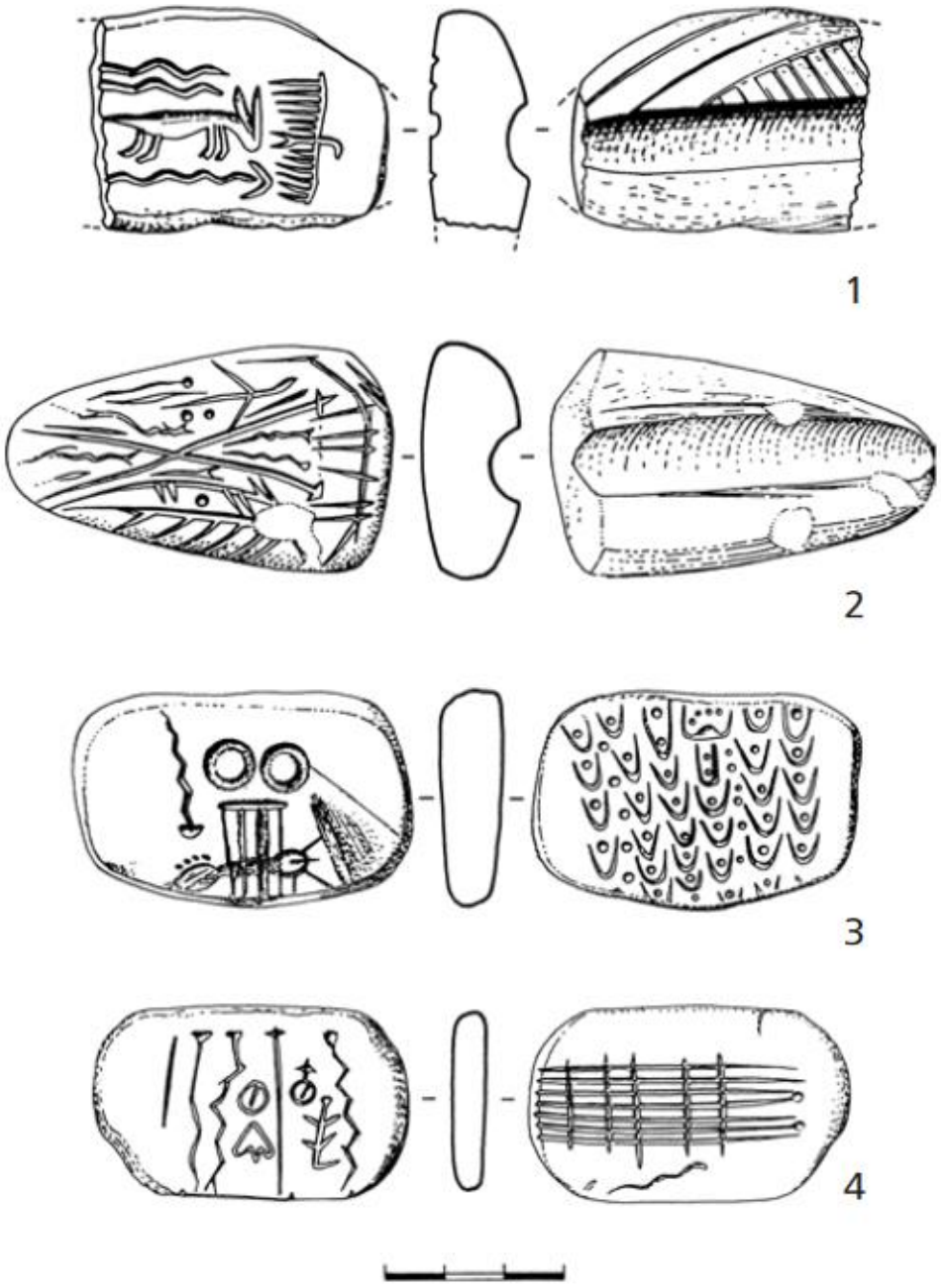

Figure 3.1 Shaft-straighteners and plaques found at Jerf el Ahmar (Watkins 2012:31)

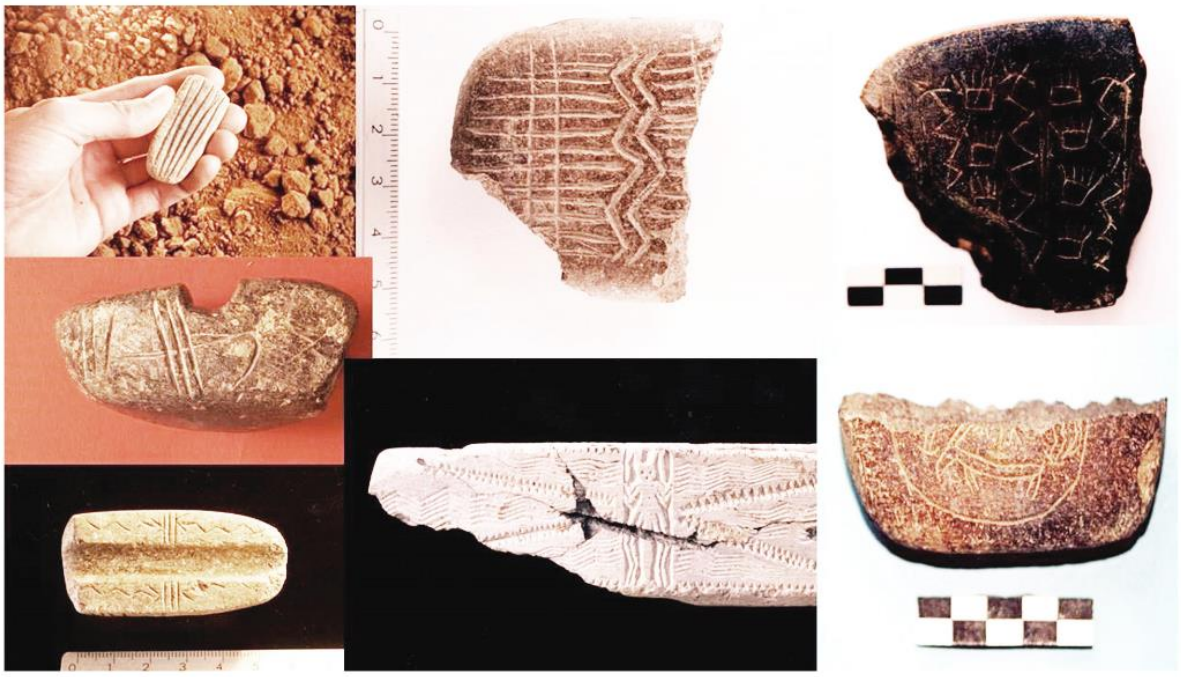

Figure 3.2 Stone tools found at Tell Qaramel displaying various faunal, floral, and geometric designs (Kanjou 2015:14)

Figure 3.3 Pillar Nine, Göbekli Tepe (Dietrich et al 2017:21)

Figure 3.4 Pillar One, Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt and Köksal-Schmidt 2014:75)

Recent research has shown that at Çatalhöyük, structures that combined ritual and domestic functions were surrounded purely by housing structures. There were even signs of domestic use in the multi-purpose structures (Caletti 2020:109). This is distinguishable from Göbekli Tepe where no such mixed usage was found within the circles. Excavations in 2015 and 2016 at Göbekli Tepe uncovered a number of round-oval structures with evidence of hearths and bead production. Early indications are that this relates to an early occupation of Göbekli Tepe (PPNA) (Clare 2020:83). This, of course, does not prove that the circle structures at Göbekli Tepe were for ritual purposes, and it could simply be that the people utilising the structures resided nearby. The domestic activities continued into the EPPNB period and rectangular-shaped structures emerged at this time. This would strengthen the theory that Göbekli Tepe was more densely occupied than previously thought (Clare 2020:84). Again, this does not necessarily imply that the circular structures were for ritual purposes, as any other use of these structures would require people to be present. The absence of burials (apart from one found in the south-eastern part of the site) (Clare 2020:84) as well as the absence of human bones, (apart from a number of human skull fragments and other bone fragments) (Gresky et al 2017:1), among the large number of animal bones found at the site (Schmidt 2000:47), would indicate that the domestic structures were not utilised all year round. It is conceivable that the seasonal

occupants of the site took their dead to their permanent settlements, since places of residence were also used for the burial of residents of these places who died (Richter et al 2019:2). It is my contention that the circles at Göbekli Tepe were built by different tribes (Clare 2020:82, Schmidt 2000:49) and that burial of dead tribe members there would not be acceptable to other tribes at the site. Further study of the iconography at Göbekli Tepe may cast further light on the argument that different tribes may have build different circles.

3.6 CURTAILMENT OF FURTHER PHYSICAL INVESTIGATION AT GÖBEKLI TEPE

Göbekli Tepe is considered a unique site when compared with other Neolithic settlements in the region since it does not conform to the standard formula for a Neolithic settlement: for instance, there are no living areas, fireplaces, ovens, or other signs of domestication. (Schmidt 2000:45-46, Schmidt 2010:239, Banning 2011:620-621, 623; cf. 7.1). There does not appear to be an attempt to unify the various postulations by archaeologists, other academics, and writers into a unified theory as to the real purpose of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. Various current theories also seem to contradict each other.

The assumption that the special buildings at Göbekli Tepe were a sanctuary of sorts (Schmidt 2000:46) gained traction to such an extent that the popular narrative became one of religious use, the ‘World’s First Temple’. This assumption is hard to dispel but new research indicates that it has to be revisited. The discovery of domestic buildings in the vicinity of the T-pillar circles casts a new light on the possible different use for the site (Clare 2020:82-83). A new interpretation is also not enthusiastically pursued because of the efforts of promoting Göbekli Tepe in accordance with popular assumptions.

Göbekli Tepe may have been used as a hunting site for seasonal hunting with the meat and leathers thus produced being used locally. The physical location of Göbekli Tepe was selected for a reason. Göbekli Tepe is ‘a complex of round topped knolls of red earth with slight depressions between, located on a high limestone ridge rending SE’ (Schmidt 2000:45). This location was ostensibly selected for the view, but this may have been for two entirely different reasons. It could be that Göbekli Tepe could be seen from far which may support the theory of a ritualistic centre. The other reason may have been the view from Göbekli Tepe over the Harran Plain (UNESCO 2017; cf. 4.4). This would enable the occupants to see their prey on the plain from a distance.

Various T-shaped pillar sites are also located around this ridge. Dietrich et al lists these sites as Sefer Tepe, Karahan Tepe and Hamzan Tepe (Dietrich et al 2012:682). These sites share similarities with Göbekli Tepe in that there are T-pillars found in all of them. The sizes of these pillars differ considerably from site to site with those found at Sefer Tepe and Hamzan Tepe much smaller than those found at Karahan Tepe and Göbekli Tepe.

A totem pole, four life-sized human heads and a medium-sized human statue were found at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2010:248-249). It is not known whether these artefacts were intended for Göbekli Tepe and, if so, what the intended use would have been. They may have been manufactured at Göbekli Tepe for use elsewhere. Further study of these artefacts needs to be undertaken (Schmidt 2010:248).

3.7 CONCLUSION

Empirical evidence is important for the understanding of any archaeological site anywhere in the world. As already discussed in Chapter Two, a theory should be based on the most logical conclusion and this conclusion must correspond with the archaeological and empirical evidence discovered at the site (cf. 2.6). Applying knowledge from a different settlement causes many inconsistencies, especially if that knowledge comes from a different culture entirely (cf. 2.6). By considering the facts from the archaeological record one must ask what the most logical conclusion is among other possible conclusions from the evidence available. Many of the settlements in the Southern Levant were discovered much earlier than Göbekli Tepe and knowledge of these settlements may be useful to reveal the real function of Göbekli Tepe. It should be considered, however, that Göbekli Tepe is much older than these settlements (such as Çatalhöyük, Qermez Dere and Asikli Höyuk) and that the question should rather be how Göbekli Tepe influenced those settlements. Settlements older than Göbekli Tepe (such as Abu Hureyra, Körtik Tepe and Mureybet) are yet to be dated conclusively in order to make comparisons valid.

Göbekli Tepe is seen as a sanctuary, identified by iconography found at the site. Similar iconography is shared across many archaeological settlements in the Southern Levant. While these settlements have their own iconography, they do not all share T-shaped

pillars and often have a communal building to perform this alleged function. Such communal buildings are often accompanied by what appears to be housing around it. Göbekli Tepe is different in this regard and must be viewed as something else, despite some similarities. A re-evaluation of the evidence discovered at Göbekli Tepe might lead to a different theory when more factors are taken into consideration such as the location of the site, the abundance of animal bones, and the numerous arrow heads found there.

It is clear from the above that Schmidt's initial interpretation that Göbekli Tepe was a hilltop sanctuary was popularised to be considered a temple of sorts. This narrative set the tone for numerous other interpretations influenced by this perspective. In the process, the abundance of arrow points on the terrain, the size and shape of the T-pillars and even the purpose of iconography found on some of the T-pillars were not considered in any other context. Even a logical explanation of the earth found within the circles was given a ritualistic slant when considering it to be deliberate.

Later observations and discoveries, after Schmidt's initial observations, necessitate a thorough re-evaluation of all previous and later information from the site, free from the backdrop of religion. Should the facts support a religious context, only then should it form part of interpreting Göbekli Tepe. Preconceived theories about what Göbekli Tepe means has led to erroneous interpretations of the site, for example Schmidt's initial view of Göbekli Tepe as a ritualistic centre and later as a sanctuary (cf 3.2). Evidence from later findings at the site is placing this initial preconception in serious doubt (cf 3.5, 3.6).

Since its declaration as UNESCO World Heritage site, Göbekli Tepe has become a tourist attraction, marketed in the prevailing religious context (UNESCO [s.d.]:Online; UNESCO 2017:Onine; Guided Istanbul Tours 2022:Online). The investment in this enterprise will make it difficult for any other interpretation, however sound in empirical evidence and logical deduction.

CHAPTER FOUR
GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND CLIMATE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Ice Age ended around 11 600 years ago. Göbekli Tepe was therefore founded at the beginning of the Holocene Era[19] (Scarre 2013:40). The climate before and during the time of the occupancy of Göbekli Tepe had a profound impact on the communities of the Southern Levant and on the ability to produce sufficient food. The importance of this impact, created by the climate, is often overlooked when settlement patterns In the Levant are considered. The climate at the time of the Göbekli Tepe's occupation was still settling after the Younger Dryas[20] which caused cold weather to affect crops (cf. 4.5). This in turn necessitated finding supplementary food sources in order to prevent settled communities falling back on a nomadic lifestyle (Rozen and Rivera-Collazo 2012:3642). The increase of game around Göbekli Tepe provided this source (Rozen and Rivera-Collazo 2012:3643).

Various sources, such as Rambeau (2010), referred to in this chapter emphasise the importance of climate on cultural development, while Kuijt and Finlayson (2009) expound on the effect of climate instability on human settlements (Cheng et al 2015:8648). Their conclusions explain the effect that climate change might have had on the communities that built Göbekli Tepe. Braun contradicts the notion that Göbekli Tepe was built to be observed from afar and offers compelling proof that the location for the erection of the structures was chosen because of the view over the Harran Plain (2021). Braun argues that Göbekli Tepe is not on the highest point of the Germuş Mountains but rather on a much lower level where Göbekli Tepe is less visible but from where it offered a good view of the distant surrounds. This promoted the gaining of information as to the status of the landscape (Braun 2021:27). Braun's observations on the view from Göbekli Tepe go a long way in repudiating the theory that Göbekli Tepe was a sanctuary or temple. Furthermore, Braun argues that Göbekli Tepe was directly on a major wildlife migratory route (Braun 2021:27), adding weight to the theory that Göbekli Tepe was a hunting

19. 11 700 BP.
20. The Younger Dryas was a period of 1300 years starting around 12 500 BP that temporarily halted the global warming which ensued after the withdrawal of the last Ice Age. The Younger Dryas was a cool and extremely dry period.

facility rather than anything else. Since climate change led to an increase in the game population (Rozen and Rivera-Collazo 2012:3643), it became possible to establish permanent structures for the hunting of game, making it unnecessary to keep moving to different hunting grounds. The improving climate was further conducive to the increase of plant and animal life, making cultivation of food and a lifestyle less dependent on hunting possible (Scarre 2013:40-41). Climate, therefore, was an important cornerstone for the existence of Göbekli Tepe.

Göbekli Tepe is situated in the area that is historically known as the Fertile Crescent, the region where agriculture is commonly believed to have originated amongst settlements established by Neolithic communities (Arranz-Otaegui et al 2016:14002). This area is located at the northern periphery of the Fertile Crescent, an area comprising a portion of the South-Eastern part of modern-day Turkey, bordered by Syria to the south, in an area currently known as Urfa, a region within Şanliurfa, a province of Turkey. The immediate area around Göbekli Tepe is comprised of the Germuş mountain range to the North (Dietrich et al 2019:4) and the Harran Plain to the South (Dietrich et al 2019:4). The immediate vicinity of the site features the habitats of various wild plant species, including (later domesticated) wild einkorn, emmer, and barley (UNESCO 2017).

4.2 RELEVANCE OF THE WEATHER BEFORE AND DURING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GÖBEKLI TEPE

‘Our knowledge of climatic evolution, during the last approximately 25 000 years, is of crucial importance to understand cultural developments’ (Rambeau 2010:5225).

There are several well-dated archaeological sites with excellently preserved archaeological records in the Levant and vast research has been undertaken on climatic changes. However, the evidence for corresponding information is seldom compiled into a larger body of knowledge with direct references to particular prehistoric occurrences (Maher et al 2010:2).

At the start of the Bølling-Allerød,[21] the temperatures and moisture increased within a few decades, which corresponds to a period of maximum humidity during the Late Glacial period. The latter part of the Bølling-Allerød period was much drier (Knitter et al 2019:6). At the end of the Bølling-Allerød Interstadial, a period of climate warming followed the end[22] of the Pleistocene. After this warm period, a return to cold conditions followed with the start of the Younger Dryas (Knitter et al 2019:6).

The Younger Dryas lasted around 1 300 years, a process of global warming which ensued after the withdrawal of the last Ice Age. It was believed to be a time of extreme climatological occurrences (Cheng et al 2020:23408). This period was also considered to be arid at the outset (c. 12 500 - 11 700 BP) and is referred to as a cool and dry period (Knitter et al 2019:6). The Younger Dryas was a cool and extremely dry period. After the Younger Dryas ended, it was followed by a substantial increase in temperature and moisture (Knitter et al 2019:6). Until 9 500 BP temperatures increased, though with decreasing rainfall (Knitter et al 2019:6).

The end of the Younger Dryas precedes the establishment of Enclosure A at Göbekli Tepe by approximately 700 years. There is, therefore, a reasonable correlation between the end of the Younger Dryas and the establishment of Göbekli Tepe, since the transition from the colder period to the warmer phase did not happen overnight. The climate instability of the Younger Dryas possibly reduced the distribution of cereal crops (cf. 4.5) and uprooted the sedentary way of life of the late Natufian[23] people (Kuijt and Finlayson 2009:10966). This in turn compelled people to adopt a lifestyle of foraging and greater mobility and consequently caused people to abandon earlier settlements and to seldom establish residential structures (Kuijt and Finlayson 2009:10966). At Çayönü, Dja'de al Mughara, Göbekli Tepe, Gusir Höyük, Hallan Çemi, Jerf el Ahmar, Mureybet, and Nevali Çori only one 'special building' with a possible connection to the storage of cereal in a communal silo was identified at Jerf el Ahmar (building EA 30) (Dietrich et al 2019:3).

21. A period of warm climate beginning abruptly approximately 14 700 years ago, following the end of the Pleistocene, and extending to approximately 12 700 years ago (Broeker 1992:135).
22. About 11 800 years ago (Singh et al 2011:865).
23. The Natufian culture is a Mesolithic culture of Palestine and southern Syria dating from about 11 000 BP (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010:Online).

It is, however, possible that due to the climatic instability at the end of the Younger Dryas and during the beginning of the Holocene, Göbekli Tepe may have played a pivotal role in making the transition from hunting to the cultivation of crops in the area possible. Hunting as a means of food procurement was still well underway with the first development of farming only appearing around 10 000 BP (Girgen and Oktay 2022:225). Göbekli Tepe was well placed in the migration path of goitered gazelle between summer and autumn grazing areas. This did not exclude the availability of resources in the larger region. Göbekli Tepe was chosen because of the topography as well as the conditions required for the hunting of game (Braun 2021:27). Climatic conditions adverse to the cultivation of crops were not necessarily adverse for the proliferation of game. The large-scale hunting evident at Göbekli Tepe may have made it possible to allow the inhabitants in that part of the Levant to survive the negative effects of climate fluctuations on crop cultivation, allowing them to endure the occasional failure of crops. This in turn allowed for the development of crop cultivation without a compelling reason to abandon permanent residential structures in view of the availability of meat during periods of inadequate or failed harvests.

Evidence of large granaries has not been found at Göbekli Tepe or at the settlements in the vicinity, which supports the notion that grain cultivation was either not substantial or not very successful during the time of the occupation of Göbekli Tepe. Evidence of such granaries existing at this time was found at Dhra in the Jordan Valley (Kuijt and Finlayson 2009:10966) and tentative indications of small storage bins were found at Jericho (Kuijt and Finlayson 2009:10968). The absence of similar structures at Göbekli Tepe and its surrounding settlements emphasises the importance of an alternative food supply and the role of hunting there.

Besides plant collecting, hunting was essential for the meat and skins of the animals, and other animal by-products. The meat was consumed, skins were turned into leather products and the fat could be used for various different purposes such as the tanning of leather (Harris and *Veldmeijer* 2014:9). The faunal remains show that, during Göbekli Tepe's occupation, Persian gazelle, wild cattle, Asiatic wild ass, wild boar, wild sheep, deer, hare, fox, and a variety of bird species were hunted (Peters et al 2014:3066).

The hunting of large animals declined during later occupation of Göbekli Tepe when smaller-sized hooved animals such as gazelle and wild sheep were predominantly hunted (Peters et al 2014:3066). This would correspond with improving harvests in an increasingly more suitable environment for crop cultivation. Karacadağ, a mountain situated in close proximity to Göbekli Tepe, is considered a site where the earliest domesticated cereals appeared (Girgen and Oktay 2022:231) but no date is given. It would also relate to the fact that the later circles at Göbekli Tepe became smaller (Schmidt 2000:51; Schmidt 2010:241) as large-scale hunting became less important due to the availability of grains.

According to Peters et al, there is evidence of feasting at Göbekli Tepe. They argue that the shared iconography from a wide geographic distribution in Upper Mesopotamia implies that groups of hunter-gatherers from different parts of Anatolia and northern Syria assembled at Göbekli Tepe where they would share knowledge and experience relative to the hunting of gazelle, wild cattle, wild sheep, and wild boar, thus distributing common knowledge relatively quickly (2014:3067). It is suggested that the term ‘evidence of feasting’ should rather be termed ‘evidence of large-scale consumption’ because feasting has a strong connotation with ritual (Twiss 2008:424), a deduction that cannot always be substantiated, although it cannot be excluded.

Peters et al note that livestock husbandry existed in South-eastern and Eastern Anatolia well before the Holocene climate stabilised. This would imply that hooved animal domestication was already underway before the land would optimally support it. The gradual transition from hunting to animal husbandry and the cultivation of grain took place during the general availability of food sources at the time. Peters et al point out that the abandonment of Göbekli Tepe corresponds with the replacement of gazelle hunting by small livestock husbandry as the main source of meat in Upper Mesopotamia (2014:3067). This would strongly suggest that Göbekli Tepe was, if not completely, at least largely utilised for the procurement of meat by means of hunting.

As an example of how hunting patterns were affected by the changing climate, Moore and Hillman (1992:490) note that, at Abu Hureyra phase one, this remained the same with little or no effect on the density of prey (Curry 2008) such as Persian gazelle (Moore and Hillman 1992:490). Abu Hureyra was a settlement in the middle Euphrates Valley

located in modern-day Syria and was occupied between 11 500 and 10 000 BP.[24] The variation in available plant material caused by the changing climate did, however, affect the choice of plants utilised by the inhabitants of Abu Hureyra. Abu Hureyra at the time of excavation by Moore was the only Levantine site to be well documented and excavated. It was inhabited throughout the Younger Dryas and yielded a long representative series of plant remains (Moore and Hillman 1992:490).

In contrast, Göbekli Tepe was utilised seasonally. Animal migration follows the availability of food and water. This is a seasonal occurrence and is not limited to one specific area. At Göbekli Tepe, it was evident that game would be available seasonally (cf. 4.2.) This would explain why Göbekli Tepe was not occupied all year long since no permanent residential structures were found (Schmidt 2010:240) (cf. 3.6).

Göbekli Tepe lost its inferred main function as a hunting facility when the weather changed towards the end of the PPNB era. The Harran Plain became drier again, no longer attracting an abundance of wildlife (Horwitz et al 1999:64). The establishment of Nevali Çori approximately 500 years before the final demise of Göbekli Tepe, just north-west of Göbekli Tepe on the banks of the Euphrates River (a much more reliable perennial source of water) may have been related to this occurrence since Göbekli Tepe was apparently not a permanent settlement. The change in weather with wetter winters and hotter summers would also have made the drying of meat and the storage of dried meat more difficult. Grains, growing better in the new climate, were more suitable to store in summer. The availability of potable water in the vicinity of Göbekli Tepe during the summer, despite wetter winters, is not necessarily a given and this could have had an impact on the availability of game during the hotter summer months.

The changing weather patterns during the Younger Dryas caused difficulties in the early development of crop cultivation. The Younger Dryas was believed to be a time of extreme weather systems and was arid at the beginning (Cheng et al 2020:23408). This would have made regular successful harvests extremely unlikely. In the absence of reliable crop harvests, the inhabitants in the vicinity of Göbekli Tepe either had to develop a reliable food source or revert to a nomadic lifestyle. Some settlements were indeed abandoned

24. Abu Hureyra was excavated by Andrew Moore in 1972 (Boyd 2016:21-23)

as indicated above, but others remained occupied during the entire period, as referred to in more detail in Chapter Seven.

The structures at Göbekli Tepe would indicate a far more utilitarian function than has been considered hitherto and this function would appear to be closely involved with the procurement of meat, as will be argued further.

4.3 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND THE FUNCTION/S OF THE STRUCTURES AT GÖBEKLI TEPE

In my opinion, there is a reason why Göbekli Tepe was built where it was built and a reason why it was built in the form that it was (cf. 1.12). The site of Göbekli Tepe was fortuitous in the sense that the material required for the specific construction of the circles was readily available. Göbekli Tepe is situated within the Urfa region. This region is typified by limestone formation, assisting in the establishment of other T-shaped pillar sites in the region. The T-shaped pillars at Göbekli Tepe are extremely heavy and were made from the limestone found in close vicinity of the circles (Knitter et al 2019:2). There is a correlation between the availability of limestone and the occurrence of T-shaped pillars (Moetz and Çelik 2010:699).

Heavy T-pillars are able to carry large weights and would have been able to support heavy roofing material such as earth. They would also be able to support heavy weights hanging from beams suspended between pillars. Such pillars would also provide structural stability to stacked walls between pillars, such as were found in the circles at Göbekli Tepe. It seems most plausible that the T-shaped pillars of Göbekli Tepe were designed to be functional, rather than ritualistic or anthropomorphic.

If the circles were indeed utilised for the large-scale processing of meat, as argued, a sturdy construction would have been required for, *inter alia*, the hanging of animal carcasses and animal products. The structures would, at the same time, require extraordinarily strong supports for earthen roofs. Such roofs would have had to be strong enough to withstand scavengers and thick enough to provide an ambient climate conducive to the curing of meat. This need would also explain the partial sinking of the structures to the underlying bedrock in order to carry the weight. The ‘deliberate backfilling’ referred to by Dietrich (Dietrich et al 2017:17) was most probably the collapse

of earth roofs rather than an intentional process. While there is no motivation in the literature advanced to support the theory of deliberate backfilling, the possibility of a roof being built over the T-shaped pillars is postulated by Banning (Banning 2011:629-230).

Because the limestone pillars of Göbekli Tepe were made in close vicinity of the construction of the circles, they could relatively easily be moved to where they were needed (Moetz and Çelik 2010:697).

Various interpretations of the specific construction of the stone circles at Göbekli Tepe have been attempted over the last few years. In this regard Haklay and Gopher found 'an underlying geometric pattern based on an equilateral triangle and a set of main perpendicular axes that ties together Enclosures B, C and D under a single, rather complex geometric design' (Haklay and Gopher 2019:350). The empirical evidence thus produced is, unfortunately, weakened by insights as to the function of the circles and the T-shaped pillars found within. For instance, the authors postulate that the T-pillars may represent a discourse related to a change in social order *viz* a new world order or even social differentiation regarding dead ancestors. They consider Göbekli Tepe, in relation to Jericho, as a 'foreign country', a quantic jump of the latest hunters-gatherers in the region, a 'wild growth', 'a disorder of sorts in the hunting-gathering world, way beyond the capacity of a pristine hunter-gatherer society' leading to new ways to interpret the world and man's relationship to its larger environment (Haklay and Gopher 2019:354-355).

4.4 GÖBEKLI TEPE AND THE LOWEST PLATEAU OF THE GERMUŞ MOUNTAINS

Göbekli Tepe was not an isolated development. Göbekli Tepe's various phases of occupation are parallel to different settlement phases in places such as Mureybet, Jerf el Ahmar, Quermez Dere and Körtik Tepe.

Figure 4.1 shows the position of the settlements surrounding Göbekli Tepe and mentioned in the previous paragraph with Nevali Çori to the North, Jerf al Ahmar and Mureybet to the south-west of Göbekli Tepe.

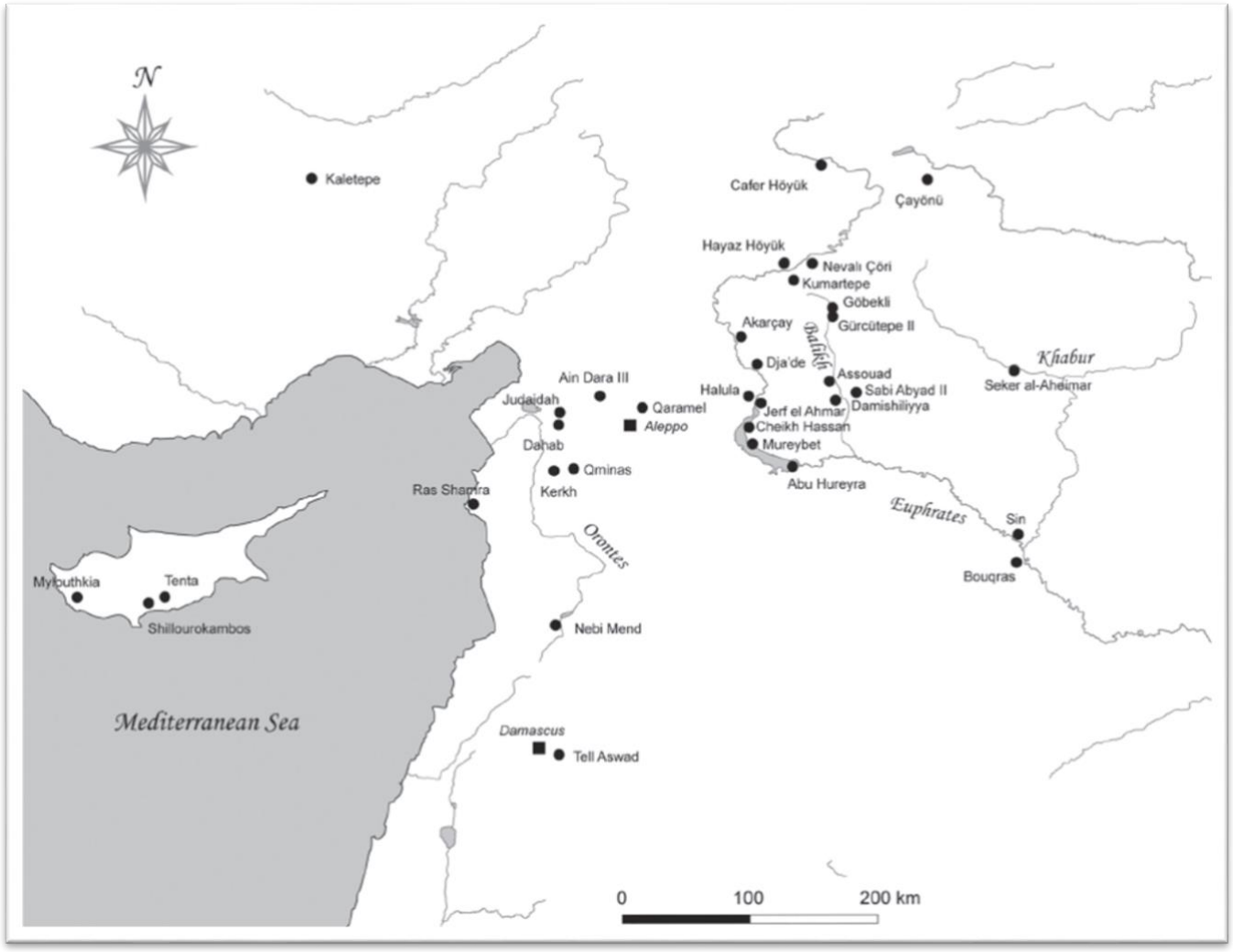

Figure 4.1 Settlements surrounding Göbekli Tepe (Kanjou 2015:14)

Located on a limestone plateau (Dietrich at al 2019:4), a limestone quarry provided the raw materials used for the construction of the T-shaped pillars. The limestone was a natural resource for the building construction of Göbekli Tepe. Access to this resource was a fortuitous occurrence rather than the reason for the location of Göbekli Tepe, as discussed in 4.2 below. Göbekli Tepe was well situated in more than one sense. For instance, when considering the possible migration corridors of the goitered gazelle it was situated in the middle between summer and autumn grazing areas (Braun 2021:27). This would make the placing of Göbekli Tepe a practical decision to serve the necessities of the hunter-gatherer existence rather than a strategic resolution (Braun 2021:27).

As mentioned above, numerous observers state that Göbekli Tepe was located on the highest point of the Germuş Mountains and that it was widely visible (Braun 2021:26). In

fact, Göbekli Tepe is situated on one of the lowest plateaus of the Germuş Mountains (Braun 2021:27). The location allowed for a better view of the distant areas but afforded a limited view of its immediate surroundings (cf. Figure 4.2). This also restricted the possibility of a direct view of the site. This would be contrary to the popular opinion that the location of Göbekli Tepe as a temple or sanctuary was chosen for its visibility from afar (cf. 7.4).

From a strategic perspective, the location actually offered an unobstructed view of the distant surroundings which made the observation of that area possible. This, in turn, enabled the occupants to make timeous decisions (Braun 2021:27). The view from Göbekli Tepe was across the entire plain of Harran, enabling a view of the prey being hunted. It also made it possible to see any threats approaching. As such, visitors to Göbekli Tepe would be in a perfect position to hunt any observed prey.

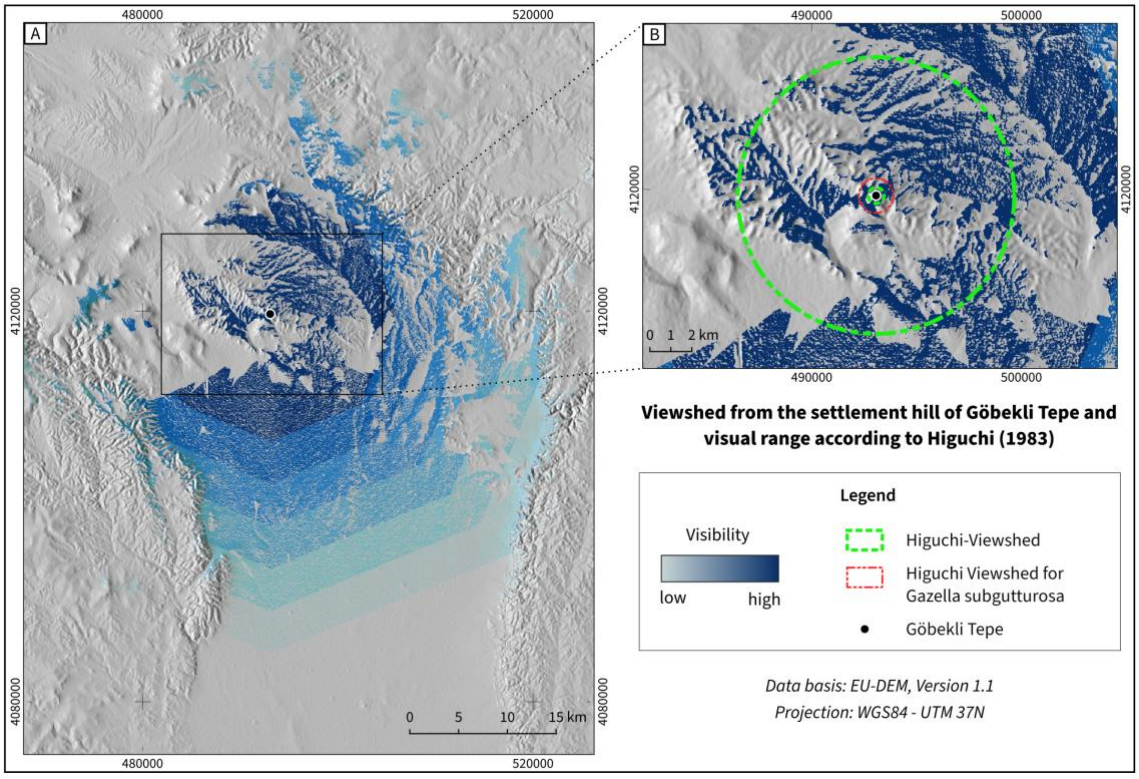

Figure 4.2 Left (A) - Viewshed from Göbekli Tepe. Right (B) - Detailed view with visual range[25] (Braun 2021:26)

25. Inner green circle: transition from short to middle distance view. Outer green circle: transition from middle to far distance view. Red circle: transition from middle to far distance view related to goitered gazelle. The transition from the near to the middle-distance view related to gazelles cannot be shown due to its limited extent.

The groundwater on the Harran Plain is of inferior quality, being high in salt and sodium content (Çullu et al 2009:473). Fluctuations in groundwater levels and the capillary movement of salt water to the surface leads to the accumulation of salt in the soil (Çullu et al 2009:470). It stands to reason that during evaporation of the salt water, crystalline salt will be deposited on the surface. If salt was used to preserve meat, it would therefore have been available on the spot. Concentrated salt deposits were found at Çatalhöyük (Atalay and Hastorf 2006:298) indicating that the use of salt was already known more than 9000 years ago. It is thus conceivable that salt could also have been used in the preservation of meat and other foodstuffs.

Artefacts found at Natufian sites (that is, predating Göbekli Tepe) include dried meats and fish for planned meals (Hirst 2019:Online). This indicates that Neolithic man had already mastered the art of meat preservation at the time of occupation of Göbekli Tepe. Braun argues that Göbekli Tepe was one of the first sites with T-shaped pillars built in a specific location based on the principles of elevation, availability of water and the accessibility of other resources. The correlation between the sites and the T-shape of the pillars does, however, not imply causation with regard to the location where they occur but is merely a function of their use. Other known sites with T-shaped pillars that followed Göbekli Tepe mirror this approach but do not approximate the same view as that of Göbekli Tepe. These sites appear to be hidden with safety in mind, an approach which changed in later settlements to be more orientated to plains where it was adjacent to potential agricultural land. (Braun 2021:27).

4.5 CONCLUSION

Geographically, Göbekli Tepe was built at the most advantageous location for the large-scale hunting of gazelle and other species of prey. It was most probably utilised as such, as is manifested by the tens of thousands of bones found at Göbekli Tepe (cf. 2.2) as well as numerous arrow points and flint found at the site (cf. 3.3). Göbekli Tepe was clearly built in a location that was advantageous for the observation of the Harran Plain and not in an ideal position to be observed (cf. 4.4).

Domestic plant propagation was not established until another five hundred years after the Younger Dryas.[26] Hunting as a means of food procurement was still prevalent and farming only appeared around 10 000 BP (cf. 4.2). The lack of 'special buildings' with a possible connection to the storage of cereal in a communal silo except as in Jerf el Ahmar (building EA 30) (cf. 4.2) would seem to support this. The unstable climate at the end of the Younger Dryas may have influenced the domestication of wheat, and the establishment of Göbekli Tepe would have been undertaken to provide meat and the by-products of meat processing, especially during periods outside the seasonal availability of grains. It is not clear why the first farming only occurred after the establishment of Göbekli Tepe, but the absence of grain storage facilities is an indication that not enough grain was available at the time to justify storage facilities. By necessary implication there still was a reliance on hunting at this time.

The Ice Age ended around 11 600 years ago. Göbekli Tepe was therefore founded at the beginning of the Holocene Era (cf. 4.1). The improving climate was conducive to the increase of plant and animal life, making cultivation of food and a lifestyle less dependent on hunting possible (cf. 4.2). This transition, however, did not happen overnight. Evidence of farming became more pronounced only approximately a thousand years after the construction of the first circles at Göbekli Tepe since, according to Curry (2008:280), 'The abundant remnants of wild game indicate that the people who lived here had not yet domesticated animals or farmed' (cf. 5.3). This implies that hunting was very much still the main source of food during the utilization of the structures at Göbekli Tepe. It is my contention that the Stone Age commodification of the products of hunting such as meat and skins reached a high point at Göbekli Tepe and that the structures there were built for this purpose.

Climate change after the Younger Dryas made an influx of hunter-gatherers possible who exploited the concomitant abundance of wildlife within an improving environment for human habitation. The establishment of Göbekli Tepe appears to be the culmination of the commodification of meat and animal by-product procurement.

26. At a prehistoric village just twenty miles away, geneticists found evidence of the world's oldest domesticated strains of wheat; radiocarbon dating indicates agriculture developed there around 10,500 years ago, or just five centuries after Gobekli Tepe's construction (Curry 2008).

CHAPTER FIVE
ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Five, the function of Göbekli Tepe is explored against anthropological considerations relevant at the time. The prevailing theory that Göbekli Tepe was a ritualistic centre or temple must be reconsidered in view of an ever-growing body of research indicating other possible theories.

Food procurement in the Southern Levant is a topic of debate, since food sources have to be deduced from sources such as the general availability of foodstuff during the time (Atalay and Hastorf 2006:284) and plant remains obtained from archaeological evidence such as flotation samples and charcoal remains. Detailed studies were undertaken into the available food sources leading up to the establishment of Göbekli Tepe and later (Curry 2021; Lang et al 2013). It will be argued that a primary and sustainable food source was required for sedentism. The need to augment such food source, coupled with the need to reside permanently at one place, necessitated the production of crops and the domestication of animals. The development of Göbekli Tepe was to exploit the availability of meat. The observation by Graeber and Wengow that farming was an endeavour necessitated by need rather than want, lends support to this argument (2021:282).

Göbekli Tepe may have made the transition from hunting to farming possible, in view of the intermittent availability of seasonal crop cultivation elsewhere (Lang et al 2013:411) and the availability of game (Lang et al 2013:412). It makes sense that supplementary activities would also be undertaken, such as the preparation of skins. In view of the seasonal availability of meat it is reasonable to deduce that there were periods that food was scarce and had to be augmented by other sources, of which agriculture was to provide one such source.

From the evidence available Göbekli Tepe was situated in an area of abundant fauna (UNESCO 2017) (cf. 5.3). In this area, considered to be a rich environment, it is clear that the population visiting Göbekli Tepe were still relying on wild resources to a large extent, as is evident from the large amount of animal bones at Göbekli Tepe, thousands of years

after the site was abandoned. As stated by Graeber and Wengrow, it was clear that at Göbekli Tepe, something big was developed (2021:282).

Atalay and Hastorf (2006) published a detailed study about food activities found within the archaeological record at Çatalhöyük. This study supports the argument that hunting was a seasonal activity that was undertaken during periods before seasonal crops were ready to be harvested (Lang et al 2013:412). This explains the large volume of gazelle and other faunal remains at Göbekli Tepe and would also emphasise the role of Göbekli Tepe in the seasonal hunting of game.

Dietrich et al consider the abundance of grinding stones at Göbekli Tepe and conclude that large-scale grain processing took place at Göbekli Tepe. The conclusion is based on extensive research and experimentation (2019:25; cf. 5.5) but does not explain why Göbekli Tepe was developed. Dietrich et al (2019:23) note that most of the grinding tools were found outside the circular structures.

Dietrich et al adduce an abundance of grain being processed at Göbekli Tepe. This is based on the discovery of 1166 grinding tools. However, only 7% of these tools were not broken. Dietrich et al note that broken tools were not mended but replaced. Mentioning the 'conspicuous absence' of plant material, Dietrich et al nonetheless conclude that a large amount of grain was processed at Göbekli Tepe. Logic dictates that it would be dubious to conclude this simply from the vast number of broken grinding tools.

It is not known how many of these grinding stones were exclusively used for the processing of grain, how many were used for the processing of meat, skins and other animal products and how many of them may have had more than one use.

Gresky et al (2017) consider human cranial remains in archaeological sites in-depth but much of the information mentioned does not apply to Göbekli Tepe, despite some arguments for Göbekli Tepe being a religious or cultic site due to some skull fragments being found there. Since only a few skull fragments were found at Göbekli Tepe, the study tends to underscore the randomness of skull fragment discovery at Göbekli Tepe (cf. 5.7.).

5.2 THE NATURE OF FOOD PRODUCTION IN THE SOUTH-EASTERN LEVANT

LEADING UP TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF GÖBEKLI TEPE

The food cycle during the occupation of Göbekli Tepe was dependent on the seasonal availability of food resources. A detailed study conducted at Çatalhöyük established that a range of produce was used by the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük (Atalay and Hastorf 2006:289). Atalay and Hastorf rely on the work of a number of researchers such as Asouti, Richards and Pearson, and Helbaek to reach this conclusion. Since Çatalhöyük was inhabited between 9300 BP and 8200 BP (Scarre 2013:224), therefore immediately after Göbekli Tepe was abandoned, it is useful as a case study for the food procurement of Neolithic societies during the Late Pre-pottery Neolithic B.

The importance of the study at Çatalhöyük lies not in a comparison with Göbekli Tepe but rather serves to provide insight into the demise of Göbekli Tepe. At Çatalhöyük, the community became more sedentary over the period of its occupation and farming, including animal husbandry, became prevalent. This, in turn, made hunting less important. According to Atalay and Hastorf (2006:289-290), game animals were available all year round but most fresh meat was obtained from sheep and fish, as well as a smaller contribution from birds. This corresponds with the stone circles at Göbekli Tepe becoming smaller towards the end of its occupation (UNESCO 2017). If Göbekli Tepe was indeed a hunting facility as I postulate, the reduced need for hunting could explain its demise. If Göbekli Tepe was, however, a place of ritual significance, the reasons for its decline are still unknown.

During the occupation of Göbekli Tepe, intermittently for a period of approximately a thousand years, the utilisation of resources for food production was mixed, but meat was most important during the first part of this period. This corresponds with the colder climate and inclement weather at the time which meant that grain production would be less successful (Atalay and Hastorf 2006:289).

The earliest stone circles at Göbekli Tepe dating back to the PPNA (cf. 1.1) were larger at the time and more robust than later circles and would be suited for the construction of thick earth roofs and the suspension of large carcasses from beams resting on the T-pillars (cf. 3.4). This would facilitate the processing of carcasses and concomitant products such as skins. The profusion of animal bones and scrapers found at the site

bears out the conclusion that large-scale processing of carcasses took place at Göbekli Tepe (Dietrich et al 2019:27). The presence of limestone vessels may indicate the processing of skins for leather. Residue in these vessels was ascribed to the brewing of beer but may just as well have been formed by tanning processes (cf. 5.5).

Processed meat would be easier to carry and distribute to settlements in the vicinity of Göbekli Tepe, as would processed skins and other products (cf. 5.5).

During the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) period, grain was already established as a staple cereal throughout many parts of the Fertile Crescent. Sites such as Tell Mureybet, Jerf el-Ahmar and Tell Qaramel, which demonstrated large scale cereal use, implies pre-domestic cultivation (Lang et al 2013:411). In view of the imperfect climate at the time it is difficult to quantify the extent of annual production.

The use of cereals as part of a sustenance plan during the late Epipalaeolithic (c. 14 520 - 11 620 cal BP) and Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN, 11 620 - 9020 cal BP) periods was an extended and complicated process of the selection and use of plants, the landscape, and available resources (Dietrich et al 2019:2). Methods of cultivating, processing, and storing were probably developed over a protracted period. The subsequent development of grain cultivation on a large scale towards the end of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPNB, 10 8020 - 9020 cal BP) period led to many developments and adaptations of tools for plant processing (Dietrich et al 2019:2). It must be deduced that during the developmental process of trial and error, the reliance on hunting as a sustainable source of food remained important but declined as the production of grains became more prevalent. The production of leather, however, could not be substituted in the same way and the importance of hunting in this regard remained[27].

5.3 FOOD PRODUCTION AS A MOTIVATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE

[27] A more detailed anthropological investigation may provide interesting anwsers as to the compexity and potential commercal production of leather, but falls outside the scope of this thesis.

SITE

In the absence of any proof of known domesticated plants or animals at Göbekli Tepe, it must be deduced that the people who built Göbekli Tepe were still hunter-gatherers (Dietrich et al 2010:684).

Schmidt stated that the need for food to feed the builders of Göbekli Tepe might have led to the acceleration of domestication (Dietrich et al 2019:3). The converse is more compelling, that Göbekli Tepe was constructed to provide food to the bands of hunter-gatherers in the region. The constructions were, in my opinion, erected to provide shelter for the hunters, processing facilities for meat and skins, and protection of these products from predators until such time as the products were moved to the respective settlements where the hunters came from. This food was provided by the abundance of wildlife on the Harran Plain within view of Göbekli Tepe (UNESCO 2017). The construction at Göbekli Tepe was intricately connected to hunting as an alternative food source, a basic human need (Çelik and Ayaz 2022:146). The availability of an alternative food source in close proximity to settlements would make a sedentary lifestyle required for crop cultivation and animal husbandry possible.

The presence of a large number of grinding stones (Dietrich et al 2019:26) indicates the processing of wheat but does not prove the cultivation of wheat in the vicinity of Göbekli Tepe. No other proof of the cultivation of wheat in the vicinity of Göbekli Tepe has been found and a remarkably low volume of carbonised plant remains was found at Göbekli Tepe (Dietrich et al 2019:3). This may be because all the grains processed at Göbekli Tepe had to be carried there and that only an adequate amount for the people residing there at any given period was thus transported at a time.

Grinding tools discovered at archaeological sites normally indicate proof of plant processing. When the usage wear of such tools is analysed, it tends to show other uses for these tools as well, such as processing of meat, animal skins or minerals (Dietrich et al 2019:3). This, in turn, provides a reasonable deduction that Göbekli Tepe was indeed a Neolithic slaughterhouse, providing meat, skins and possible other animal produce to the people who utilised the site. Leather was probably a commonly used material in the past, used for protection from the elements. This is supported by the wide occurrence of

stone scrapers and cutting indentations on animal bones indicating a process of skinning in the Palaeolithic Period (Harris and Veldmeijer 2014:12). It is difficult to discern a site where the hunting and slaughtering of animals took place and in most instances sites like these are identified by the occurrence of stone tools as well as bones at the same time (Shipman and Rose 1982:58). At Göbekli Tepe copious amounts of bones were found (Dietrich et al 2012:691) as well as a large number of flint tools (Schmidt 2000:51) and therefore the criteria set by Shipman and Rose (1982:58) is met at Göbekli Tepe. Clear proof of hunting at Göbekli Tepe was the discovery of an Auroch humerus with a broken-off flint tip stuck in it (Pöllath et al 2017:3).

Various arrow points were produced at the site since all stages of production are well represented in the deposits, but no flint source has been found at the site of Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:51). Even though the flint stones had to be carried from neighbouring valleys, Schmidt says that 'there were more flints in one little area here, a square meter or two, than many archaeologists find in entire sites' (Mann 2011:7). It is submitted that this was because the site was predominantly used as a hunting base. The abundance of points from PPNA may explain the lack of PPNB points. During the later occupation of Göbekli Tepe the preferred prey became smaller (Scarre 2013:205) and this may have led to alternative hunting methods. Arrow points from Byblos, Helwan, Nemrik, El-Khiam and Nevali Çori found at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:51-52; cf. 3.3) indicate that hunters from across the area brought their own points from their respective regions. Bringing raw material to the site may indicate that they had time to work on this material while at the site, time which they may not necessarily have had at their abodes.

A large number of flint arrow points found at the site all date from PPNA. No points have yet been found from PPNB (Schmidt 2000:52). It is unclear if the use of the structures at Göbekli Tepe may have changed or if the abundance of these arrow points made the production of further arrow points unnecessary. It might also be ascribed to a change in hunting techniques and weapons, related to a change in prey from larger animals to smaller animals such as foxes, hare and birds like partridges (Scarre 2013:205). This would make the use of arrows less frequent.

5.4 THE TRANSITION OF HUNTER/GATHERER SOCIETIES TO FARMING

SOCIETIES

Göbekli Tepe may prove to have been pivotal in the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to farming societies in the region. Other areas may well have had less pronounced focal points for the same process, but the importance of Göbekli Tepe lies in the fact that for a period of a thousand years during the transition from hunting to farming, it provided a steady source of food and other products derived from hunting. This made the establishment of farming at other sites possible during uncertain and fluctuating conditions, when the successful annual cultivation of wheat was not a given. Since Göbekli Tepe did not have a perennial water source, it was unlikely that the cultivation of wheat would be attempted there and no proof of such cultivation has been found thus far.

Hunter-gatherer groups form and split up according to needs occasioned by seasonal change, influenced by the availability of resources and social needs (Widlok 2020:3). This is different from the process of extending farming operations (Widlok 2020:3). This is ostensibly why Göbekli Tepe was not occupied full-time, although the structures would indicate full-time occupation because of their sheer size. The stone-circles were, in my opinion, utilitarian and designed for the large-scale processing of meat and by-products from hunting (cf.4.3; 5.2; 5.5).

5.5 WAS GÖBEKLI TEPE ONLY ABOUT HUNTING?

Apart from meat, skins would be in demand all over the fertile crescent for clothing (Harris and Veldmeijer 2014:9) and shelter, shoes, and belts as well as strapping since there is no documented proof of weaving or cloth making at that time. The tanning process was known during the Neolithic era and leather and furs might have been important products produced at Göbekli Tepe.

A group of six large stone bowls found at Göbekli Tepe showed tentative signs of oxalate (Dietrich et al 2012:687; cf. Figure 5.1). According to Dietrich et al, oxalate is a by-product of the steeping, mashing and fermentation of cereals, leading to the deduction that it could indicate the production of malt and beer, although it is not fully conclusive yet (2012:687-688). No evidence could, however, be found of grain malting and the explanation offered was that not every step of the process was carried out there (Dietrich

et al 2012:688).[28] Based on this argument, Dietrich et al come to the conclusion that beer brewing and large-scale feasting took place at Göbekli Tepe (2012:687). Schmidt do not offer an explanation as to where the water for the brewing was obtained, since there were no nearby water sources (Schmidt 2000:45).

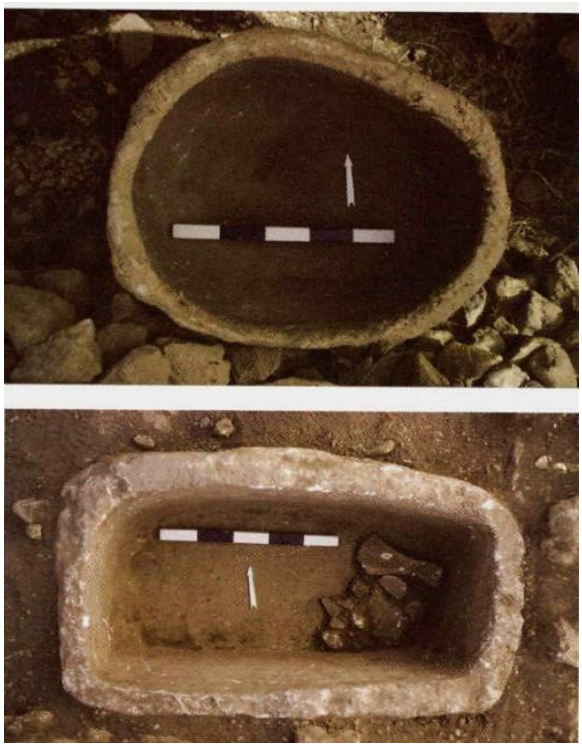

Figure 5.1 Limestone vessel from Göbekli Tepe (Dietrich et al 2012:688)

Feasting, as proposed by Dietrich et al (2012), might have created a different impact on the ecological landscape. If the theory that copious amounts of beer was prepared for the purposes of a feast, the scarcity of grains in the vicinity of the site would be a contra-indication. Very few sickles were found in the oldest layer of Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2000:51). This would indicate limited harvesting of wild grain which would be consistent with the non-cultivation of grains.

The stone bowls referred to above were found in PPNB contexts (Dietrich et al 2012:687) and most sickles (high quantities) in the younger layers (also PPNB) (Schmidt 2000:51). This would be consistent with more substantial harvests of grain (and concomitant

28. Research as late as 2019 could not find evidence of grain malting apart from determining that some hand tools found were probably used for processing softer cereals or grain polishing suitable for processing, amongst others, malt (Dietrich et al 2019:17). This does not provide any direct evidence for the production of malt at Göbekli Tepe.

increased use) during the latter part of Göbekli Tepe's existence. If correct, this still does not explain the use of the stone bowls beyond reasonable doubt.

I submit that the oxalate residue found in some of the stone vessels could have been the result of tanning processes utilising urine (cf. Kumar 2013:Online). Certain diets produce an increase in oxalate formation, such as the increased consumption of protein, ascorbate (vitamin C, found commonly in fruit) as well as vitamin B6 (found in foods such as pork, poultry, some fish, wheatgerm and oats) (NHS 2020:Online). These foodstuffs were commonly eaten by hunter-gatherers in the region of Göbekli Tepe at the time of its construction and occupation and would invariably influence their urine (Atalay and Hastorf 2006:289). If urine was utilised in a tanning process, this would also explain the presence of oxalate residue in these vessels. A high percentage of endscrapers was found in the older layers of L9-66 (Schmidt 2000:49-51). This would indicate that the preparation of skins took place at Göbekli Tepe from an early age. A later (2020) study by Laura Dietrich et al undertook a comprehensive overview of the six troughs found at Göbekli Tepe and the residue found within. They concluded that it might have been used for some preparation of cereal but that some of the tests were inconclusive, indicating that the content of these vessels may have been from either vegetable or animal origin. No specific biomarkers were found for cereals, herbs or other plants (Dietrich et al 2020:10-11). Again, the preparation of meat and animal products cannot be ruled out.

Dietrich finds a contradiction between the numerous quern-stones found at Göbekli Tepe and the absence of direct evidence of the large-scale presence of cereals there (Dietrich et al 2019:3). The possibility that many of these quern-stones were not used for grain processing but for the processing of skins was apparently not considered. In a comprehensive study conducted by Dietrich and others (Dietrich et al 2019) the various grinding tools at Göbekli Tepe were analysed. Despite exhaustive experimentation, the study makes very little reference to any possible meat and skin processing. This may have been due to the possibility that the investigation was focused on the processing of grain based on the feasting theory that Schmidt as well as Dietrich held (cf. 5.5)

In Figure 5.2, some of the grinding tools found at Göbekli Tepe are illustrated. Some grinding bowls appear to have been holed on purpose and may have been used to dehusk grain (Dietrich et al 2019:18). The most frequent grinding stones at Göbekli Tepe

are types represented by pictures A, B, C and D and were used in a grinding motion in a pendular, back and forth motion, as well as a circular motion (Dietrich et al 2019:14). Seventy-five percent of the tools found at Göbekli Tepe were of the abovementioned type and were the most important grinding tools there. They were easy to make and broken handstones were discarded (cf. 5.1). Only 7% of the 1166 found were not damaged at all. The wear pattern on these handstones was even, implying a uniform use (Dietrich et al 2019:14). As to the damage to most of the handstones, it can only be speculated but pounding, such as would be done in preparing leather, may have caused it. Grinding tools usually prove plant processing in archaeological context but studies offer multiple uses for grinding tools, including the processing of meat, skin and minerals (Dietrich et al 2019:3).

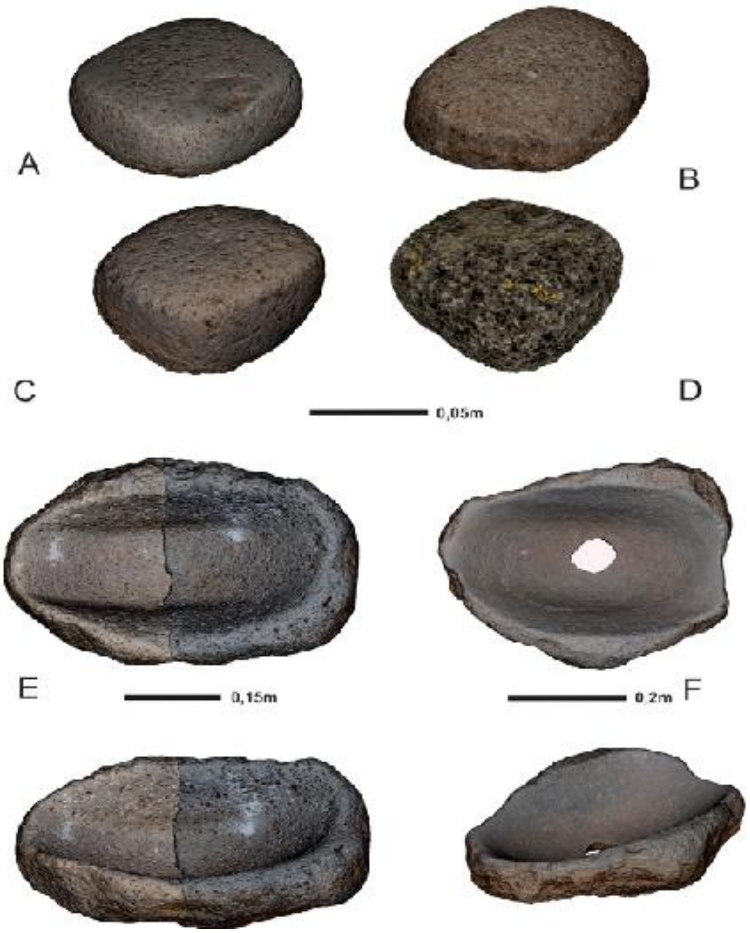

Figure 5.2 Bowls and grinding stones from Göbekli Tepe. (A), (C) Neolithic handstones of type 1; (B) Neolithic handstone of type 2; (D) Experimental handstone of type 1, produced as copy of (C); (E, F) Neolithic grinding bowls (Dietrich et al 2019:12)

Dried meat and processed, dried skins are much easier to transport than fresh carcasses, even though there were methods to assist in the transport of fresh meat (Byrd 1989:177). This implies that a band of hunters could produce and transport a large quantity of food and skins for a number of people over a distance with relative ease. Processing the meat in close vicinity of where it was culled would be much easier than to transport fresh meat to a settlement. This also means that meat products could be used domestically as well as possibly for trade.

5.6 A CENTRAL FACILITY FOR THE OBTAINING OF MEAT AND SKINS

The killing of game and the processing of meat has been traced back as far as 400 000 years ago after the finding and examination of a bison killing site at Atapuerca in northern Spain. This shows the possibility that meat-drying goes back to the Middle Pleistocene era (Spyrou et al 2019:86). It is therefore not unheard of that the central hunting and processing of game is possible and in fact took place hundreds of thousands of years before Göbekli Tepe was established. The seasonal availability of game on the plain of Harran would have attracted bands of hunter-gatherers from all over the region. This in turn would necessitate the establishment of infrastructure for the processing of game and concomitant produce in large numbers.

It makes sense that foodstuffs such as wheat would also be processed at Göbekli Tepe in view of the large numbers of hunter-gatherers gathered there from time to time. This is not proof of feasting but logically proof of the simple consumption of food during the period of the hunt, as well as for the possible use to process skins. It would seem that the structures at Göbekli Tepe were utilitarian and were built of necessity, rather than as a sanctuary or temple or communal structure that had to be erected by enticement and the necessity of feasting.

5.7 FRAGMENTS OF HUMAN SKULL AT GÖBEKLI TEPE IN CONTEXT

No human burials have been found at Göbekli Tepe to date, although a number of fragmented human bones occur, most of which are from skulls. Fragments from the rest of the skeleton are less evident (Gresky et al 2017:1). Schmidt believes that the presence of human bones found in the filling material indicates the presence of primary burials at Göbekli Tepe but no evidence for such a theory has been discovered (Schmidt

2010:243). Schmidt argues that these burials were opened afterwards for further rituals with the dead (Schmidt 2010:243). Again, no confirmatory evidence has been uncovered yet.

According to Gresky et al, there are two distinct criteria to identify skull cults. The first criterion is that it must take place within a religious context and the second criterion is that many and different skulls must have had the same treatment. Any 'ritualistic' characteristics found at Göbekli Tepe are deduced from its architecture and the iconography found on the T-shaped pillars, none of which sustain any indication or evidence for a 'death cult' (Gresky et al 2017:2). The images have, however, led many observers to the understanding that Göbekli Tepe was a ritual centre of Early Holocene hunter-gatherer groups living within the area (Gresky et al 2017:3).

There is abundant evidence that skulls had a special status during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period of Southeast Anatolia and the Levant. Skulls were kept in special places and have also been decorated at times by replacing soft tissue with plaster and colouring of facial features (Gresky et al 2017:1). A plastered skull found at 'Ain Ghazal, a neolithic site occupied between 9200 to 8000 BP and situated in close proximity to the present-day Amman, Jordan (Simmons et al:1988), is shown in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Plastered skull from 'Ain Ghazal (Schmandt-Besserat 2020:Online)

None of this was found on the skull fragments at Göbekli Tepe. Rather, the occurrence of the skull fragments in the filling material found at the site would indicate a rather unceremonial disposing thereof. Figure 5.4 shows the skull fragments found at Göbekli Tepe.

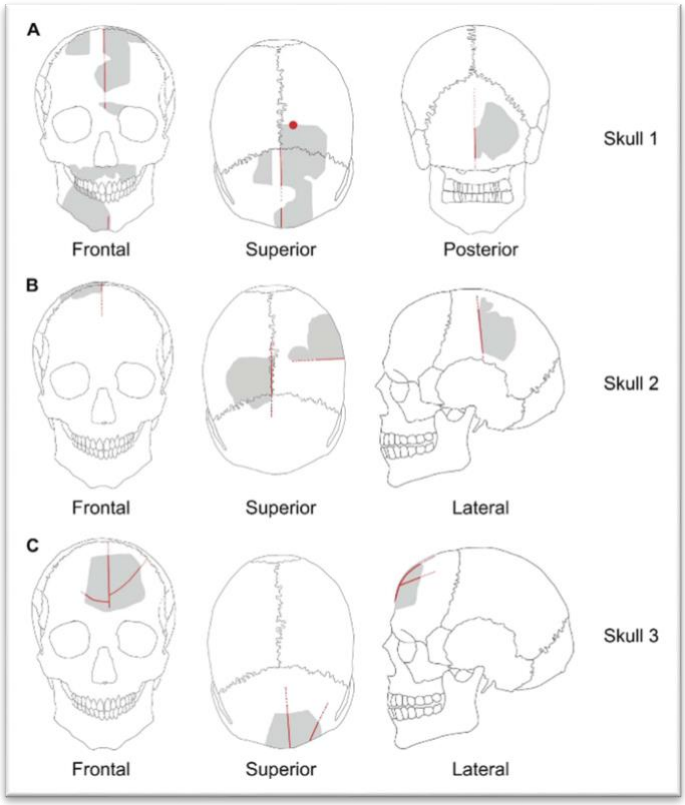

Figure 5.4 Sketches of skull fragments found at Göbekli Tepe. Gray indicating preserved elements; red showing modifications (Gresky et al 2017:3)

5.8 CONCLUSION

In considering the evidence appearing from an ever-growing body of research, the theory that Göbekli Tepe was a ritualistic centre or temple can no longer be supported. In my opinion, Göbekli Tepe should rather be considered a facility for the production and distribution of meat and concomitant products.

Conclusions drawn by various researchers such as Schmidt, Dietrich, and others, from the site itself, the various artefacts found at the site and the faunal remains appear to attempt to justify the preconceived notion that Göbekli Tepe was, at the very least, a monumental construction, a ritual building or, at the other extreme, a temple. The evidence of grain processing is considered in the context of ritual feasting and thus combined with ritualistic practices. This view is amplified by the occurrence of iconography on some of the T-pillars at the site. The notion that Göbekli Tepe could simply be a utilitarian construction is not developed.

In considering the evidence gleaned from the previous chapters, a unifying theory can be developed. It is noted from this evidence that a number of theories may be plausible, but none of these theories are presented in such a way that they may be integrated with all the information known about Göbekli Tepe.

Schmidt and Özalp's theories about the monumental nature of what Schmidt considers to be a sanctuary and what Özalp interprets to be a temple is not based on any evidence of a deity. Banning refers to a possible housing use for Göbekli Tepe but other evidence points to the possibility that this was not the position and that the site was occupied seasonally at best. Other, more exotic theories, border on pseudoscience and worse and are often not even based on the facts found at Göbekli Tepe (Collins 2014). They fail to take into consideration the aspects of anthropology and the daily needs of the people who inhabited the Southern Levant at the time.

CHAPTER SIX
ICONOGRAPHY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As the body of iconography from Palaeolithic sources increases over time, increased attempts at interpreting this iconography are being published. It is hoped that this will lead to a better understanding and interpretation of these symbols to establish what they might try to convey (Yakar 2016:165).

It is important to note that there are scholars, such as Maurice Bloch, who suggest that there is an intricate connection between utilitarian and ritual practises. Bloch himself, however, cautions that this presents a challenge in that a contrast between religion and secular use is taken from a more recent system of representation that cannot be extrapolated and applied to more ancient practises. He argues that the bigger picture, namely the transcendental, is to be considered and explained. He admits that this presents a difficulty (Bloch 2008:6).

In this chapter the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe on the pillars in Enclosures A, B, C and D (cf. Figure 6.1) will be discussed and the contributions of Schmidt, Peters and both Dietrich and Laura Dietrich, as well as that from Yakar, in the interpretation of this iconography will be critically considered. An alternative interpretation will also be advanced.

Some of the T-pillars in a number of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe are adorned with iconography in the form of wild animals such as carnivores, reptiles, and birds. There are a few anthropomorphic designs on others. Comments on the iconography vary but fall into two broad categories, namely attempts at interpreting the iconography while others are merely reports of the pictography as it is found.

Schmidt (2000) initially noted the iconography at Göbekli Tepe on some of the pillars in the various enclosures and in later papers discussed its possible meaning.

Dietrich, collaborating with various other scholars, also published a number of papers on the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe (2012; 2016; 2017 and 2019). He went further than Schmidt in considering the meaning of the iconography and proposed that the iconography expressed aspects of cult activity (Dietrich et al 2019:4).

Peters, together with Schmidt, is of the opinion that animals played a significant role in the spiritual world of the people who used the site (Peters and Schmidt 2004).

Yakar argues that Neolithic art from Anatolia encompasses many symbols and requires an interdisciplinary approach and then proceeds to an interpretation based on neurophysiology (Yakar 2016:165).

6.2 THE NATURE OF THE ICONOGRAPHY FOUND AT GÖBEKLI TEPE

6.2.1 Enclosure A - Serpent Pillar Building

Enclosure A (cf. Figure 6.1) was named the Serpent Pillar building by Schmidt (Schmidt 2000:49) because of the snakes identified on Pillar One (cf. Figure 6.2). According to Schmidt, Pillar One depicts five snakes and what he considers might be a net of snakes because of how they intertwine with each other, as well as a four-legged animal at the lower end of the pillar which he identifies as possibly being a ram (Schmidt 2000:49).

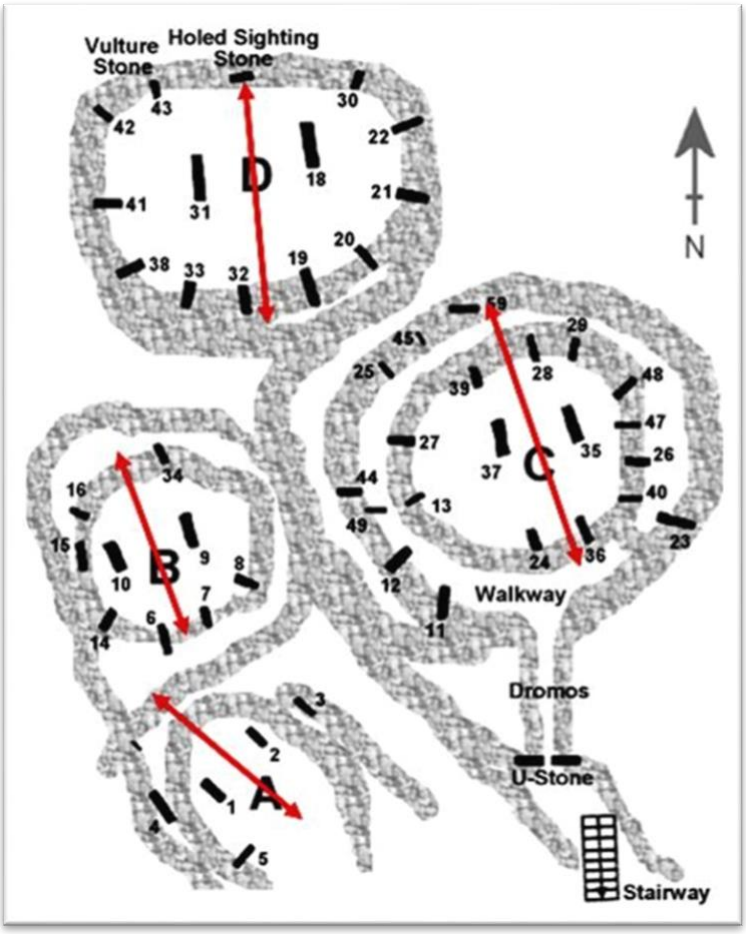

Figure 6.1 Orientation of Enclosure D and, to the front, Enclosures C, B and A (Dendrinos 2016:14)

Figure 6.2 Pillar One (Schmidt and Köksal-Schmidt 2014:75)

Pillar Two depicts the image of a bull, a fox, a crane and a bucranium[29] (cf. Figure 6.3). The bucranium is not visible on the image of Pillar Two. Schmidt says that the possible meaning of the bull, the fox and the crane can be interpreted as a fable of the people or be seen as a guardian symbol (Schmidt 2012:116-119). Schmidt does not elaborate on the grounds that lead him to this conclusion.

29. A sculptured ornament composed of an ox skull adorned with ribbons or garlands (Merriam-Webster [sa]:Online).

Figure 6.3 Pillar Two Enclosure A showing three motifs of bull, fox, and crane below each other (Dietrich 2017a:Online)

Pillars Three and Four do not have any iconography on them. Aside from pillars, several sculptures were also discovered such as a lion-like sculpture thought to be part of a totem pole and the back part of an animal-like being whose hind legs grasp a human head (Schmidt 2012:108-109). Pillar Five depicts a snake sailing down the pillar (Schmidt 2012:120). Schmidt does not attempt to interpret this. In a 2014 article, it is argued that an interpretation of the snake wickerwork is difficult as it is not clear whether this depiction is associated with the other depictions on the pillars and if it is part of one narrative ('story') or whether it is part of more than one stories (Schmidt and Köksal-Schmidt 2014:76).

In the absence of any indications to the contrary, it would be irresponsible to postulate on any specific conclusion as to the meaning of the iconography found in Enclosure A, since it would be based on conjecture and be without any basis in fact. Any theorising around the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe is, in view of the age of Göbekli Tepe, of necessity based on theories from later periods retrospectively applied to Göbekli Tepe, but without any substantive proof. This goes for all the other enclosures unearthed at Göbekli Tepe as well, e.g., the 'snake wickerwork' found in Enclosure A. Although interesting, a

comparison with similar motifs from Uruk dating thousands of years later does not disclose a direct connection between the motifs from Uruk and the same motif found at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt and Köksal-Schmidt 2014:76).

Depictions of intertwined snakes were found on a seal stone and an asphalt vase at Susa, dating to a period approximately 3000 BP from the first Babylonian Empire and the Hittite empires (Van der Osten 1926:405). The snakes appear to be biting each other's tails, apparently with a symbolic meaning (Van der Osten 1926:406). It may have been connected to snake worship or have a ritual or magical meaning, or it could be a symbol of eternal life (Van der Osten 1926:406-407).

Foxes were identified with the god Enlil in Mesopotamia and were considered to be a symbolic representation of Enlil's emblem. Other than this the fox was very seldomly ascribed a religious or cultic function (Uther 2006:138).

In ancient Iraq, bulls had a symbolic significance. Depictions of bulls appeared on artistic fragments from 7000 BP and reflected religious beliefs of the time. The bull represented power, fertility, protection, and a representation of a deity culminating in the anthropomorphic winged bull with human head, known as Lamasu (Hussein 2020:734-735).

In Iran, the symbol of ducks in general reflects beliefs related to the sacredness of water and its relation to the goddess Anahita (*circa* 2800 BP) (Karimi 2019:24). Clay items from the hills of Kashan and various other places reflect motifs of birds on water, depicted by horizontal or vertical lines. There are also depictions of birds in relation to checkered lines which are interpreted as agricultural products (Karimi 2019:25). One such depiction is shown in Figure 6.4 and shows a more than cursory similarity to the iconography found on Pillar Twelve in Enclosure C (cf. Figure 6.7) Although thousands of years apart, the similarity is interesting and deserves further study.

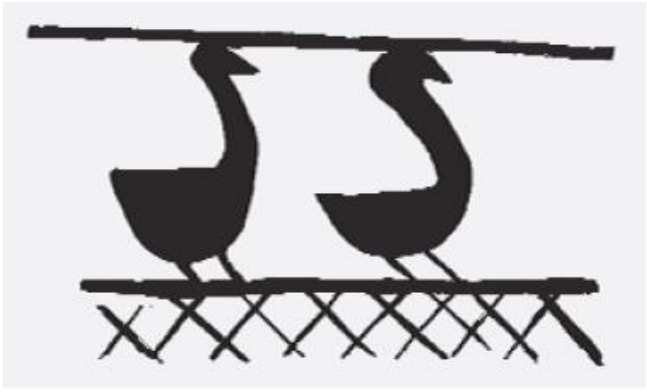

Figure 6.4 Water (aquatic) bird from Tappe Hesar (Karimi 2019:26)

6.2.2 Enclosure B

Enclosure B lies directly north of Enclosure A (cf. Figure 6.1). Pillars Six to Nine were discovered during 1998, a year after Enclosure A was opened, and Pillars Ten, Fourteen, Fifteen and Sixteen were unearthed in 1999 (Schmidt 2000:50).

On the southern face of Pillar Six are the reliefs of a reptile and a snake (Schmidt 2000:50; cf. Figure 6.5). These are the central twin pillars of Enclosure B (Schmidt 2012:128). These pillars are found within the terrazzo floor plan.

Figure 6.5 Pillar Six (Dietrich 2017b:Online)

A relief of a fox appears on both Pillars Nine (cf. Figure 6.6) and Ten, which are located in the centre of a further enclosure (Schmidt 2000:50). Below the fox on Pillar Nine is a small 'graffito'[30] boar carved directly into the pillar below the fox (Collins 2014:179). This carving appears to be work from a different artist, but the significance is not clear.

Figure 6.6 Pillar Nine (Dietrich et al 2017:21)

30. An inscription or drawing made on some public surface (such as a rock or wall). Singular of graffiti (Merriam-Webster [sa]:Online).

Pillar Ten depicts carvings of a wild boar and three wild dogs. Schmidt says that this depicted a hunting scene (Schmidt 2012:129). These animals are reflected on the western side of the pillar. The motif on Pillar Fourteen is unidentifiable but it could possibly depict a fox (Schmidt 2012:130). I could find no mention of Pillar Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen.

6.2.3 Enclosure C - House of the Boars

Journalist Michael Zick called Enclosure C 'The house of the Boars' (cf. Figure 6.1) (Schmidt 2012:140). Much like Enclosure A, boars were identified on six out of the ten pillars in Enclosure C (Schmidt 2012:140).

Pillar Eleven is a T-shaped pillar but the head of the pillar is in a bad condition. A hole as thick as an arm is also visible on the pillar (Schmidt 2012:141). Schmidt offers no opinion on the presence of the hole.

Pillar Twelve, on the T-shaped upper part, shows five birds trapped in a net that would suggest a reduced portrayal of animals. This further supports my theory that Göbekli Tepe was established for the purpose of hunting, but Göbekli Tepe was not a permanent settlement being occupied seasonally. A proposal by Von den Driesch[31] claimed that this scene could be depicted as wild Asiatic asses jumping over rocks (Schmidt 2000:50). There is also the depiction of the head of a fox with its body hidden by the second terrazzo floor with a boar above it (cf. Figure 6.7). In the fill in front of this pillar, a sculpture of a boar was discovered (Schmidt 2000:51) (in Figure 6.8, the boar iconography is not revealed). Interpretations may differ even when based on the same representation and is often based on the observer's biases, training, and background. This is the first time that reliefs were noticed on the upper horizontal part of a T-pillar.

31. No other reference to this claim could be found, apart from the citing by Schmidt.

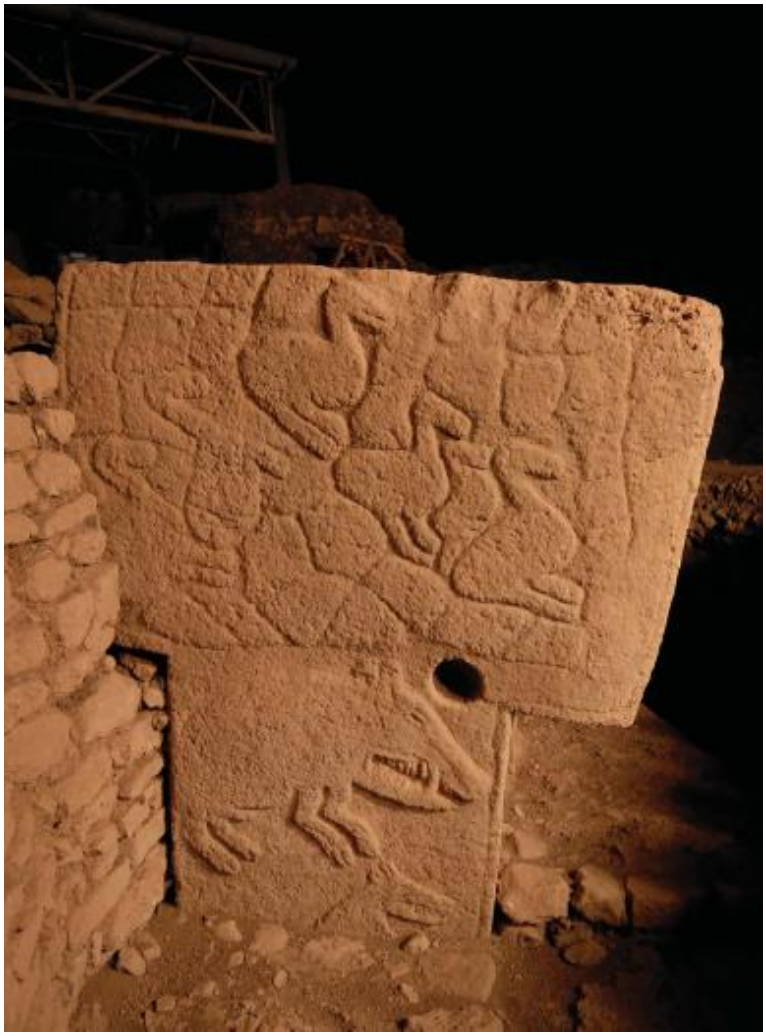

Figure 6.7 Pillar Twelve depicting a wild duck, wild boar, and fox (Busacca 2017:6)

Figure 6.8 A sculpture of a boar lying next to Pillar 12 in Enclosure C (Dietrich 2016b:Online)

On the main body of Pillar Twenty-Three, there is a depiction of an intimidating boar revealing its teeth.

On the top edge of the second circle wall of Enclosure C, between Pillars Twenty-Four and Thirty-Six, appears a very large limestone panel showing a well-kept high relief depicting a cringing animal akin to a dog (Schmidt 2012:144-145).

Pillars Twenty-Six and Twenty-Eight both bear one small boar each (cf. Figure 6.9). Pillar Twenty-Six also depicts a predator looking in the direction of a boar. The predator is chiselled from the rock while the boar is depicted in relief. It is not clear whether these two depictions were made at the same time and if the one is relevant to the other. The predator was ostensibly carved at the same time as the pillar while the relief of the boar may have been done at the same time or subsequent to the former. Pillar Twenty-Eight has a boar on each of the two largest sides (Schmidt 2012:141).

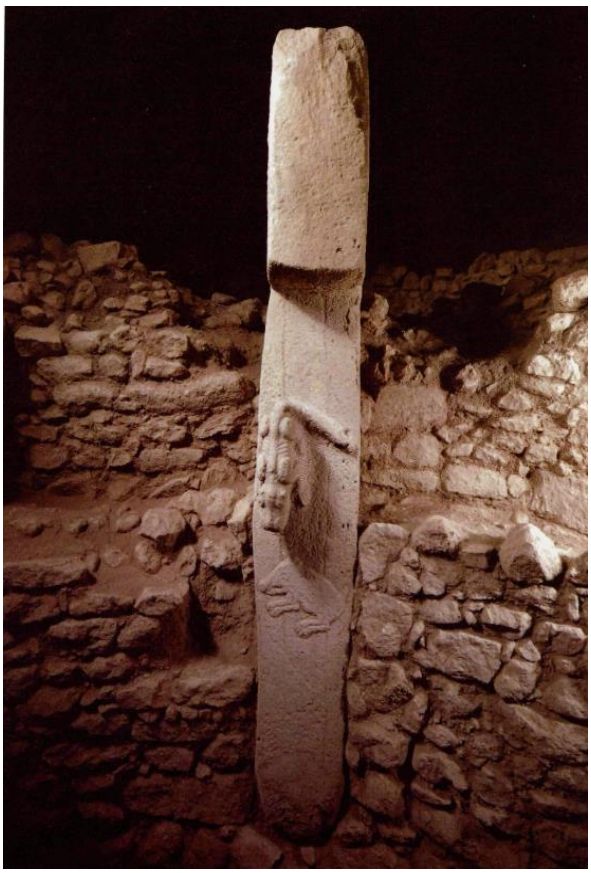

Figure 6.9 Pillar Twenty-Six showing a predator (Dietrich et al 2012:680)

On Pillar Thirty-Three there is a crane (Notroff 2016a: Online; cf. Figure 6.10), and Pillar Thirty-Eight shows three birds, two appearing to be cranes showing strangely human-like legs (Notroff 2016a: Online; cf. Figure 6.11).

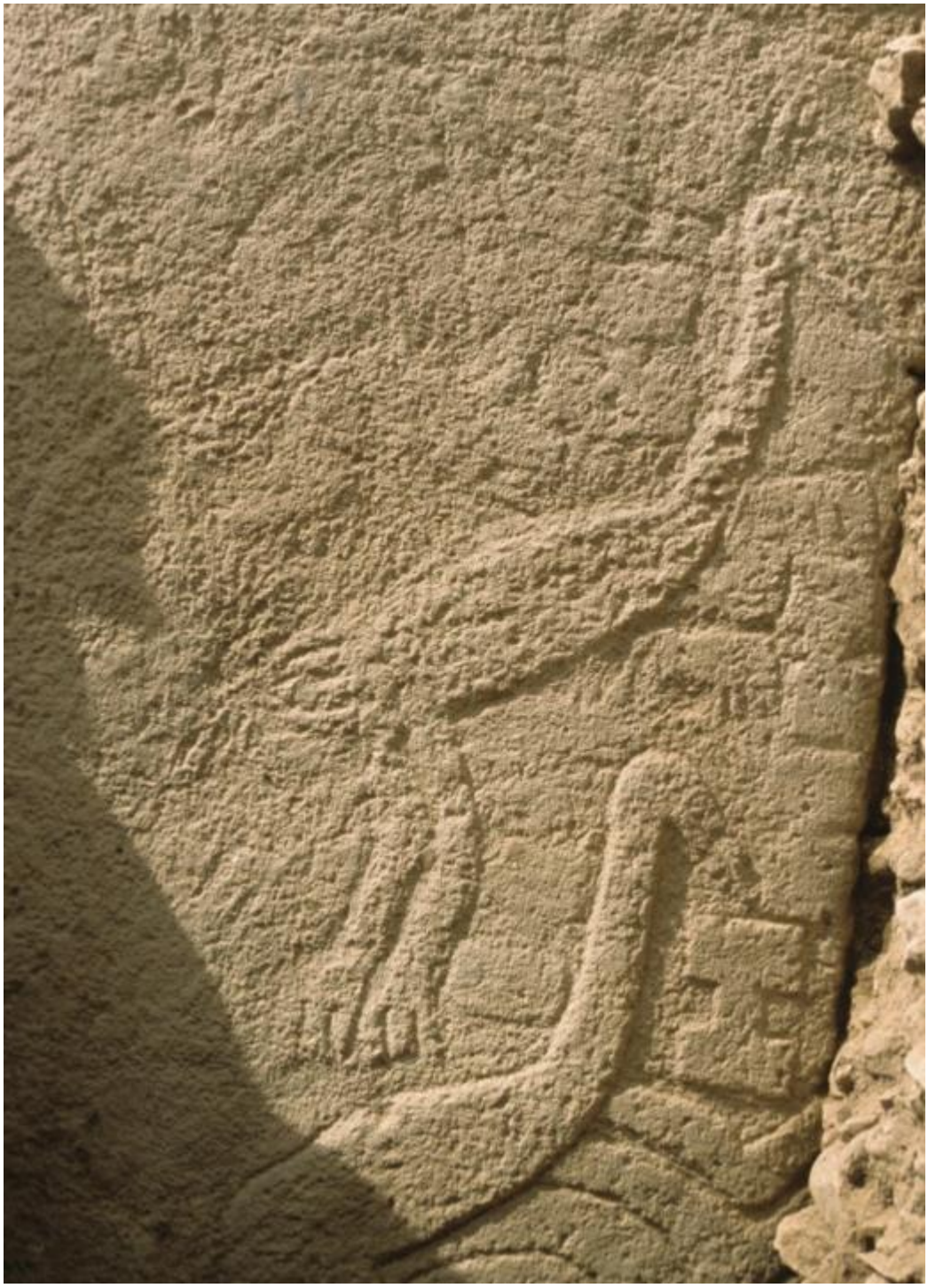

Figure 6.10 Pillar Thirty-Three showing a crane (Notroff 2016a:Online)

Figure 6.11 Three birds depicted on Pillar Thirty-Eight (Notroff 2016a:Online)

6.2.4 Enclosure D

Some of the T-shaped pillars at Göbekli Tepe have arms engraved on them. Since Nevali Çori's[32] T-shaped pillars are interpreted as stylised human figures, Schmidt believes that all T-shaped pillars can be seen as 'humans' (Schmidt 2012:111-112). Schmidt's interpretation seems a little one-dimensional. It is true that a T-pillar may resemble the outline of a human figure, but this could also be interpreted in the same way that people see images in clouds. This phenomenon is called *pareidolia*, which is the false perception of seeing a non-existent face or pattern in everyday objects (Baylis & Ting 2015:1364). Therefore, the adornment of a T-pillar with human characteristics does not necessarily imply that it was originally meant to be a depiction of a human being, but could also simply be the embellishment of a functional construction piece, perhaps even at a later stage than the original creation of the pillar.

32. An early Neolithic settlement dated to 10 320 BP (Affonso & Pernicka 2000:3)

Pillar Eighteen (cf. Figure 6.12) is likened to a Nevali Çori type of pillar[33] (cf. Figure 6.13) as it shows a garment and arms on the wide side. Below the hands appears an 'H' shaped symbol. In the bend of the right arm a fox is depicted (Schmidt 2012:157). Much like Enclosure C, the T-pillars in Enclosure D (cf. Figure 6.1) incorporated into its oval-plan wall are images of wild animals, birds, and insects (UNESCO 2017).

Figure 6.12 Pillar Eighteen in Enclosure D reflecting anthropomorphic features (Notroff 2016b:Online)

33. A type of T-pillar found at Nevali Çori, an early Neolithic settlement dated to 10 320 BP (Affonso & Pernicka 2000:3).

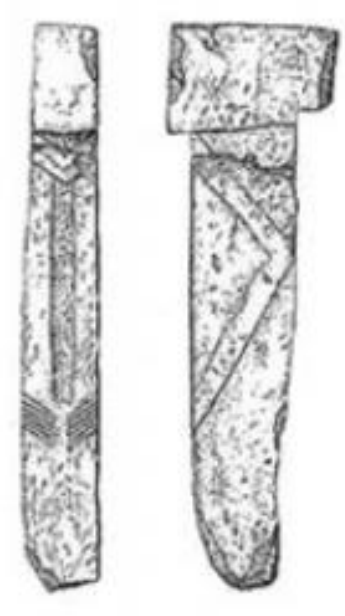

Figure 6.13 The pillar at Nevali Çori with anthropomorphic features similar to Göbekli Tepe (Tobolczyk 2016:1403)

Pillar Twenty has the T-head without adornments, but at the front shows a snake creeping downwards towards a bull (Schmidt 2012:164). Below the bull, the upper part of a fox with the lower part damaged is depicted (cf. Figure 6.14).

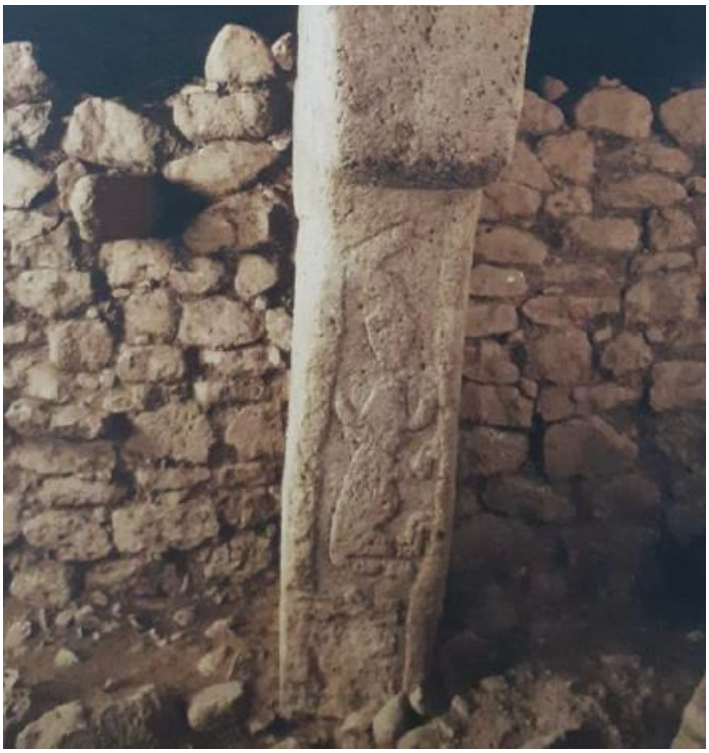

Figure 6.14 Pillar Twenty adorned with a snake, bull, and fox (Schmidt 2012:167)

Pillar Forty-three in Enclosure D has different animals and a headless man depicted on the broad part of the western side. A vulture appearing to balance a ball-shaped object on its wing is interpreted to have a narrative character (Dietrich et al 2017:20 & 22; cf. Figure 6.15). The frontside of Pillar Forty-Three shows an animal upside down as well as an insect (Schmidt 2012:245; cf. Figure 6.16).

Figure 6.15 Pillar Forty-Three in Building D depicting wild animals, birds, and a scorpion (Dietrich et al 2017:22)

Figure 6.16 On the front end of Pillar Forty-Three an animal upside down and an insect (Schmidt 2012:245)

Pillar Twenty-One depicts goitered gazelle and an Asiatic wild ass (Peters and Schmidt 2004:202; cf. Figure 6.17).

Figure 6.17 Pillar Twenty-One with goitered gazelle and Asiatic wild ass (Peters and Schmidt 2004.202)

6.2.5 Enclosure H

Pillar Fifty-One has collapsed and is broken. The animal on the pillar was identified as a big cat, similar to the ones found in Enclosure A (Notroff 2017:4; cf. Figure 6.18).

Figure 6.18 Pillar Fifty-One in Enclosure H identified as a large predator (Dietrich 2016a:Online)

Pillars Fifty-Four and Fifty-Five are respectively located in the northern and southern wall of the enclosure. On both is depicted ‘Stola’ reliefs and the head part of the southern pillar was probably damaged due to erosion caused by weathering (Notroff 2017:5 & 6).

Pillar Fifty-Six (Figure 6.19) has a large scene of animals identified on it, a total number of fifty animals. The main animal identified on this pillar is a large bird, most likely a vulture. Other identified animals are snakes, birds, and unidentified four-legged creatures. Due to the substantial number of animals on this pillar, it could be seen as a ‘story scene’ that is being played out (Köksal-Schmidt and Schmidt 2010:74).

Figure 6.19 Pillar Fifty-Six showing numerous animals (Dietrich et al 2017:20)

The head of Pillar Fifty-Seven is damaged. The front side shows the depiction of two snakes appearing to be coiling around the pillar, with an unidentifiable carving beneath it (Notroff 2017:9).

Pillar Sixty-Six prominently features a horned animal, interpreted as likely being an aurochs. The way in which the animal is depicted in side view with legs flexed and tongue hanging out indicates to Dietrich that the animal is likely dead. Below the beast a smaller animal is depicted in the same fashion (Dietrich 2017c:Online; cf. Figure 6.20).

Figure 6.20 Pillar 66 in Enclosure H (Dietrich 2017c:Online)

6.3 THE POSSIBLE PURPOSE OF THE ICONOGRAPHY

The main challenge with a possible interpretation of the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe is, firstly, that there is no proof that the people who used the structures at Göbekli Tepe after they were constructed were also the people who built these structures and, secondly, there is no proof that the people who used the structures are also the people who adorned them with iconography. Extrapolating known attributes of the builders to

conclusions about the users is therefore unfounded. Thirdly, there is simply no written record of any explanatory texts informing any factual conclusions as to the possible purpose of the iconography discussed above. ‘There is no doctrine, no world shamanic church, no holy book as a point of reference, no priests with authority to tell us what is and what is not correct’ (Vitebsky 2001:11). Inference from absence of archaeological evidence is dependent on the conditions requiring validation of such inference. This is even more important when the absence of evidence in a local site is extrapolated to an inference in broader context (Wallach 2019: 8-9).

Cave paintings, some of the oldest depictions of animals and forms anywhere in the world, also do not assist in interpreting the animal representations found at Göbekli Tepe. According to Fontana, interpretations of these depictions found in caves are ‘highly speculative’ (Fontana 1994:23).

Enclosure A contains images of snakes while in Enclosure B, foxes are in the majority. Enclosure C contains boars and in Enclosure D, birds are dominant. According to Dietrich (2016c), this may indicate that separate groups built the various enclosures. There are, however, a variety of less prominent depictions of other animals in each enclosure. Although many scholars have strong urges to interpret iconography found at places like Göbekli Tepe as religious symbols, there is no reason to interpret all iconography as being symbolic. ‘The relationship between contemporary historians, archaeologists and visual sources remains strained. Because of the lack of a proper visual theory and methodology, the potential of iconographical sources still is rarely fully exploited’ (Januarius and Teughels 2009:667).

It is not argued that the iconography found on some T-pillars in some of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe is free from symbolism, but Göbekli Tepe cannot be interpreted in the light of its iconography and its possible symbolism. The overwhelming evidence, as argued in this dissertation, is that Göbekli Tepe was possibly built for a functional reason which had no basis in religion of any kind. In this regard there is no indication of a deity or deities, whereas the arguments in favour of a utilitarian objective are overwhelming. Sometimes it must be considered that a picture of a fox is just a picture of a fox. It cannot be ruled out that Göbekli Tepe served a ritual purpose as well, but there is no tangible evidence of this.

The bone material found at Göbekli Tepe was found all over the terrain, in copious quantities (Schmidt 2010:241) and is a clear indication of hunting, food preparation and eating activities rather than ritual processes (Peters and Schmidt 2004:207). Of course, these uses would not be mutually exclusive, but it must be considered what most likely use the evidence points to.

Dragoş Gheorghiu (2020) postulates that the iconography found on the pillars in Enclosure D is related to a spiritual relationship to water (Gheorghiu 2020:9). In this regard he considers the depictions on Pillars Twenty, Thirty, Thirty-Three and Forty-Three to represent animals from both water and land. He relates this to the archetypal myth of the Mesopotamian flood as described in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Gheorghiu 2020:9), which goes back to 4170 - 3420 BP (Mark 2022:Online). Göbekli Tepe pre-dates this by 7500 years. He poses the question as to whether these 'visual narratives' may be deduced as a representation of the myth in the absence of a written record. He concludes that the iconography records a mythical narrative of a disastrous flood. He considers that the way in which water animals and land animals are placed together is only possible if it refers to some catastrophic event like a flood (Gheorghiu 2020:12). The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores the iconography that does not support the narrative. There are also some different interpretations of the same depictions. For instance, Gheorghiu interprets the depiction on Pillar Forty-Three in Enclosure D (cf. Figure 6.16) as a crayfish, while it is an insect to Schmidt (Schmidt 2012:245).

A number of researchers such as Schmidt (2010:248), Oliver Dietrich et al (2017:17 & 24) and Peters and Schmidt (2004:209) consider the occurrence of animal depictions in the context of totems. Within this framework the various animal depictions would indicate that separate groups or clans were responsible for the construction of separate enclosures and that a number of clans were therefore responsible for the construction of Göbekli Tepe. The problem with this interpretation is that parallels are being drawn between what is found at Göbekli Tepe and examples dated thousands of years later, often on different continents such as North America in work done by, for instance, Halpin (Peters and Schmidt 2004:210-211).

Peters and Schmidt postulate that the presence of Aswad, el-Khiam, Helwan, Nemrik and Nevali Çori arrow heads at Göbekli Tepe may be indicative of the involvement of groups

from different regions in the constructions at Göbekli Tepe, and that the animal depictions on the various pillars may indicate the geographic origins of the various groups (Peters and Schmidt 2004:210-211).

It has been pointed out that ‘there is no simple relationship between art and subsistence. People depict animals because they are something to consider rather than just food, so the frequencies of animal taxa represented in art rarely match those represented in the faunal assemblages’ (Russell 2012:14). ‘Trying to pick out symbolism from prehistoric context is an exercise in futility’ (Curry 2008).

Dietrich et al remark that the earlier round buildings at Göbekli Tepe reflected more animal depictions and the rectangular buildings had more anthropomorphic and zoomorphic depictions (2019:6). This is interesting since it could indicate that the round buildings more closely relate to functions in connection with hunting while the later rectangular buildings may have had possible ancillary or even divergent functions such as the storage or processing of grain. A distinction must be drawn between cultural expressions and ritual practices. Although ritual may have been practised at Göbekli Tepe, to my mind the iconography at Göbekli Tepe does not support conclusions as to ritualistic practice as such. It is clearly a form of cultural expression but to deduce ritual practices and even religion from these expressions is going too far, because these practices cannot be observed (Twiss 2001:17).

Yakar argues that it may be a universal human trait from the subconscious that could, to an extent, explain why comparable depictions of symbols have been created since prehistory. Yakar states that this requires a biogenetic approach which falls outside the ambit of this study (2016:177).

6.4 CONCLUSION

To my mind, when interpreting observed elements of an archaeological site, the departure point should always be that the conclusion reached must correspond with all the known facts. In the absence of a written record, it is tempting to extrapolate a possible meaning from later, similarly appearing elements. Such extrapolation is often done without due consideration of the cultural milieu in which the site was initially developed.

When this cultural milieu is largely unknown, conclusions as to the possible meaning simply become conjecture.

Attempts at interpreting the iconography found on the T-pillars at Göbekli Tepe can, to my mind, only be speculative, in the absence of any evidence supporting such interpretation. Reference to other cultures on other continents and at various times compared to the timeframe of Göbekli Tepe for me has no probative value. For this reason, I do not offer an interpretation of the iconography found at Göbekli Tepe. The iconography at Göbekli Tepe does not support my theories but also does not contradict it. I include it in my dissertation since it has been offered as proof that Göbekli Tepe was a ritual centre.

It is a human trait to see similarities between observed items such as a T-pillar and a well-known form such as a human figure. From the observation to the inference is a small leap, but this leap should always be guided by what is known and not by what it is thought or believed to be. The addition of arms and other human limbs to a T-pillar may have been guided by exactly that human trait. Similarly, the depiction of animals on T-pillars may simply be the work of a Neolithic artist depicting the observations made in the artist's day-to-day interactions with these animals and may not carry any other significance. Again, an attempt to interpret these depictions in any other way must of necessity be based on conjecture and in the case of Göbekli Tepe, extrapolation of known interpretations of similar depictions from later epochs. As interesting as it may be, the articulation of ritual and utilitarian must be approached with circumspection (cf. 6.1), as must retrospective interpretation (cf. 2.2 & 7.1).

CHAPTER SEVEN
COMPARATIVE SETTLEMENTS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Göbekli Tepe is distinguishable from concurrent constructions since it does not contain houses, has T-shaped pillars, is not near perennial water and is built on the highest level within the landscape where it is situated. This is not the highest point of the mountains but one of its lowest plateaus, high enough to offer a good view into the distance (Braun 2021:27). Since form follows function, the huge T-pillars clearly had to have a specific function requiring such massive pillars. Manufacturing it would have been a mammoth task, especially in view of the limited technology available at the time, such as stone and bone tools (UNESCO 2017). The limestone in the quarries around Göbekli Tepe is relatively soft and could be cut by flint tools.[34]

The comparative study is undertaken to see if the construction methodology used in surrounding settlements can cast light on the constructions at Göbekli Tepe. I argue that a retrospective evaluation of Göbekli Tepe against what is known from later settlements must be considered carefully, since Göbekli Tepe may have influenced the later settlements, but not the other way around. As far as methodology of the manufacturing process is concerned, however, this is established by scientific processes of observation and experimentation and there is not much room for speculation (Barkai and Yerkes 2008).

The most important architectural feature of the circles at Göbekli Tepe is the occurrence of monumental T-pillars. This has defined the interpretation of the site from an early stage (Schmidt 2000:46). The specific study of the occurrence of T-pillars at other sites was undertaken to find possible parallels between Göbekli Tepe and other sites where T-pillars were found.

34. Probably in the form of axes, although no mention is made of the extraction of the pillars. Axes were already in use at the time of the construction of Göbekli Tepe (Barkai & Yerkes 2008:160).

Schmidt was the first to identify Göbekli Tepe as a sanctuary with monumental characteristics and cursorily compared Göbekli Tepe with Nevali Çori, dated as 10 520 - 9620 BP, which lies 50km to the north of Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2010:240-241).

Kodaş (2015) refers to pillars occurring at various sites in the northern Near East (cf. 7.2). These pillars have been utilised since old PPNA, more so during the PPNA-PPNB and the old PPNB era. The architectural functioning and symbolic significance have not yet been discussed widely in archaeological context.

Çelik discusses Neolithic settlements containing T-pillars discovered in the Şanliurfa province (cf. Figure 7.1), located in southeast Turkey (2014:10). The locations and sizes of the settlements that contain T-shaped pillars are a focus point of the study. He also considers the differences between various small settlements containing cult centres and T-pillars, two of which contain the remains of circular domestic buildings as well as pillars resembling Çayönü and Nevali Çori. Both Çayönü and Nevali Çori contain cult and domestic buildings. Çelik considers that these settlements are of the same age as Göbekli Tepe layer II (2014:10).

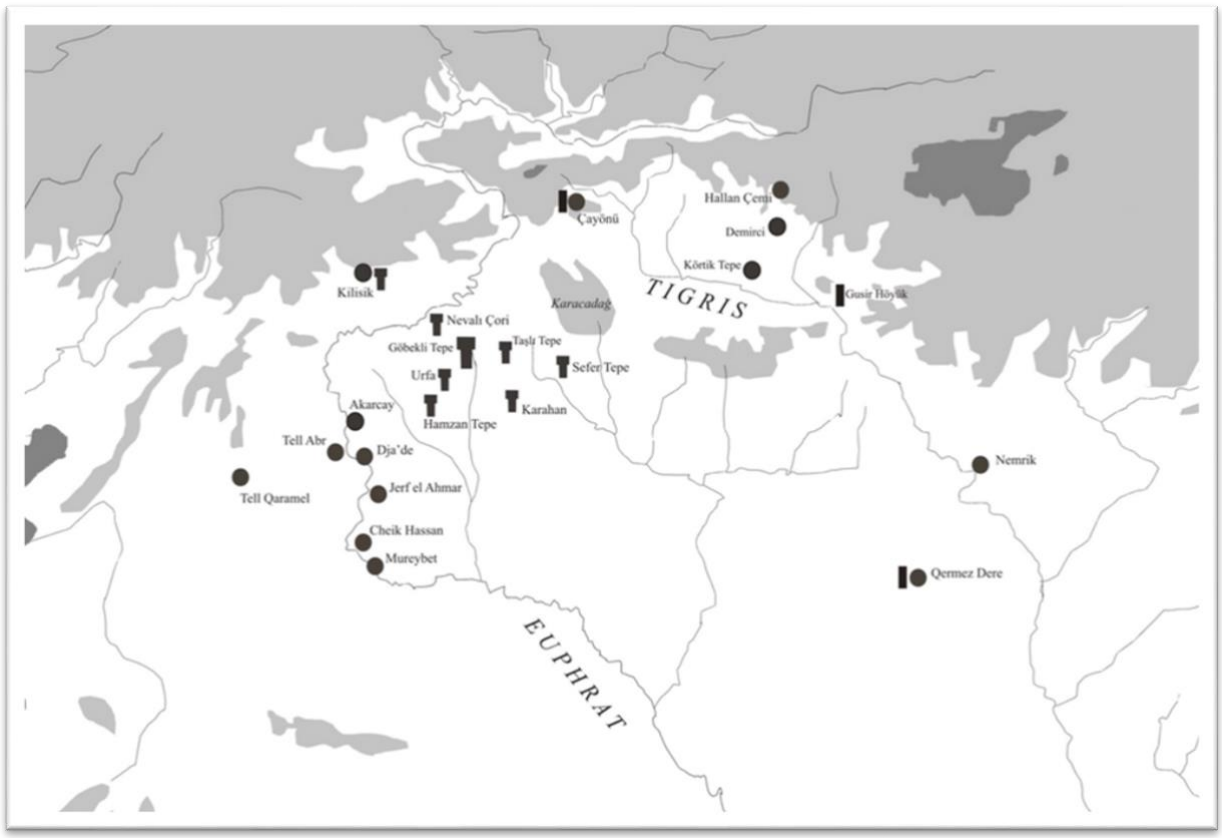

Figure 7.1 Current distribution of sites with T-shaped pillars or limestone stelae (Dietrich 2016d:Online)

A comparative study of sites where T-pillars occur was undertaken by Ergül Kodaş (2015). Kodaş distinguished between pillars in a T-shape, simple straight pillars with no distinguishable top and anthropomorphic pillars. Both T-pillars and straight pillars were found displaying anthropomorphic elements such as arms (cf. 7.2.3).

Morsch, referring to T-shaped pillar sites in the western part of Upper Mesopotamia, which he refers to as Nevalıçorien, points to similarities between modern corporate identity and an elaborate and significant similarity of design in these T-pillar sites, in the structures of the settlements and their architecture, as well as in figurine art, hairstyles and dress code (2017:203). He refers to the T-pillars of the cult buildings and the similarity of dress as having great outward effect. These markers of a common identity may assist in promoting cooperation. He concludes that it is not clear whether these elements were used consciously or unconsciously (Morsch 2017:203).

7.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE PILLARS

7.2.1 Pillars with ‘T' capitals

T-shaped pillars were discovered at sites in the final PPNA and the old PPNB (cf. 1.3) in the Şanliurfa region around the Harran Plain. The oldest were identified at Göbekli Tepe in the final PPNA level (level IIIIII / II) and the old PPNB (level II), as well as at Nevali Çori in the old PPNB level IIIII. T-pillars were further found during excavations on different sites in the region such as Hamzan Tepe, Karahan Tepe, Sefer Tepe and Tasli Tepe, sites dating from the same period (Kodaş 2015:104).

7.2.2 Pillars without 'T' capitals

This kind of pillar is made of stone and/or earth. The most ancient were found in levels of the old PPNA at, for instance, Gusir Höyük. They are also found in the final PPNA and the old PPNB levels in Çayönü, located in the Haut Tigre valley (Kodaş 2015:104). Pillars made from ‘compacted marl concrete’[35] were found at Qermez Dere in the old PPNA-PPNB layer. The method used in settlements on the Euphrates River differs from that of

35. Marl or the other name Marlstone is a calcium carbonate non-clastic sedimentary rock. It contains variable of clays and silt (Bonewitz 2012:Online).

Gusir Höyük and Çayönü on the Tigris River and may be considered a different tradition (Kodaş 2015:104-105).

7.2.3 Anthropomorphic pillars

These are pillars from both pillars with or without T-heads made in clay or stone and displaying mostly male human form (Kodaş 2015:105). Anthropomorphic pillars are considered to be most remarkable and interpreting their functioning in an architectural context is problematic (cf. 6.3). Specimens were found in Göbekli Tepe, Nevali Çori, Tell Abr 3 and Qermez Dere (Kodaş 2015:105).

Several T-pillars found in Enclosure D at Göbekli Tepe in the youngest PPNA level and the older PPNB level display anthropomorphic elements (UNESCO 2017).

7.3 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SURROUNDING NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENTS AND THE ARCHITECTURE FOUND AT GÖBEKLI TEPE

7.3.1 Çayönü

The site of Çayönü, dated as 9270 - 8770 BP (Braidwood et al 1981:251) is 60km north of Diyarbakır in south-eastern Turkey, on a tributary of the Tigris River that flows by the foothills of the Taurus Mountains (Gates 2011:19).

Three pillars without a T-capital are situated in the ‘flagstone’ building, a so-called ‘community’ building with two pillars in the centre of the building and a third on the northeast side that appears to have been leaning against the wall. The height of the pillars varies between 1.70m and 1.20m. The two pillars installed in front of the buttresses appear to have been used in the construction of a roof (Kodaş 2015:106).

Four buildings of circular plan have been unearthed in level III, named Locus A, B, C and D. These buildings are constructed as circular or oval enclosures, being 10m to 20m in span with monolithic pillars with 'T' capitals. Each pillar measures 3 to 5m in height. The presence of pillars installed symmetrically suggests that it was done for the purpose of construction. One pillar erected at wall height in the east wall of the ‘flagstone’ building has no apparent architectural function and would suggest a symbolic role. Three more pillars appear in a secondary context in the Skull Building (Kodaş 2015:105-106).

7.3.2 Nevali Çori

The site of Nevali Çori, dated to 10 520 - 10 360 BP (Benz [n.d.]:Online), lies 50km to the north of Göbekli Tepe. The site was submerged during 1992 by the waters of the Atatürk Dam Lake (Schmidt 2010:240-241). Schmidt referred to Nevali Çori as a 'normal site', with an unearthed 'ritual building' and domestic structures (Schmidt 1998:1).

In Cult Building II, thirteen T-pillars are inserted into the bench. The central pillars are taller than the pillars in the bench, and a pyramidal roof is postulated as possible (Kodaş 2015:108-109).

In Cult Building III, directly above Cult Building II, 14 T-pillars form part of the architecture of the construction. Two 2.35m central pillars are enclosed by twelve pillars in the walls of 2.15m. Since the central pillars are higher than the pillars in the circle, as in Cult Building II, a pyramidal roof is also conceivable (Kodaş 2015:108-109).

7.3.3 Jerf El Ahmar

The site of Jerf El Ahmar is dated as 11 600 - 10 800 BP (Scarre 2013:218). At the lowest end of the settlement at Jerf El Ahmar, an embedded round building indicates the edge of the constructed area. The structure is subdivided into cells and benches. The building had a flat earth roof on a wooden lattice, held up by stout wooden pillars. A fire destroyed the building, but parts of the earth roof were found on the ground with indications of the beams that held it aloft (Stordeur 2000:1).

7.3.4 Qermez Dere

The site of Qermez Dere dates to 10 020 BP (Dobney et al 1999:48). Qermez Dere lies just northwest of the town of Tell Afar, south of the Jebel Sinjar Mountain range, approximately 50km west of Mosul in northern Iraq (Watkins et al 1989:19). The site consists of a small, early aceramic neolithic settlement, roughly 100m by 60m. The site has been damaged by erosion over time. The organisation of the buildings is unusual, as is the architecture of the type of house. The settlement was small with two distinct areas. In the centre is an area with large and small stones without much of a floor and which appears unroofed. In the middle of the site many ground stone tools were found, whereas the southern part only had a few such items (Watkins et al 1989:19). This would indicate different uses for the different rooms.

Eight clay pillars without capitals are found in four buildings dubbed ‘exceptional’ without elaborating on it (Kodaş 2015:110). Every building displays a central hearth and at least one pillar in each. The pillars are mostly anthropomorphic in shape and are in the centre of the building. The location of the pillars and the fact that they were not packed solidly indicate that these pillars had no role in the construction of the buildings (Kodaş 2015:110). Post holes in some buildings indicate that the roofs were carried on wooden uprights. The conclusion is that these anthropomorphic pillars must have a ‘symbolic’ meaning in the absence of a structural function (Kodaş 2015:110). Pillars unearthed in a different building appear to have had an unquestionable function in the construction of that building, like the pillars found in Nemrik 9 (Kodaş 2015:110; cf. 7.3.6).

Although far from Göbekli Tepe, Schmidt was fully apprised of the excavations at Qermez Dere by the leading excavator, Trevor Watkins. Schmidt and Watkins co-presented a workshop on Göbekli Tepe and Contemporary Settlements in the Region (Watkins and Schmidt 2012). As early as 1989,[36] Watkins remarked that there must have been parallels between Qermez Dere and other communities between what is now known as Northern Iraq and North-Western Syria, and that cultural interchange must have happened between these communities (Watkins et al 1989:24).

7.3.5 Gusir Höyük

The site of Gusir Höyük is dated as 12th to late 11th millennia cal BP (Kabukcu et al 2021:1). Gusir Höyük lies in the Siirt province of southeast Turkey where the Tigris River intersects with its tributary, the Botan River. The earliest excavated phases comprise semi-sunken circular buildings approximately 2m deep with centrally located monolithic pillars (1-1.5m in height). Later stages show rectangular buildings with sunken floors (up to 1m below ground). Stone pillars were set at the centre of buildings, either in pairs or alone. Some were positioned unevenly at corners or walls, both inside and outside the walls. The latest excavated phases include buildings with an open end providing access to the building (Kabukcu et al 2021:3).

36. The real importance of Göbekli Tepe was not realised until 1994 (Schmidt 2000:46).

7.3.6 Nemrik 9

The site of Nemrik 9 is dated to the 11th to the middle of the 9th millennium BP (Kozlowski 1991:102) which is contemporary with Qermez Dere. The site is located near Dohuk in Iraq, 50km north-west of Mosul, approximately 20km from Qermez Dere, on the bank of the Tigris River. Several houses were found, including houses 1A, 2, 4, 6, 8 which are specifically important because of the presence of ‘compacted marl concrete’ pillars. The buildings are between 4m and 8m in diameter and all have a minimum of two pillars (House 4) and a maximum of six pillars (House 2), either in the middle of the house or in the walls. They appear to have supported roofs (Kodaş 2015:109). If there were indeed roofs, the mud brick walls of these buildings raise two possible explanations for the presence of the pillars, namely that there was an absence of stone or an absence of timber suitable for pillars. The available timber may have been suitable for beams, though, but the absence of archaeobotanical information makes this impossible to conclude. The buildings unearthed at Nemrik 9 were more or less similar, either circular or sub rectangular, and pillars are always present without exception (Kodaş 2015:109-110). The pillars did not display any iconography and appear to have had a purely utilitarian function.

In view of the close proximity both in distance and age, Nemrik 9 must be considered in the context of Qermez Dere.

7.3.7 Tell Abr 3

The site of Tell Abr 3 is dated to 11 000 BP (Yartah 2004:141). Tell Abr 3 is located approximately 15km south of the Turkish border, on the east bank of the Euphrates River (Yartah 2004:143). Building B2 ‘specialized community’, has a pillar, but without a 'T' capital. Holes of 25-30cm in diameter placed between the slabs of the bench indicate that wooden posts were used to support a roof. A fragmentary anthropomorphic stone pillar measuring 55cm was found in front of the bench. The pillar is not part of the construction of the building, since the roof was built with wooden posts. The assumption is therefore that its function is symbolic (Kodaş 2015:109). If the pillar was not meant to bear a load, for instance a roof, its presence with anthropomorphic depiction would indicate that it had some other function. My argument is that the pillars at Göbekli Tepe had load bearing functions and that the embellishment with iconography was of a secondary nature.

7.3.8 Karahan Tepe

Karahan Tepe is situated 63km east of Sanliurfa which, like Göbekli Tepe, Hamzan Tepe and Sanliurfa Yeni Mahalle (situated in downtown Şanlıurfa) are located around the Harran Plain in the Urfa Region. Furthermore, Karahan Tepe is located on a high plateau foot on the eastern side of the Harran Plain (Çelik 2011:241). Karahan Tepe is currently being excavated by a team with Necmi Karul as the head archaeologist. To date, four structures have been identified, named structure AA, AB, AC and AD (cf. Figure 7.2). Structure AB was carved out of the bedrock, leaving ten solid pillars standing. All the pillars are shaped to look like a phallus (cf. Figure 7.3). According to Karul, structure AB was designed for a special purpose. A human head was shaped form the bedrock and the structure appear to have no domestic use. It is assumed that structure AB was deliberately filled in over a short period (Karul 2021:24).

The current assessments of the site at Karahan Tepe are mostly based on the excavation of the visible structures and more particularly that of structure AB (Karul 2021:22). The site should be interpreted as a unit and deductions from individual parts would be premature. Since more information becomes available all the time, Karahan Tepe may provide valuable insights into the construction of Göbekli Tepe in the future.

Figure 7.2 Structures AA (top left) and AB (centre) (Karul 2021:27)

Figure 7.3 Structure AB (Karul 2021:29)

7.3.9 Other Neolithic sites

Only Göbekli Tepe, Nevalı Çori and Çayönü have, until now, been systematically studied on a large scale (Morsch 2017:187). Other neolithic sites with pillars that may contribute to an understanding of the pillars found at Göbekli Tepe in future are Hamzan Tepe, a small settlement with few architectural remains which, like Göbekli Tepe, was used as a temporary open air site (Çelik 2010:257) and Taşli Tepe, a site displaying similarities with the ‘cult building’ pillars at Nevali Çori (Çelik 2014:18). Tasli Tepe, now destroyed by agriculture, had fragments of T-pillars (Güler et al 2013:292). At other sites where circular structures were found, the absence of T-pillars was interpreted to mean that the sites were not used for cultural or cultic practices (Güler et al 2013:297). Information on these other sites is scarce at the moment.

7.4 A COMPARISON WITH TEMPLES FROM A LATER ERA

The Mesopotamian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish* (also known as The Seven Tablets of Creation) narrates the tale of the god Marduk's victory over the forces of chaos. According to this tale, Marduk established order at the creation of the world. The myth originates from a period long before the fall of Sumer in 3700 BP (Mark 2018).

According to the creation narrative, the world was covered in waters of chaos. Marduk, the chief deity of the Mesopotamian religion, fought the goddess Tiamat who represented chaos. After his victory, the flood waters of chaos retracted to reveal primordial mounds. The first temples were built on these mounds (Gates 2011:33).

Temples were built and reconstructed from time to time. Every new temple was built on top of the mound where the previous one stood. This caused the mound to grow bigger and bigger, eventually forming stepped platforms called Ziggurats (Gates 2011:33).

The prehistoric White Temple, where the god Anu was venerated, contained three long rectangular units forming the ground plan of the temple. A large hall formed the centre portion with a stepped socle for a cult statue on one side and an altar in the centre (Gates 2011:34).

Göbekli Tepe, established more than six thousand years earlier than the White Temple, has no founding myth that we know of. There is also no indication of a deity being venerated there, nor is there any credible indication of a pantheon of gods. Even if evidence of ritual is deduced from the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe, there is no automatic link between ritual practices and religious belief. According to Watkins, a lot of rituals and ceremonies did not have anything to do, as in our modern times, with veneration of gods (Watkins 2015:158). It is therefore possible that ritual practices took place at Göbekli Tepe but in the absence of proof of a god it cannot be deduced that it was a temple. The iconography found at Göbekli Tepe does not support any concrete evidence in this regard, as discussed below.

Imagery of a mother goddess is absent from Göbekli Tepe whereas scant reference can be found at Çatalhöyük, and the symbolic imagery at Göbekli Tepe consists of undomesticated and dangerous animals depicted in various themes that include maleness, dangerous animals, decapitated humans, and birds (Hodder 2010:66). It is not inconceivable that later occupants of the enclosures may have adorned the T-pillars and used the sites for several reasons, but the original purpose of these structures was clearly utilitarian. No narrative can be derived from a continuous iconography consisting of more than one depiction following on one or more further related depictions found on the T-pillars, such as the relief found in a communal building in Sayburç, 60km east of the

Euphrates River on the southern part of the eastern Taurus Mountains. This scene reflects a theme as well as a story (cf. Figure 7.4) and differs in this respect from other images of the time. According to Eylem Özdoğan this is the elaborate representation of a Neolithic story currently found in the Near East (Özdoğan 2022:1599).

Figure 7.4 The Sayburç relief (Özdoğan 2022:1602)

Even the anthropomorphic depictions may just as well be the artwork of a gifted artisan and nothing more. Stewart Elliott Guthrie points out that anthropomorphism is a reasonable but mistaken attribution of matters most important to someone to parts of the world without such matters. These matters would include appearance, behaviour, and intention. He considers this as natural, universal, and inevitable, and that it prevents us from seeing the evidence for what it is. This is the result of a strategy that is mostly outside our consciousness and always out of our control (Guthrie 1996:418). This must be borne in mind when attempting to interpret the anthropomorphically depictions on the T-pillars in Enclosure D at Göbekli Tepe.

Manu Seyfzadeh, a medical doctor interested in Egyptology, and Robert Schoch, a Professor in Natural Sciences, published an article in 2019 arguing that a symbol appearing on some of the pillars in Enclosure D resembles the letter H which, according to them, is a logogram from the Bronze Age Luwians of Anatolia, meaning ‘god’. By way of retrospective reasoning, they argue that the Luwian logogram was linguistically connected to the ‘H’ image at Göbekli Tepe as found on Pillar Eighteen (cf. Figure 7.5 and detail in Figure 7.6). From this they postulate that the T-pillars at Göbekli Tepe were built to represent a god associated with a bull guarding entry to the human and animal afterlife. They further propose that this could have been inspired by celestial images observed in the night sky which were ritually re-enacted by hunter-gatherer visitors to Göbekli Tepe. Finally, they believe that the influence of the ‘H’ symbol on the Luwian

logogram was spread by the descendants of the visitors to Göbekli Tepe over a period of thousands of years. From the iconography on Pillar Eighteen in Enclosure D there appear to be two ‘H’ images, but also three images that appear to be the letter H rotated 90 degrees and forming the letter ‘I’ (cf. Figure 7.7), but no mention is made of this.

Figure 7.5 Pillar Eighteen, Enclosure D (Seyfzadeh and Schoch 2019:36)

Figure 7.6 Detail from Pillar Eighteen, Enclosure D with symbol interpreted as an H, inside two semi-circles (Seyfzadeh and Schoch 2019:36)

Figure 7.7 Close-up of detail on Pillar Eighteen (Seyfzadeh and Schoch 2019:36)

It must be noted that the Bronze Age Luwian culture dates to 5500 - 3150 BP while Enclosure D at Göbekli Tepe dates to 11 720 - 11 320 BP (cf. 1.1), more than 6000 years earlier. The authors acknowledge the timespan of thousands of years as well as the fact that the hieroglyphic script used to record Luwian culture dates to approximately 3500

BP (Seyfzadeh and Schoch 2019:33), leaving a gap of 8200 years in the written record. How the meaning of this symbol was carried for all this time is not explained.

From their theory, the authors conclude that the T-pillars inside the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe were meant to be one or more gods and that these gods were associated with bulls. The H-symbol notes the pillars as such. From this they suggest that at least a part of Göbekli Tepe was a temple where death rituals took place (Seyfzadeh and Schoch 2019:49). Their reasoning, although detailed, is based on very little evidence and rests mainly on conjecture.

Dietrich and Notroff point out that with the interpretation of a depiction it must be understood that not every depiction is 'readable' beyond doubt and interpretations of such a depiction should be approached with circumspection (Dietrich and Notroff 2016:29).

In the absence of any written records any thoughts as to a deity or cultic practices remain pure conjecture.

7.5 CONCLUSION

The architecture found in Göbekli Tepe is reflected in surrounding sites dating from the same time and later. The absence of specific dating of contemporary sites makes comparison with these sites hard. If the dating of Göbekli Tepe is accepted as correct, it predates most of the other sites or runs concurrently with some of them. This means that conclusions about design and technology found at these sites were probably derived from Göbekli Tepe and not the other way around, such as Nevali Çori.

The use of T-pillars at other sites, as discussed above, however, indicates that T-pillars were mainly used in construction and that they did not have a primary decorative or ritualistic function. It may be surmised that decorative or ritualistic functions may have been derived from their presence, but the main function of these monumental monoliths was clearly utilitarian. The T-design lends itself perfectly to carrying large beams and for the fastening of these beams to the pillars by means of strips of rawhide or other methods. The centre pillars found in enclosures at Göbekli Tepe facilitated the placement of two parallel beams next to each other, making roof access possible.

T-pillars can carry extremely heavy loads and were necessary to support thick earthen roofs required to cool the inside and to provide additional protection against predators. What is considered to be intentional backfill of the structures at Göbekli Tepe was most probably these earthen roofs collapsing when the beams carrying them became structurally unsound[37]. No plausible explanation for an intentional backfill appears to have ever been forwarded.

The embedded nature of the buildings provided structural integrity, cooling of the inside and security from predators, all-important for the curing and storage of meat and by-products of hunting. The nature of the buildings does not preclude ritual practices.

Lastly, the temporal nature of the use of the structures at Göbekli Tepe differs from that of settlements both in scale and in design, with no evidence of permanent settlement. Göbekli Tepe was, according to my interpretation of the site and with reasons given in previous chapters of this work, primarily used for the curing and keeping of meat and meat products. Structures found at surrounding sites that reflect elements of the buildings at Göbekli Tepe were ostensibly used for the same purpose as the primary function, but secondary uses are not excluded. My theory is that Göbekli Tepe served as a communal facility at a time when the people who used it were not fully sedentary yet, mainly because agriculture and herding were not yet established to the extent that it could support settlements throughout the year. This function may later have been decentralised to the various settlements, explaining the similarities between Göbekli Tepe and those found at those settlements. Göbekli Tepe was, in my opinion, the first meat processing plant ever where meat and meat products were processed on what would today be termed an industrial scale[38].

Finally, Göbekli Tepe probably has more say about the architecture of surrounding sites than those sites have to say about Göbekli Tepe.

[37] The modern recommended lifespan of a wooden beam for planning purposes is one hundred years in the case of monumental building structures (Viitanen 2014:11).

[38] A study more focused on anthropological evidence will provide a more nuanced picture of the scale of hunting at a singular site such as Göbekli Tepe, but at this stage the archaeological evidence suffices to conclude that Göbekli Tepe was a site where the large scale exploitation of wildlife took place. Concomitant research into matters such as feasting and the redistribution and the construction of social hierarchy will enrich such research, but a broader anthropological investigation falls outside the scope of this thesis. See for instance The Proof is in the Pudding, a work on feasting and the origins of domestication (Hayden 2009).

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The most prominent theory to date is that Göbekli Tepe was a religious or ritualistic structure. This theory was propagated by Schmidt who led the excavations of the site of Göbekli Tepe for a period of twenty years between 1994 and 2014. While theories and conclusions by various authors attempt to highlight various aspects of Göbekli Tepe, the question remains as to what these theories contribute to an understanding of the establishment of Göbekli Tepe and what it can tell us about the people who built Göbekli Tepe. The main question that must be answered is: What was Göbekli Tepe's main function?

During the overview of the body of literature it became clear that the interpretation of the circular structures comprising large monolithic T-pillars was derived from preconceived ideas about monumental buildings, largely based on knowledge of similar structures from antiquity but dating thousands of years after Göbekli Tepe. It was further clear that opinions as to the role and function of Göbekli Tepe were influenced by its location in the Near-Middle East, against the background of the Old Testament and the Quran, despite Göbekli Tepe being thousands of years older than the emergence of the former. This influenced conclusions about Göbekli Tepe.

8.2 METHODOLOGY

The multi-disciplinary approach to the existing literature made it possible to investigate the origins of the prevailing hypothesis that Göbekli Tepe was constructed for ritualistic or religious reasons. From the empirical evidence, this view was difficult to support. Although it is possible that rituals may have taken place there, this view is not supported by uncontested facts. The prevailing hypothesis is based on various and even contradictory interpretations of the site (cf. 1.5; 1.6).

Considering Göbekli Tepe in an all-embracing context of archaeological, agricultural, geographical, iconographical, climatological, environmental and anthropological aspects presented more than one possible explanation for the constructions at the site. The

approach to consider literature from the various disciplines as well as considering the site in a much broader context made it possible to come to a different conclusion as to the construction of Göbekli Tepe, one which I offer as a possibility. Further investigation may reveal more information and provide other reasons for the construction of the monolithic stone structures and other buildings on the site, as well as provide some insight into Neolithic society at the time of the occupation of Göbekli Tepe.

8.2.1 Archaeological evidence

The main research question that formed the basis of this dissertation is an enquiry into the very nature of the structures at Göbekli Tepe. What was Göbekli Tepe's main function? Any theory should be based on factual, empirical evidence. Considering archaeological and empirical evidence available in the body of literature on the subject, it was clear that most writings departed from only one or two singular approaches to the subject. An all-encompassing approach was required. Not only archaeological evidence, but also evidence from other disciplines were needed to understand the site and its *raison d'etre* (cf. 4.2; 4.3; 5.2; 5.3; 6.3; 7.3). This approach led me to the theory that, considering aspects of the setting in which Göbekli Tepe was placed, as well as the historical timeframe during which the site was developed, it had a much more practical reason for its existence. The observable facts support a theory that Göbekli Tepe could have been constructed for the large-scale hunting and processing of meat and related products. If correct, Göbekli Tepe may have been one of the earliest examples of the commodification of hunting produce.

8.2.2 Contribution of climate and geographical location

Although research has been undertaken into the climate and geographical location at the time of the establishment and operation of Göbekli Tepe, scant attention was given to the relevance of these factors in the placement and the functioning of the site. I argue that the geographical location and climate at the time were responsible for the conditions within which an abundance of game was at least seasonally available for large-scale hunting. The location of Göbekli Tepe just outside of and with a view on the Harran Plain was optimal for the observation and hunting of game. The production of grain is seasonal and grain fields require tending and guarding, as do the harvested grains. The residents of 'farms' were therefore bound to their lands and an alternative, sustainable source of food was indispensable for the establishment of agriculture during the period of climatic

instability and the slow and uncertain beginnings of agriculture after the Younger Dryas. Although hunting became less of a food imperative as farming developed it retained its role as a provider of some food and concomitant by-products such as skins.

8.2.3 Anthropological aspects

Human beings do things for a reason. Without the benefit of eyewitness accounts or written records, the construction at Göbekli Tepe must be deduced from the physical evidence. Conclusions drawn by various researchers typify Göbekli Tepe as a monumental construction, a ritual building or a temple built for ritualistic practices. The occurrence of petroglyphs on some of the T-pillars amplifies this view. The idea that Göbekli Tepe could simply be a utilitarian construction is scantily considered and weakly developed. In considering the evidence appearing from an ever-growing body of research, the prevailing theory that Göbekli Tepe was a ritualistic centre or temple can no longer be considered as the only theory and other theories must be considered. The presence of a deity or of ritual practices are deduced from the same evidence that could imply something else. Co-operation between various people could have had a different basis than ritual or religion. Göbekli Tepe has not yet been considered as a facility for the production and distribution of meat and concomitant products. The development of agriculture was a protracted process and the procurement of food apart from the produce from agriculture remained important for a long time after the establishment of agriculture.

8.2.4 Iconography

Interpreting the iconography found on the T-pillars at Göbekli Tepe remains speculative in the absence of any evidence supporting such interpretation. Any attempt to interpret these depictions must, of necessity, be based on conjecture and in the case of Göbekli Tepe extrapolation of known interpretations comes from similar depictions of later epochs.

8.2.5 Göbekli Tepe in the context of neighbouring sites

Elements of Göbekli Tepe’s architecture are found in sites in the proximity of Göbekli Tepe, dating from the same period and later. The establishment of Göbekli Tepe predates most of the other sites or is concurrent with a few of them. This implies that design and technology found at these sites were possibly derived from Göbekli Tepe and not the

other way round. Göbekli Tepe probably reflects more of the architecture of surrounding sites than the other way round.

Göbekli Tepe as an archaeological site spans a period falling within both the PPNA and PPNB. The nature of the various enclosures differs greatly from buildings in settlements around Göbekli Tepe dating from the same period. Housing for permanent occupation is absent at Göbekli Tepe and monumental monolithic pillars Göbekli Tepe distinguishes it from other constructions of the same era. These differences may contribute to a better understanding of the purpose of the buildings at Göbekli Tepe.

8.3 SHORTCOMINGS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE RESEARCH

During the review of current literature, a number of issues were identified. Two notable matters were that the presence of quern stones and large stone bowls could indicate both grain preparation for beer brewing (implying feasting) as well as the tanning and processing of skins. Both processes would require quern stones as well as bowls. Furthermore, the oxalate found during a first test of residue in some of the bowls could be a residue from the brewing process as well as from tanning with urine. This dichotomy remains unresolved.

The ‘intentional backfilling’ of circles and the possibility that the material could have been part of an earthen roof is also unexplained. If ‘intentional backfilling’ was indeed practised, no writer commented on the possible reason for this practice. The fact that it was considered to have been done ‘quickly’ rather gives credence to a theory that the stone circles had earthen roofs (cf. 3.4), a theory which also has not been supported by credible evidence (Schmidt 1999:13). Contrary to this, Banning is of the opinion that there might have been roofs covering the circles (Banning 2011:629). Again, the same facts give rise to differing conclusions.

The difference between a sacred space and/or a similar space used for communal religious activity causes differences of opinions as to the real purpose behind the construction of Göbekli Tepe. A sacred space may be found in a residential living space, but communal religious spaces would require specialised buildings or spaces. This distinction often leads to the erroneous conclusion that the circles at Göbekli Tepe must

be housing if not temples. There is little room for interpretation between the two viewpoints, making it difficult to establish the real meaning of the circles at Göbekli Tepe. One possible interpretation would be to combine the two theories but again, there is no credible evidence to support it.

By comparing the different theories addressed in this dissertation, it is clear that a unifying theory cannot be formulated from the widely divergent ideas that the various authors hold. Often theories are not supported by observations and sometimes observations not supporting a theory are being ignored or downplayed. It is important to go back to the evidence and to consider a possible theory that holds true for all the known facts about Göbekli Tepe.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	-	American Antiquity
AaC	-	Astronomy and Computing
Ac	-	Academia
AD	-	Archaeological Discovery
AFS	-	Asian Folklore Studies
AGU	-	American Geophysical Union
AloA	-	Archaeological Institute of America
Arc	-	Archaeology
Ant	-	Antiquity
Antzoo	-	Anthropozoologica
BJRS	-	Borneo Journal of Religious Studies
BP	-	Before Present
BS	-	Biological Sciences
CA	-	Current Anthropology
CAJ	-	Cambridge Archaeological Journal
CSP	-	Communications of the Society for Prehistory
DAI	-	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut
DP	-	Documenta Praehistorica
EoA	-	Encyclopaedia of Anthropology
ESIG	-	Encyclopedia of Snow, Ice and Glaciers
EX	-	Expedition
IA	-	Internet Archaeology
ID	-	Irrigation and Drainage
IJoL	-	International Journal of Innovation
IRotAP	-	International Relations of the Asia-Pacific
JoAA	-	Journal of Anthropology and Archaeology
JoAAttP	-	Journal of Anthropological Approaches To The Paranormal
JoANEC	-	Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures
JoAS	-	Journal of Archaeological Science
JoEB	-	Journal of Experimental Botany
JoFA	-	Journal of Field Archaeology
JoGHaT	-	Journal of Gastronomy, Hospitality and Travel

JoNES - Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JoQS - Journal of Quaternary Science
JotS - Journal for the Scientific
JoWP - Journal of World Prehistory
JSAH - Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians
KAS - Kroeber Anthropological Society
LA - Land
MAA - Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry
Nat - Nature
NL - Neo-Lithics
NNJ - Nexus Network Journal
OJoG - Open Journal of Geology
Ori - Orient
Pal - Paléorient
PAM - Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean
PC - Palgrave Communications
PE - Procedia Engineering
PNAS - Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America
PO - Plos One
PotNAS - Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences
PTMPaES - Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences
PToTRSBbs - Philosophical transactions of The Royal Society B: biological sciences
PTRSLBS - Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci
QI - Quaternary International
QS - Qualitative Sociology
QSR - Quaternary Science Reviews
SA - Science Advances
Sci - Science
SM - Studia Monographica
SPAG - Saint-Ponais Archaeological Group
SR - Scientific Reports
SSS - Settlement, Survey, and Stone

SNS	-	Springer Nature Switzerland
SWJoA	-	Southwestern Journal of Anthropology
TaoSJoA	-	Turkish Academy of Sciences Journal of Archaeology
TCEoA	-	The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology
TG	-	Treatise on Geochemistry
TGJ	-	The Geographical Journal
TJoAaE	-	Turkish Journal of Archeology and Ethnography
TuoCP	-	The University of Chicago Press
VTT	-	Valtion Teknillinen Tutkimuskeskus
WA	-	World Archaeology

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