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RISE OF GÖBEKLI TEPE CULTURE: "HUNTING GROUND ECONOMY" AND THE ROLE OF SPECULATIVE "KNOWLEDGE"[***]

GÖBEKLİ TEPE KÜLTÜRÜNÜN YÜKSELİŞİ: AVLAK EKONOMİSİ VE SPEKÜLATİF "BİLGİ"NİN ROLÜ

ПОДЪЕМ КУЛЬТУРЫ ГЁБЕКЛЫ ТЕПЕ: ЭКОНОМИКА ОХОТНИЧЕСТВА И РОЛЬ СПЕКУЛЯТИВНОГО "МЫШЛЕНИЯ"

Bahattin ÇELIK[*]
Orhan AYAZ[**]

ABSTRACT
At the beginning of the Early Holocene Period, the hunter-gatherer groups in the Upper Mesopotamia region left behind complex structures, monumental stone pillars, and various sculptures and Neolithic cultural zone that stand out with rich symbolism accompanying thereto in unprecedented permanent settlements. Excavations were initiated at new Neolithic sites within the scope of the "Taş Tepeler" project in Göbekli Tepe cultural zone, rather known for Göbekli Tepe Neolithic Period site. By whom, how and why this early Neolithic civilization that reverses some basic assumptions on the history of the mankind remains the most important area under discussion. The excavations currently in progress, and the surveys carried out, at the Neolithic sites in this culture region provide comprehensive data on the social and economic foundations that allowed rise of this civilization. In particular, the prevalent and enormous hunting grounds/entrapment areas discovered in this region stand out as the most important economic grounds that allowed this civilization to rise. Moreover, the finds referring to the material exchange and craftsman network conducted in a wide area appears as another socio-economic factor. Despite recognizing the socio-economic foundations, this study shall place the speculative "knowledge" highlighting the psycho-cultural aspect of the people of that era as the main triggering driver regarding rise of this civilization. In conclusion, this study shall endeavour to deduct reasonable interpretation on how Göbekli Tepe culture started to rise on the basis of the sociological perspective that considers knowledge at an autonomous place against other socio-economic conditions.

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Keywords: Göbekli Tepe, hunting ground economy, entrapment areas, Pre-Pottery Neolithic, sociology of knowledge

ÖZ

Erken Holosen dönemin başlarında Yukarı Mezopotamya bölgesinde avcı toplayıcı gruplar arkalarında daha önce benzerine rastlanmayan kalıcı yerleşim birimleri içinde karmaşık yapılar, anıtsal taş sütunlar, çeşitli heykeller ve onlara eşlik eden zengin bir sembolizmle öne çıkan Neolitik kültür alanları bıraktılar. Daha çok Göbekli Tepe Neolitik Dönem sitesiyle tanınan Göbekli Tepe kültür bölgesinde "Taş Tepeler" projesi kapsamında yeni Neolitik tepeler kazılmaya başlandı. İnsanlık tarihine dair bazı temel kabulleri ters yüz eden bu erken Neolitik medeniyetin kimler tarafından, nasıl ve niçin yapıldığı en önemli tartışma alanları olarak yerini korumaktadır. Bu kültür bölgesine ait Neolitik sitelerde ilerleyen kazılar ve yapılan yüzey araştırmaları bu medeniyetin yükselişine imkân tanıyan sosyal ve ekonomik temeller hakkında ayrıntılı veriler sunmaktadır. Özellikle bu bölgede keşfedilen yaygın ve devasa Avlaklar/Tuzak Alanları bu medeniyetin üzerinde yükseldiği en önemli ekonomik temel olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Dahası geniş bir alanda gerçekleşen materyal değiş-tokuşuna ve zanaatkâr ağına işaret eden buluntular bir diğer sosyo-ekonomik faktör olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışma sosyo-ekonomik temelleri kabul etmekle birlikte bu medeniyetin yükselişinde temel tetikleyici güç olarak merkeze o dönem insanının psiko-kültürel yönüne vurgu yapan spekülatif "bilgiyi" koyacaktır. Sonuç olarak bilgiyi diğer sosyo-ekonomik koşullar karşısında özerk bir yere yerleştiren sosyolojik bakıştan hareketle Göbekli Tepe kültürünün nasıl yükselişe geçtiğinin makul bir yorumunu yapmaya çalışacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göbekli Tepe, tuzak alanları, avlak ekonomisi, Çanak-Çömleksiz Neolitik, bilgi sosyolojisi

АННОТАЦИЯ

В начале периода раннего голоцена группы охотников-собирателей в районе Верхней Месопотамии оставили после себя беспрецедентные постоянные поселения в сложных сооружениях, монументальных каменных колоннах, различных скульптурах и неолитических культурных ареалах, которые выделяются богатой сопровождающей их символикой. Новые неолитические холмы были раскопаны в рамках проекта "Каменные холмы (Taş Tepeler)" в культурном регионе Гёбекли-Тепе, известный памятниками периода неолита Гёбекли-Тепе. Кем, как и почему эта ранняя неолитическая цивилизация, которая переворачивает некоторые основные предположения о человеческой истории, остается самой важной областью обсуждения. Раскопки и поверхностные исследования, проведённые в неолитических стоянках этого культурного региона, дают подробные данные о социальных и экономических основах, которые способствовали возникновению этой цивилизации. Особенно широко распространенные и огромные охотничьи угодья/ловушки, обнаруженные в этом регионе, выделяются как самая важная экономическая база, на которой была построена эта цивилизация. Более того, находки, указывающие на обмен материалами и сеть ремесленников, которые имели место на обширной территории, выступают в качестве ещё одного социально-экономического фактора. Хотя в это исследований внимание уделяется на социально-экономические основы, однако, в нём выдвигаются спекулятивные "знания", подчеркивающие психокультурный аспект людей того периода, как главную движущую силу в подъеме этой цивилизации. В результате он попытается дать разумную интерпретацию по поводу возникновения культуры Гёбекли-Тепе, начиная с социологической точки зрения. Даёт информацию

по поводу его автономии по сравнению с другими социально-экономическими условиями.
Ключевые слова: Гёбекли-Тепе, ловчие районы, охотничье хозяйство, керамика эпохи неолита, социология знания.

Introduction

The hunter-gatherer groups in Near East left behind various settlement sites within a widespread area. Although common cultural themes are prevalent in the entire widespread area, exclusive cultural zones have emerged within the region that stand out with the specific structure and symbolism. In this sense, although the Tigris Basin and the Euphrates Basin are located relatively close to each other in the Upper Mesopotamian Neolithic, both basins represent different cultural worlds. For instance, the symbolic elements in the Tigris Basin both embodied significantly differentiated themes and were embroidered on portable objects instead of monumental structures (Karul, 2020: 91). The excavations at Nevali Çori, which was discovered as a result of the survey conducted in 1979, paved the way for unearthing a new Neolithic cultural world. The finds unearthed in the excavations initiated particularly at Göbekli Tepe following Nevali Çori put the spotlight on this region. Successive surveys revealed that Göbekli Tepe represented just a small portion of this cultural world. As of 2022, the excavations are still in progress on approximately 12 sites (some of these sites are excavated, while others are still in the planning stage), but existence of just as many sites is also known. In conclusion, one can mention about presence of dense Neolithic settlements representing distinct cultural world in an area of approximately 100 km around Şanlıurfa province in the southeast of Anatolia (Çelik, 2000, 2011, 2017, 2019; Güler et al., 2013; Karul, 2022).

Initially, where Klaus Schmidt, who conducted excavations at Göbekli Tepe, excavated first and how he defined such excavations, determined how to interpret this Neolithic cultural world. Majority of the comments concentrated around the question of *why* such monumental structures adorned with depictions of fauna were constructed. Unearthing of the "special structures" at the excavations first has led to evaluation of said “special structure” as a "temple" and interpretation as a sacred mountain that hunters in the basin visited temporarily for religious purposes during certain periods (Schmidt, 2005, 2006, 2010; Dietrich & Notroff, 2015; Dietrich et al., 2012). Although Lee Clare, who later took over the chairmanship of the excavation, highlighted the fact that the initial excavation team considered that such structures were constructed on the basis of “religious zeal” (Clare, 2020), one can actually state that Klaus Schmidt was also influenced significantly by the functionalist approaches (See Notroff et al., 2014). In this context, although the discipline of archaeology has enriched unilateral environmental determinism with the theories based on social and ideological change since the 1980s (Benz & Bauer, 2013: 12), one cannot claim that archaeology managed to surpass the functionalism with respect to the perspective on the basic nature of human beings. In addition to progression achieved during the excavations conducted at Göbekli Tepe, the findings, structures and symbols acquired after unearthing new excavation sites on other sites induced a spike in interpretations that highlight the social and economic

functions. Although such interpretations does not consider hunter-gatherers directly as "naive" materialists, the perspective that regarded the main priorities of such hunter-gatherer societies to be economic and social concerns indirectly has prevailed (For instance, Hodder, 2020; Jeunesse, 2020; Kinzel & Clare, 2020; Watkins, 2020). One can mention that the assumption set forth hereunder forms the core of such interpretations: Any socially constructed "reality" or any social "construct" that occurs in the world of human beings emerge as it responds to the most fundamental needs of people, such as feeding or keeping people away from conflict. In other words, the structures and symbols that emerged in that society possesses the value as proportional to the function they perform in the society. Based on this perspective, the people in the Neolithic Period exerted such level of mental and physical effort as the structures and symbols legitimized and preserved the economic and social structure in question.

The way to overcome the functionalism mentioned here to a certain extent is possible by changing the perspective on the basic nature of human beings. Mankind is a creature that constantly weaves "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973) that offers safe sanctuary while in social interaction. The social and economic needs are not always considered to be determinative when constructing such webs of significance. Sometimes the attempt to explain birth, death and the cosmos as a whole as independent of material conditions can be the primary motivation for building webs of significance and incarnation thereof in material tools. Moreover, one should further consider the possibility that sometimes people can weave webs of significance that sabotages even their most basic needs.

This study shall endeavour to come up with reasonable explanation -with the help of the data acquired from the site- regarding the interactive conditions that led to the rise of Göbekli Tepe culture[1] as unique cultural zone, especially by taking advantage of the theoretical background of the sociology of knowledge. Here, it is important to emphasize that each Neolithic cultural world can rise under distinct interactive conditions, wherein it is the material "reality" that sometimes act as the catalyst and wherein the speculative "knowledge" can sometimes act as the primary source of motivation. Every social construct in the sociology of knowledge takes place in some formation that involves mutual interaction that is dominated sometimes by "reality" and sometimes by "knowledge". In case of Göbekli Tepe culture, it is obvious that the "hunting ground economy" developed in addition to the abundance of wild grains and plants has induced some level of prosperity. It is also possible to find evidence from the site that such prosperity induced an explosion in population and made Göbekli Tepe a center of attraction for persons engaged with material exchange and for the artisans. This study shall argue that the leading motive for the rise of monumental structures and rich symbolism did not predicate on fulfillment of several social and economic functions in the Neolithic society. Despite the importance of social and economic functions[2], the core claim of this study is that

[1] The expression "Göbekli Tepe Culture" belongs to archaeologist Mehmet Özdoğan.

[2] In this context, the intense effect of the economic conditions (hunting ground economy) of the period on animal symbolism will be discussed in another study.

the driving force in rise of Göbekli Tepe culture was the ideological motivations based on highly complex mythological pattern that represent diverse concerns.

1. Building the Neolithic Culture in terms of Sociology of Knowledge

In social theory, "knowledge" is addressed within the category of "culture" that encompasses all symbolic systems. The perspective of this discipline considers "knowledge" as the thoughts that introduce us to what is true and correct about ourselves and the world that surrounds us (McCarthy, 1996). Here, "knowledge" does not refer to being conscious of something, but being conscious of something - for example, the moon - is something - for instance, the moon is either the fertility god or the house thereof (Percy, 1958: 55). In this sense, all symbolic systems in Göbekli Tepe culture can be considered as expressions of "knowledge". It is possible to contemplate that every depiction carved on the stone in this cultural world offers the people of that era the knowledge of what is true and correct about things.

The relationship between the knowledge and the material conditions has been in the focus of the theorists since emergence of the sociology as a modern discipline. All discussions are concentrated around two themes. The first theme dominantly features the view that what is recognized as knowledge is identified by the tangible conditions. According to this theme mostly pioneered by Karl Marx, the human thought has no effect on tangible conditions. According to Marx, knowledge and thought do not have independent appearances but are solely passive reflections of substantial processes (Marx & Engels, 1998). This assumption also means that consciousness cannot affect life and shall not induce any alteration or transformation thereon. In Durkheim's sociology, albeit in a dissimilar context, what is mental is determined by the social conditions. In this sociological approach, the core concepts and categories of the mind are the product of social factors and dynamics. According to Durkheim, the only reason the indigenous tribes attached importance to and sanctified the totem arises from the fact that such tribes considered the totem as an objective representation of the unity of the clan (Durkheim, 2019: 190). Setting out from this notion, all kinds of rituals are then reduced down to some process that only glorifies and serves the unity of the society.

The second theme in the sociology of knowledge can be traced back to the work by Max Weber. Unlike Marx and Durkheim, Weber argued that the religious considerations in particular could determine the economic behavior (Weber, 2002). In his well-known work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argues that unlike Protestantism, which, according to Marxists, is simply an outcome or derivative of economic conditions, provided an effective motivation for work and work ethics in the emergence of reverse capitalism. In this theme, knowledge is not merely reflections of the social structure and change, but rather the determining forces in establishment and conveyance of any social structure (Williams, 1981). The new sociology of knowledge, on the other hand, combines these two themes, and argues that knowledge is both influenced by the material conditions and is the fundamental factor in the buildup and transformation of such conditions. In this context, it is the knowledge that sometimes trail after the tangible conditions, but it

is the tangible conditions that sometimes trail after the knowledge (McCarthy, 1996). Thus, it is possible to consider the symbolic systems as the product of the dialectic relationship wherein the thought affects the tangible conditions and the tangible conditions affect the human thought (Berger, 2015: 227).

So, is it possible to explain the rise of Göbekli Tepe culture based on the theoretical background that have been outlined above? One can mention that Göbekli Tepe culture has arisen on the basis of stone/wood as material and on mastery of stonework/woodworking. The symbols dominant on such engraved stones (also wood) frequently composed of the human head and phallus as well as the animals compatible with the fauna of that era. It is obvious that Neolithic people has chosen the most fundamental action of their symbolic world – i.e., stonework/ woodworking - and their common symbols from the economy and ecology of the period. Therefore, such symbolic works and objects predicate on economic and ecological foundations probably going back in time. Working the stone (also wood) for defense and subsistence has been a vital activity since the Paleolithic Period at the least. Also, one could possibly indicate that the animals they choose to depict represent major material conditions (economic and ecological) of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Therefore, such symbolic world built by the society in Göbekli Tepe had close and/or distant roots that refer to the economic and ecological conditions. In other words, said symbolic world was derived from the interactions engaged with the material conditions. The primary source of motivation for working and shaping stone (and/or wood[3]) could be the economy; however, it is evident that, in Göbekli Tepe culture, stone working had further attained other motivations besides such economic grounds. Taking the average age of the human population in the Neolithic Period into consideration, the male genitalia should have been very important; however, in Göbekli Tepe culture, it is possible to observe that the human phallus was transformed into an important part of some mythological narrative in addition to the population problem and motivations related to the sexuality[4]. The actual contribution of the sociology of knowledge to the building of the Neolithic culture starts at this point. The thoughts[5] alienated from interaction with the material conditions should have transformed into an autonomous power that would affect the material conditions through inclusion into a web of significance distinct from their material conditions. Thus, it is moral certainty that the economic significance attached to stone working lost such economic motivation after some time and transformed into the motivation for production of monumental structures and elaborately crafted symbols that are prized and highly esteemed in the mythological order, thus

[3] There is convincing evidence that wood (instead of T-shaped stone pillars) could also be used in monumental special structures along with stone at Çakmaktepe (Quça Çeqmaq, in local language), which dates before Göbekli Tepe (Excavation director Fatma Şahin, personal communication).

[4] How such complex mythology about the phallus was weaved in Göbekli Tepe culture shall be addressed in another study.

[5] Interpretations so as to when and how this was performed fort he first time would be nothing more than speculation, due to the possibility of arising from just a single moment of single interaction, whether rational or irrational- for example, a dream.

becoming an ideological force that would change the material conditions. In this context, it is possible to observe the architectural advancement induced by the mythological thinking on stone working during the Neolithic Period. In this sense, one can observe that the structures previously constructed in circular form have transformed[6] into more useful angular structures over time (See Karul, 2020).

2. Socio-Economic Context: Hunting Ground Economy, Population Growth, Craftsmen and Material Flow

During the Pleistocene Period, the humankind lived in small, wandering hunter-gatherer groups for a long time. Such lifestyle was abandoned in the Upper Paleolithic, and immediately thereafter, the Epipalaeolithic cultures started to emerge, wherein various stone tools and settled lifestyle became evident. It is generally recognized that the changes that occurred at the climate and the vegetation at the end of the Pleistocene Period staged the conditions required for transition to the settled lifestyle. The climate on earth started to get milder with the Holocene, and the wild grain yields started to grow in some parts of the Anatolia, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. Abundant evidence exists on cultivation of morphologically wild grains in the settlements that represent the Natufian culture of the eastern Mediterranean starting from the 12th millennium BC. The richness of flora and fauna induced by such climate stabilization in the Early Holocene is an important factor that enables transition to the settled lifestyle (Benz & Bauer, 2013: 20; Hodder, 2021: 243). Initiation of purposeful and planned production of food in the Natufian settlements for the first time differentiates such settlements from other archaeological sites around the world. More favorable climatic conditions prevailing at this region allowed longer periods of accommodation that can also be considered as an orientation towards the settled lifestyle (Schmidt, 2006; Zeder, 2011). The cultural period that follows the Natufian culture is the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA), dated to the 10th millennium BC. Rise of Göbekli Tepe culture corresponds to with this period.

There are some major clues linking the builders of this culture to the Natufian culture in the Levant region. It can be said that the predecessors of the architectural tradition discovered in the oldest layers of the sites in this region are close to the Epipalaeolithic experienced in the Levant region. Moreover, Gazelle Hunting Tradition that appeared in the Levant Region was maintained intensely in the Urfa region, as is better evidenced by the entrapment areas constructed in the region. First of all, one can deduce that the builders of Göbekli Tepe possessed the cultural background since the very beginning. In this sense, the data from the field indicates that the small round buildings used for domestic purposes may be older than the monumental structures (or at least contemporary with them) (See also Dietrich et al., 2019; Kinzel & Clare, 2020). This fact suggests conjures up the possibility that the hunter-gatherers of Göbekli Tepe possessed the background close

[6] Or turning wooden pillars into stone pillars.

to the Natufian culture at the beginning, and constructed the monumental structures and built the symbolism based on such background. As a matter of fact, the domestic structures consisting of bushes erected on stone foundations (Bar-Yosef, 2010: 7) as discovered in the settlement areas of the Natufian culture underwent minor changes in form at Göbekli Tepe culture. Presumably, those migrated from the Natufian culture used such domestic structures until they achieved the skills to construct the special structures. As stated above, the findings at Çakmaktepe site display the progress of special buildings from the aspects of materials, labor and technology. Furthermore, the findings of the surface surveys at Göbekli Tepe cultural area indicate that the contemporary hunter-gatherer groups that are not members of this culture maintaned their living conditions particular to Upper Paleolithic period (Çelik 2018). This situation increases the likelihood that the ideological flow in the early Neolithic was from the south to the north (See also Mithen et al., 2022).

The archaeologists were surprised with the fact that the settlements founded in Göbekli Tepe culture were established in areas far from water sources, such that this fact became one of the primary reference points for the comments of the first excavation team that Göbekli Tepe could only be a cult area rather than a settlement due to its distance from the water sources. Accordingly, a different socio-economic context was suggested in the initial assessments on Göbekli Tepe especially led by the excavation team. In this model, the general notion was that Göbekli Tepe was used only as some kind of temple by the hunters and no economic activity was conducted therein other than the feasts held at the times of gathering (Schmidt, 2005, 2010; Dietrich et al., 2012; Dietrich et al., 2019; Notroff et al., 2014). However, at this point, one can state that Göbekli Tepe (including other sites) is a settlement inhabited by the population that makes their living by hunting and gathering (Clare, 2022, Çelik, 2019; Güler et al., 2013; Jeunesse, 2020:53, Karul, 2022a;). Moreover, the studies conducted on the remains of food and fauna do not point out to existence of the "feast economy"[7], nor to the workload that would require large crowds to construct the structures. The experimental study conducted in 2019 revealed that only a small group of people is required to work for a short amount of time to construct the monumental structures (Kinzel & Clare, 2020: 37).

Despite the change in the perspective towards the settlements, no theory has been propounded yet regarding how such relatively large population made its living. Only Clare and Kinzel settled for stating that they consider presence of natural resources in the site basin as the compelling factor for the instance of Göbekli Tepe (Clare & Kinzel, 2020: 62). However, the surveys conducted imply that a very important economic factor rests behind the locations of such settlements. Large entrapment areas observed clearly indicate the economic foundations on which Göbekli Tepe culture has arisen. Widespread and extremely large hunting grounds identified in the region were often disregarded during the archaeological reviews. In

[7] Our own conceptualization.

particular, some locations exist around Karahan Tepe and Harbetsuvan Tepesi settlements that are very ideal for hunting by setting traps and snares.

The remains of the hunting grounds were discovered in this area in considerable quantities (**Picture 1**) (Çelik, 2011, 242; 2019). Moreover, as demonstrated by the temporary staging areas located in the immediate vicinity of the hunting grounds, the animals were maintained in such entrapment areas for prolonged periods[8], wherein some were processed so as to avoid spoiling thereof, and then transported to the settlements later on. A new conceptualization may be more useful for the transitional economy: "hunting ground economy" or "entrapment areas economy".



Picture 1. View of the Sarpdere Entrapment Area to the South of Karahan Tepe.

Neolithic societies often managed the economic resources in their immediate surroundings with success in order to secure the economic viability of large settled societies (Watkins, 2020: 25). The society in Göbekli Tepe developed an extremely effective method that would lead to relative economic prosperity in this respect. Huge entrapment areas were established by stacking large stone slabs in some sort of pile that resemble fish scales (**Picture 2**). Judging by the size of the hunting grounds, the hunters were able to supply meat in large quantities in a single hunting campaign. The animals trapped at such areas were butchered at the small hillside settlements in the immediate vicinity, which were occupied since the Neolithic period (Çelik 2018). All such findings indicate that the hunting campaigns in the region were extremely efficient. Sahlins states that the time the people must allocate per person to make a living did not change in the Neolithic age compared to the Paleolithic age (Sahlins, 2016: 44). However, even when we set aside the substantial

[8] Although there are symbolic signs that some rites of passage were performed in these entrapment areas, we do not know for now whether a feast was held there.

food obtained from the harvested wild grains (Dietrich et al., 2019), the hunting ground economy alone refers to a significant saving in time for the people living in this period. The question is: What is the share of hunting ground economy in rise of Göbekli Tepe culture? Ethnographic analogies indicate that if adequate supply of food is available, the decrease in motility can result in both an increase in fertility and reduced birth interval. In this case, the groups that remain unseparated leads to an increase in population (Benz & Bauer, 2013: 13). The fact that such increase in population induces an intense interaction process, and the impact of such interaction on the mental abilities shall be discussed in the following chapter. Beyond that, the hunting ground economy can be considered as the most important factor for the mythology based on speculation in Göbekli Tepe in culture for overcoming the economic concerns, as contrary to the expressions used by Durkheim for the indigenous people, "Such weak beings taking great pains to survive against so many forces attacking them are not in the position to indulge in any luxury on the way of speculation" (Durkheim, 2019: 116).



Picture 2. Remains of the Entrapment Area Wall Stacked as Fish Scales.

Another factor that improved the symbolic interaction in the region in addition to the population had to be the people and the artisans who conducted circulation of the materials. Such individuals should have induced intense cultural interaction both between the sites within the exclusive cultural zone and between diverse regions. In particular, the obsidian trade was the key in building and maintaining major networks. In addition to the technological and economic value of the obsidian, the interaction network between the cultures proves to be much more

significant (Renfrew et al., 1966; Restelli, 2021: 34). The obsidian specimens discovered in Göbekli Tepe but obviously imports from different regions (Notroff et al., 2014: 99) reveal the extensive network this cultural zone is involved in. Another significant phenomenon was that the itinerant craftsmen cased interaction on a wide geography (Özdoğan, 2003). Encountering shared themes as we set off from the neolithic settlements north of Syria and move towards the Upper Tigris Basin to the north then to Çatalhöyük in Western Anatolia is an indication of such cultural carriers (Dietrich et al., 2012; Hodder, 2021; Karul, 2020).

4. Intellectual Context

The hunter-gatherer societies were not "naive" materialists but social beings who consciously utilized symbolic systems at least starting from the Paleolithic Period (Hoppal, 2021: 75). However, the practice of living in long standing, large scale and settled societies and building institutions in such groups first emerged during early Neolithic Period (Renfrew, 2008). Nevertheless, we do know that majority of the symbolic themes used in this period and constitute an integral part of the mythological narrative date back to earlier hunter-gatherers (Hodder, 2021: 206). In other words, the Neolithic societies who started to exhibit the symbolic systems on different materials and established permanent settlements at early Holocene conveyed the socio-ideological heritage of the Upper Paleolithic Period. Such symbolic systems intensively standardized during the early Holocene[9] in the Near East started to be appear as depicted on the stone in the special structures and exhibited in public in accompaniment of the rituals (Benz & Bauer, 2013: 11). However, it is worth recalling that the mental capabilities to engage in such practice were not available in the same way or to the same extent, despite their existence in the Upper Paleolithic Period. We know that the hunter-gatherer groups left drawings in the caves in the Paleolithic Period that do not illustrate the daily practices and habits, thus represent part of a mythological narrative (Sütterlin & Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2013: 42). In this context, although we are not limiting the cultic activities, wherein the symbolic systems are used intensively, to the Neolithic Period, it is not difficult to perceive that such abilities improved over time through intense symbolic interaction between people, resulting in some background in the Neolithic Period. In conclusion, we know that the Neolithic humans possessed the mental abilities required to construct Göbekli Tepe culture 12.000 thousand years ago. Based on the reasonable assumption that the people who built Göbekli Tepe culture were the people from the Levant region in the Eastern Mediterranean, we can state that such mental abilities achieved significant improvement in the Natufian culture. We, however, should bear in mind[10] the fact that the humankind is a living being that weaves the “webs of significance” to safely sit therein during all such eras (Geertz,

[9] The interglacial period that started approximately 11.500 years ago and that still prevails at this time (Cochran & Harpending, 2009: 247).

[10] What happened in Göbekli Tepe culture was that Neolithic man further complicated said web of significance and deftly embodied such web in different material tools.

1973). In this context, the human beings are always in need of seeing the universe in a meaningful order free from chaos in all their intellectual endeavors. Today, the modern societies weave the webs of significance with the conceptual thought, where pre-modern societies used to weave with the mythical thought. In this sense, the myth offered the illusion that the man is capable of comprehending and understanding the cosmos, which is very important for the mankind. The "primitive" people that we often contemplated to be completely submissive to the need to feed and to survive under harsh material conditions are capable of thinking beyond their needs and interests. In other words, the people possess the strong desire to surpass their daily needs on the basis of mythology and to understand and make sense of the world that surrounds them, the nature and the society they live in. In order to achieve such goal, they are capable of using the cognitive tools that are available to any philosopher or even to any scientist (Lévi-Strauss, 2013).

Both the Neolithic hunter-gatherers, who left behind a complex settled civilization reveted with stones, and their ancient ancestors, who left behind simple and temporary huts, shared very similar cognitive processes in terms of constructing a mythological – not conceptual – world through abstractions that deviate from tangible reality on the basis of concrete entities. For instance, there was no rupture between both societies that led the Israelites to transcendental monotheism (Bottéro, 2020: 295) or to any transformation similar to the attempt in the Ancient Greece to propound some account of the world other than the mythology. Therefore, it is worth noting that we partially disagree with Cauvin's comments implying some sort of fracture in the cognitive factors and suggesting that the hunter-gatherers first gathered in the temples around the notion of god for purposes beyond everyday life in the Neolithic Period[11] (Cauvin, 2000). Although Cauvin brings up the significance of human creativity and agency to the agenda of the archeological discussions, it is noteworthy to question Cauvin's suggestion that the human beings experienced some cognitive fracture in this context. Once more, we should recall the fact that the hunter-gatherers from the Neolithic and pre-Neolithic periods possessed very similar cognitive "essences" did not necessarily refer to dedifferentiation of both human groups. Recent research shows that the humankind has made more progress than ever achieved before, both at the level of genetic mutation and at the level of abstraction, especially during the Holocene Period when intense interaction was experienced between human beings (See Cochran & Harpending, 2009). Such intense interaction between humans mediated by the populous settlements induced intellectual consequences also for Göbekli Tepe culture with roots extending back to the Natufian culture (See Renfrew, 1986). We are not even mentioning the outcomes of the intense interaction between the sites facilitated by the artisans and individuals traveling and moving materials between far-flung distant settlements. Here, a dialectical process also advocated by the new sociology of knowledge, in other words, a series of positive feedback loops, has been in play; because, as rather larger – settled, in particular – population units ensured transfer and preservation of the

[11] A lot of evidence is available regarding that the human beings rallied around a belief system much earlier (Finlayson, 2014: 141).

cultural information through safer means and encouraged beneficial innovations, the increase in the cultural knowledge and more advanced "technology" based thereto further induced growth of population. On the contrary, ample evidence also exists that any reduction in the size of the population also leads to decline in the cultural knowledge (Sterelny, 2012; Watkins, 2013). In brief, the hunter-gatherers in Göbekli Tepe society who originate from the Levant region in possession of certain mental background established highly populated societies with intense interaction due to abundance of wild grains enabled by the temperate climate and the hunting ground economy. Said intense interaction has strongly enriched the symbolic repertoire related to animals and humans, which, in turn, referred to further advancements in mental abstraction, and has allowed such repertoire to be skillfully embodied in various materials[12]. This highly productive cycle, wherein the material processes and the mental processes mutually supported[13] each other, persisted until the decline of Göbekli Tepe culture.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In archeology, the increase in quantity and the "petrification" process of the symbolic systems in the Neolithic Period is linked to the functions such systems fulfilled in resolving the social and economic problems that emerged in the society of that period. Majority of the archaeologists approach the symbols and the collective rituals associated thereto in terms of the roles they play in creating and maintaining social cohesion (Verhoeven, 2002: 245). Kuijt stands out as one of the archaeologists who addressed this issued in the most explicit manner. According to him, the special structures and symbols in the Neolithic Period and the ritual practices accompanying thereto were practiced to create collective identity and memory (Kuijt, 2008: 185). Likewise, the symbols and special structures at Göbekli Tepe were also discussed on the basis of socio-economic functions. Perceiving this site as some sort of "temple" until recently led to interpretation of the symbols and structures thereon in terms of functionality accordingly. The excavation team chaired by Klaus Schmidt too substantially adopted Trevor Watkins's conceptualization of "imagined communities" as borrowed from Benedict Anderson (Schmidt, 2010; Notroff et al., 2014; Clare et al., 2019). According to Watkins, the structures and symbols at Göbekli Tepe created a shared memory and ensured that the individuals in the society felt they belonged to a larger imagined community and remained in cohesion. In other words, the symbols were the ideologies that ensured cognitive unity of the society (Watkins, 2008, 2020). Similarly, Gebel also suggested that the special structures and symbols at Göbekli Tepe were created to mitigate the risk of conflict between scattered hunter-gatherer groups due to border violations (Gebel, 2013: 40).

After it became more apparent that the sites in Göbekli Tepe culture are settlements, although the functions attributed to the symbols and structures remained

[12] The boom experienced in the rituals and symbolic denotations partially standardized such intense interaction and conveyed thereto to certain spaces.

[13] However, the fact that the mental processes are more decisive in this respect shall be further discussed hereunder.

the same, the interpretations thereon are altered drastically. Christian Jeunesse considers the special buildings at Göbekli Tepe as some sort of "chief's house". According to Jeunesse, the houses embodied the unity of the clan over time and served as a political/ceremonial center (Jeunesse, 2020). Proposing another interpretation, Ian Hodder states that the structures function as balance and control. In his opinion, the neolithic society was fragmented in order to contain conflict and to balance it with social cohesion, and embodied such fragmentation through diverse special structures (Hodder, 2020).

Based on the comments set forth above, it is possible to observe the influence of the functionalist theories established before 1950, either directly or indirectly, throughout the archaeological interpretations regarding the intellectual abilities of the Neolithic man. This perspective has led to the following formulation that is often identified with Malinowski in anthropology: If you know the most fundamental needs of any population, such as feeding and satisfying their sexual desires, you can explain the social institutions, beliefs and mythology thereof. Malinowski's impression is that the actual factor determining the sentiment of unlettered peoples was their fundamental needs (Lévi-Strauss, 2013: 36). Likewise, in sociology, Durkheim indicates that Australian aborigines do not think unless they are obliged to (Durkheim, 2019: 116).

The following conclusion should not be deduced from this fact: the social and economic needs cannot act as the primary driving force for change and transformation, or the monumental structures and symbols in Göbekli Tepe culture do not feature any aspect regarding the social and economic functions. On the contrary, the symbols and the structures are fulfilling numerous functions such as maintaining the ethnic identity of the community and mitigating the risk of conflict by legitimizing certain socio-economic conditions. The situation was not different in Göbekli Tepe culture. The special structures and symbols here were beyond any doubt responding to major socio-economic needs. As we have already highlighted above, our primary point of objection here is that emergence of the best cultural products does not always predicate on the most fundamental material needs. We should not be deceived by the fact that it is the economic interest that acts as the main motivator in most cases in the agrarian and industrial societies where the economy has become more complex and more centralized. As a matter of fact, invention of writing in Mesopotamia appears to have originated from the needs related to economy and administration. Unlike the primary source of motivation underlying the rich symbolism depicted in the material tools in the Neolithic societies, there appears to be no religious or mental endeavor to explain the meaning of the world in the origins of writing in Sumerians (See Bottéro, 2020: 93). Furthermore, the decline of Göbekli Tepe culture, which shall be addressed in another study, actually occurred due to some socio-economic grounds. Although the socio-economic factors acted as facilitators in the rise of Göbekli Tepe culture, the primary source of motivation remained to be the intellectual processes, unlike the decline of Göbekli Tepe culture. Our basic assertion is that all factors collaborated (Zeder, 2011: 53), but it is some speculative information –i.e., the mythology – that

makes life more meaningful and considers the concerns rather than the fundamental needs that acts as the actual driving force for ascension.

We can observe that the main concern of the hunter-gatherers in Göbekli Tepe society is not food or avoiding conflict, but, on the contrary, judging by the complex and intense narrative related to the mythology of origins - the subject matter of another study - they have exerted great effort both mentally and physically through mythological speculations that would even rival the Sumerians in order to make sense of their origins, of life and death. Furthermore, the finds from the surveys indicate that they lived in relatively economic abundance that would allow them to spare time for generating such speculative "knowledge" and to deftly describe such knowledge on the stones. Therefore, the socio-economic functions were not the driving force of the process, but the consequences that came with this ideological ascension. One can possibly mention that such “ideological golden age”, along with the interactions with the material conditions, was trailed by the rise in architecture, economy, aesthetics and technology. In this context, if any analogy is to be made, the cultures starting with the Sumerians, for which we have the closest written references to the neolithic societies, would represent the better option. In this sense, how the anxiety of death takes stage on the mythological pattern in Sumerian mythology and how such anxiety is reflected on the material tools is very meaningful.

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