The Role of Religion in the Neolithic of the Middle East and Anatolia with Particular Reference to Çatalhöyük

Ian Hodder

Abstract

This paper considers some of the arguments in Cauvin's book Naissance des divinités, Naissance de l'agriculture in the light of new research conducted at Çatalhöyük regarding the role of religion in the Neolithic. This research has brought together anthropologists, philosophers and religious scholars to work with archaeologists in answering four questions all of which have been inspired by Cauvin's work. The questions deal with (1) the definition and archaeological recognition of religion, (2) the relationships between religion and social and economic change, (3) the role of new forms of human agency in the domestication of animals, and (4) the part played by symbolism of violence and death in the formation of settled village life. The evidence and discussion of Çatalhöyük lead to new insights in all these domains.

Résumé

À la lumière des recherches récentes à Çatalhöyük, relatives au rôle de la religion, cet article examine quelques-unes des hypothèses exposées dans l'ouvrage de Cauvin, Naissance des divinités, Naissance de l'agriculture. Ces études ont rassemblé anthropologues, philosophes et spécialistes de la religion pour s'attacher, avec la collaboration des archéologues, à répondre à quatre questions, toutes inspirées par l'oeuvre de Cauvin. Elles concernent : 1) la définition et la reconnaissancen archéologique de la religion ; 2) les relations entre religion et transformation sociale et économique ; 3) le rôle des nouvelles formes d'action humaine dans la domestication des animaux ; 4) la part du symbolisme de la violence et de la mort dans la formation des communautés villageoises. Les découvertes et les discussions apportées par les travaux à Çatalhöyük fournissent de nouveaux points de vue dans tous ces domaines.

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I. HODDER

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Keywords: *Çatalhöyük; Göbekli; Neolithic; Middle East; Domestication; Symbolism; Religion.*
Mots-clés : *Çatalhöyük ; Göbekli ; Néolithique ; Moyen-Orient ; Domestication ; Symbolisme ; Religion.*

Jacques Cauvin's ideas, particularly as presented in his book *Naissance des divinités, Naissance de l'agriculture*,[1] have only gained in importance as new data and theories have emerged. As regards new data, remarkable new discoveries at sites such as Göbekli and Körtik Tepe reinforce the importance of the subtitle of Cauvin's book, *La Révolution des symboles au Néolithique*. The new sites show that the appearance of the Neolithic in the Middle East is associated with an explosion of symbolism not unlike the cultural explosion that marks the start of the Upper Palaeolithic in Europe. As regards new theo-ries, a cognitive aspect of the transition has been foregrounded in the work of Donald[2] and Renfrew and Scarre,[3] adding to previous work suggesting the importance of the social[4] and the symbolic[5] dimensions. This is not to ignore the increasingly strong arguments for climatic change as a relevant factor,[6]

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1. CAUVIN, 1994 and 2000 (translation).

2. DONALD, 1991.
3. RENFREW and SCARRE, 1998.
4. *E.g.*, BENDER, 1978.
5. HODDER, 1990.
6. *E.g.*, the special issue of *Paléorient* 23,2, 1997, "Paléoenvironnement et sociétés humaines au Moyen-Orient de 20 000 BP à 6 000 BP" edited by Paul Sanlaville.

but it remains possible to argue, as Cauvin did repeatedly and vigorously, that such factors are not adequate in themselves to explain the origins of agriculture.

Cauvin's argument concerning the first formation of settled villages was neatly encapsulated in the French title of the book—the birth of agriculture is linked to the birth of divinities. In summary, the increased intervention in the environment associated with agriculture implied to Cauvin a human agency that is derived from envisaging the power of personal divinities. To be more specific, he saw it as very important that the revolution of symbols occurred before the first agricultural communities. He saw the Khiamian in the Levantine core as key to this argument since it indicated "a change in collective psychology which must have preceded and engendered all the others in the matter of the process of neolithisation".[7] In the Khiamian there is already a symbolism of raptors, but especially of the bull and a woman. Reading backwards from Çatalhöyük and from historical Mesopotamia and Egypt, he saw this symbolism and its later development in PPNA as centering around a Goddess flanked by a male partner in the form of a bull. The emergence of divinities in human form was not, he argued, found in the Natufian, nor in the Upper Palaeolithic. In the latter, for example, there were collections of mammoths shown in the Franco-Cantabrian cave art, but not a mammoth god. The Neolithic images were of supreme beings and they suggested a new psychology of the human being dominated by a divine personified force which looked down. The bull was seen as representing a masculine anthropomorphic god, and by confronting this, man's virility became productive and civilizing.[8] Humans thus could see themselves as separate from external reality[9] and then act upon it so as to transform and domesticate. The revolution in action (the domestication of plants) resulted from the revolution of symbols. The symbolic shift to the woman/bull system occurred before cattle were dominant in the middle Euphrates. The initial change was "a purely mental development".[10] Hence the title of the book: it was the birth of divinities in human form that created the agency and the alienated sense of self[11] that were necessary for agriculture.

A question that is immediately raised by Cauvin's account is "what causes the mental shift?" Cauvin did not appear to answer this question, except for a passing reference to some group psychology of dissatisfaction.[12] At times he argued

against a single cause for domestication. Rather, he saw[13] a continual cycle of interactions between population size, climate, collective life, domestication, and the imagination. But most of the time he was so concerned to react against climatic, economic, and power factors that he got backed into the corner of arguing for a causal and chronological primacy for the psycho-cultural. The mental shift came first and was the most important. But by so separating off the mental from all other domains it became impossible to explain the symbolic fluorescence at all. The imagination and the group psychology just changed, for no apparent reason. In this way he departed from the medieval historians of the Annales School that he cited (Duby, Le Goff and Dumézil) and unwittingly embraced a reductionist position.

Right at the end of the postscript to his 2000 book, Cauvin appeared to realise that he had gone too far and he apologised for putting too much emphasis on the symbolic at the expense of the economic. He said[14] that he may have over-emphasised the symbolic as a strategic reaction against a pervasive and dominant economic view. Instead, the symbolic and the economic "are simply two faces, interior and exterior, of a single revolution".[15] The primacy of the mental or symbolic shift is in any case difficult since the domestication of plants and animals is a long drawn-out process with no clear beginning. It is thus difficult to say which came first, domestication or the symbolic revolution.

Similar conclusions are reached if we consider Cauvin's account of later developments in the Neolithic of the Middle East. Cauvin treated at some length the spread of the PPNB. He saw this as a movement of people from the middle Euphrates, sometimes integrating into local cultures, and introducing rectangular architecture, herding, and the 'skull cult' into, for example, Anatolia and the central and southern Levant between 8600 BC and 7000 BC. He then discussed a further spread of the Neolithic in the later PPNB and Pottery Neolithic between 7500 BC and 6300 BC. This was seen as a 'great exodus' of people who now moved into semi-arid landscapes and into Cyprus. He described the spread as a colonisation, even messianic in tone.[16]

Once again, Cauvin shunned climatic, population pressure and economic explanations for these expansionist movements. In moving towards a psycho-cultural alternative, he described the internal cultural characteristics that made the PPNB a

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7. CAUVIN, 2000: 23.
8. *Ibid.*: 124.
9. *Ibid.*: 209.
10. *Ibid.*: 32.
11. *Ibid.*: 209.
12. *Ibid.*: 65.

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13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*: 220.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*: 205.

'conquering culture'.[17] He took various aspects of the PPNB and identified an underlying whole. First, there was the bull cult which showed a male virility confronting and civilizing. Second, he drew into this masculine theme the symbolic prestige invested in projectile points. Third, the domestication of the goat was linked to an imagination in which virility was expressed in terms of a confrontation with animals. Fourth, the shift to the rectangular house was fitted into the same scheme, in that the rectangular was seen as more artificial, more imposed, more a conscious expression of self than the circular house form.[18] The whole underlying the PPNB was this central involvement of the male, unlike the earlier emphasis on female figurines. And it was this virility which explained the expansionism. He talked further of the psychological character of this cultural whole–that it contained an existential *malaise*, an impatience that moved material progress forward.[19]

As with the initial adoption of agriculture, one is bound to ask what caused the shift in culture and psychology in the PPNB. Again the psycho-cultural was given primacy over the material and the economic. As a result it became difficult to explain change in the psycho-cultural realm.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AT ÇATALHÖYÜK

Largely in response to the arguments made by Cauvin, we have recently been using a grant from the Templeton Foundation to explore the role of religion at Çatalhöyük and to examine further the questions that he raised in his seminal book and related works. The first phase of this new work inspired by Cauvin has been completed[20] and I would like to describe the results here. The Templeton project involved an international study group of archaeologists but also anthropologists and philosophers of religion. This group of scholars came to the site each summer for three years and attempted to explore questions about religion in relation to specific data and the new results from the site.[21]

Our discussions centered around four questions, all of which take various aspects of Cauvin's arguments and subject them to scrutiny.

1 – DEFINITION AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECOGNITION OF RELIGION

What is religion and how can archaeologists recognize the spiritual, religious and transcendent in early time periods?

The group of Templeton scholars engaged at first hand with the materials from the site and asked questions of the archaeologists. Detailed discussions in the laboratories at the site, regarding obsidian, pottery and figurines or plants, animal bones and human remains led to reflexive dialogue about the degree to which a separate spiritual or religious part of life could be discerned, especially in these early time periods.

At theoretical and comparative levels, problems immediately arose regarding whether it was helpful to talk of a separate arena of life at Çatalhöyük that could be called religious. Sociological and anthropological debate has demonstrated the difficulties of defining a separate religious sphere in certain forms of society. M. Bloch[22] bluntly stated that "I am confident that there was no religion in Çatalhöyük", meaning that the houses themselves were both religious and domestic: there was no separate religious sphere. The sociologist R. Bellah[23] has argued that the term 'religion' was a relatively recent concept, and that 'transcendent' was a term that was given very specific meanings in different religions. Scholars from religious studies and philosophy often take a post-foundational approach and argue for diversity. For example, L. Shults[24] and J.W. van Huyssteen[25] argued for religion as an emergent property of complex human systems. Their accounts of religion remained nuanced and contextual. And yet they saw value in continued use of the term 'religion' as a general category.

The philosopher of religion van Huyssteen[26] did not see a clearly demarcated religious domain in the Neolithic at Çatalhöyük. The neurological capacity for different forms of consciousness was linked by him to the human ability to symbolize. Human spiritual and religious experience can be understood as an emergent consequence of the symbolic capacity in humans. Religion is about playing out specific and embodied worldviews within this universal framework. Shults[27] suggested that religious theorists no longer deal with an opposition between matter and spirit. Referring to emergent complexity theory, he saw spirituality as an emergent form of self-awareness. The spiritual is associated with the experience of ulti-

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17. *Ibid*.: 122.
18. *Ibid*.: 32.
19. *Ibid*.: 205.
20. HODDER, 2010.
21. HODDER, 1996, 2000, 2005a, b and c and 2006; HODDER (ed.), 2007.

22. BLOCH, 2010: 161.
23. BELLAH, 1964.
24. SHULTS, 2010.
25. VAN HUYSSTEEN, 2010.
26. *Ibid*.
27. SHULTS, 2010.

mate boundaries or boundedness. Spirituality at Çatalhöyük was not a separate domain. The hiding and revealing process (for example hiding and revealing paintings or obsidian caches or human skulls) suggested a concern with ultimate boundaries. The ridges and boundaries on the floors and platforms that defined everyday activity in the Çatalhöyük house were linked to the dead buried beneath the floors, and in this way they were linked to the ultimate—perhaps to the ancestors.

Anthropologists such as Bloch,[28] Webb Keane[29] and Peter Pels[30] were wary of the value of the term religion, which they saw as inextricably linked to particular developed social and institutional forms and particular modes of power. But they nevertheless were keen to develop an account of phenomena that others might categorize as religious. Thus Bloch[31] discussed houses, roles, corporate groups and the transcendental at Çatalhöyük rather than religion. Bloch[32] has also suggested an approach to religion that sees it as deriving from, and continuous with, the general human capacity to imagine other worlds.[33] In these ways his position, at the general level, is close to that of Shults and van Huyssteen.[34] Bloch[35] describes humans and chimpanzees as having complex social worlds. Chimpanzees engage in much Machiavellian politicking— they have what Bloch terms a *transactional* social. But they do not have the *transcendental* social—that is roles that continue on beyond the individual. It is the ability to imagine a social structure that endures, and to treat elders as honored previous holders of roles, and indeed to treat ancestors as holders of roles, that separates humans from chimpanzees. This exposition by Bloch is highly relevant to Çatalhöyük and to the origins of settled life in towns, because the evidence strongly suggests that a key concern at this time period was indeed the endurance of roles, of structure, and of the centrality of ancestors.[36] The transcendental imaginings that are seen in the art and symbolism suggest a social world concerned with establishing the longer-term social relations that are at the heart of agricultural and settled town life. But more generally, we can see the possibility of religion as an emergent property of the human capacity to imagine—as seen in Upper Palaeolithic art well before the agricultural revolution.[37]

One example of the assumptions that often, unhelpfully, travel with the term 'religion' is that religion is always about belief. Talal Asad[38] has argued that historically anthropologists had come to understand religion as propositional, yet some religion is about proper practice rather than being propositional. Anthropologists now accept that much religion is not about propositions. However, even ritual practice involves some sense of belief. Belief and meaning do not need to be separate and propositional. They can be embodied and embedded. A different though comparable distinction is made by Whitehouse[39] in his discussion of modes of religiosity.

Keane[40] is another anthropologist wary of using the term 'religion' and seeking to find other, general and comparative, ways of describing what others mean by religious phenomena. He argues that what looks to us like religion emerges from convergences between different kinds of practice which are not necessarily 'religious' in their own right, but become so when they are combined. He suggests that there is evidence at Çatalhöyük of the general processes of 'marking' and 'absence'. Marking is a way of setting some things as apart, special, different, difficult. The most obvious examples at Çatalhöyük are the kills of dangerous wild animals, the associated feasts, and the display of the resulting bucrania. One source of the difficulty associated with such marking is absence. Absence refers to the ways in which some practices produce an experience that there is something beyond experience that is still relevant. This something beyond is not just gone; it impinges on us somehow. An example at Çatalhöyük is provided by the wild boar mandibles buried in the walls—absent (hidden) but still there and relevant to the lived practices of feasts and wild animal kills. Another example is the human bodies buried beneath the floors that remain relevant to social life so that the graves are re-opened and skulls removed and circulated. Obsidian and stalagmites deposited in caches and graves also produce the effect of absence. Practices that produce the effect of absence display people's control or power over absence and presence, and the transitions between them. Marking and absence work against the background of habit—the routine flow of daily life. In the Çatalhöyük house, marking, absence and habit all come together and affect one another. Life may be a continuum between unconscious routine and conscious acts or events, but certain practices sharpen the differences between the extremes of that continuum, to social effect.

28. BLOCH, 2010.
29. KEANE, 2010.
30. PELS, 2010.
31. BLOCH, 2010.
32. BLOCH, 2008.
33. *Ibid*. and 2010.
34. See above.
35. BLOCH, 2008.
36. See HODDER, 2007.
37. See VAN HUYSSTEEN, 2006.

38. ASAD, 1993.
39. WHITEHOUSE, 2004.
40. KEANE, 2010.

Fig. 1 – *Wild bull horns set into clay and plaster pillars in the northeast corner of Building 77 at Çatalhöyük.*

The approach outlined by Keane, and the related perspective of Pels,[41] seem very useful for archaeological discussion. The marking, hiding and making absent of things has long been a focus of archaeological interest in the religious, whether it be Renfrew's[42] account of things that attract attention and so mark, or Bradley's[43] discussion of ritual conspicuous deposition of metal objects (hidden or made absent) in rivers and bogs, or Tilley's[44] description of the marking of the landscape with rock art that symbolizes absent or distant animals or boats, or the common notion that objects that are carried over longer distances often have special significance or value that is manipulated socially.[45] In relation to Çatalhöyük the approach is very productive, partly because the marking and the absence can be set within the context of habitual routines. Because of the embedding of symbolism and ritual in domestic life at the site it is unhelpful to talk of a separate religious sphere, and yet it is clear that we need a way to talk of religious experience at the site, however much it is embedded in daily life. Thus the ridges on the house floors mark differences between activity areas. Bull horn pilasters mark the edges of platforms under which people are buried as in Building 77 (fig. 1) so that the platform is marked in relation to daily activities on the floors and so that the human bones buried beneath the platform are both made present (by the bull horn marking) and hidden or made absent. The whole

social process in the house can be described as one in which absences are marked, and the beyond is constructed in the midst of the practices of daily life.

It is clear that there were rules at Çatalhöyük about what could be done in different areas of the house.[46] Adults were buried in the northern part of the house but not in the southern part. Pottery that was used to cook food in the southern part of the house was never placed in a grave. Different types of matting were placed on different types of platform. There was social control over what could be done in different parts of the house, and over the transitions between those spaces. The practices that produced the effects of absence displayed people's control or power. The bull horns marked the dead beneath the platform and made them present. The obsidian cached below the floor could from time to time be dug up and used. The skulls of the ancestor could from time to time be dug up, used and re-deposited to found a new house. In all these ways the control over absence and presence, and the transitions between them, were integrally linked to social power—perhaps between elders and youngers.

But it is important to recognize that the ways in which marking and absence are manipulated and experienced vary through time and in different contexts. How people experience absence and the beyond varies. Whitehouse[47] describes these different ways of experiencing as "modes of religiosity". Most rituals are either high or low arousal. All low frequency rituals are high intensity (Whitehouse terms these *imagistic*) so that the experiences are burned into people's minds. People then reflect on what happened over long periods of time. Low intensity, high frequency ritual (termed *doctrinal*) is more closely associated with the transmission of doctrine and knowledge, and it often involves persuasive leaders. At first sight, Çatalhöyük would seem to fit into the high frequency, low intensity category since the same images, symbols and practices are repeated over and over again in the houses. But there also seem to be cases of low frequency, high arousal events such as the feasts associated with wild bulls. Whitehouse and Hodder[48] have explored the value of this model for Çatalhöyük. There seem to be good grounds for arguing that 1,400 years of occupation at the site saw a gradual shift from a more imagistic to a more doctrinal mode. Much the same argument could be made for the Neolithic of Anatolia and the Middle East more generally. The PPNB often seems associated with high arousal and remarkable events such as the deposition of human figures

41. Pels, 2010.
42. Renfrew, 1985.
43. Bradley, 1990.
44. Tilley, 1997.
45. Sherratt, 1981.

46. Hodder, 2006.
47. Whitehouse, 2004.
48. Hodder, 2010.

at 'Ain Ghazal,[49] the plastering of skulls at Jericho and other sites[50] or the impressive carved stone stele with dangerous wild animals at Göbekli.[51] And yet by the Pottery Neolithic throughout the area there is less evidence of obvious and distinctive ritual practices and a wider dissemination of symbolism into pottery decoration and stamp seals. Evaluation of this claim for a broader shift in modes of religiosity at this time will have to await further research, but the overall effect of the approach offered by Whitehouse is to shift archaeologists from identifying religion as a separate sphere to focusing on practices, effects and experiences.

Another approach to identifying different religious modes is Nakamura's[52] contrast between magic and religion. It is difficult to provide stable distinctions between religion and magic, but the latter term is often used to describe practical acts that lie outside or alongside religious schemes. While it is difficult to draw lines between magic, science and religion, it is often the contrasts with the other two terms that define magic. Magic is part of religion but it also transgresses. The normal religious themes at Çatalhöyük (the clay plastered bucrania, burial, dangerous wild things in the clay house) can be contrasted with unusual clusters of objects. These clusters include obsidian, antler, pottery fragments, crystal, pigment, special stones or axe heads, stalactites, a baby leg, fossils and so on. Deposits of such objects often occur in liminal spaces and times, for example in the construction or abandonment deposits in a house. They can be termed magical in that they seem linked to particular practices that stand against the usual religious repertoire and can be seen as having a more direct instrumental character.

In summary, there can be disagreement about whether the term 'religious' should be used at all in the context of discussion about the types of society associated with Çatalhöyük, but it is clear that a more applicable approach is one that focuses on marking or dealing with 'the beyond'—defined as absence, ultimate boundaries or the transcendental. In small-scale societies, and at Çatalhöyük in particular, this focus on 'the beyond' is often embedded within forms of social and material life and does not constitute a separate institutional sphere.

2 – RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Are changes in spiritual life and religious ritual a necessary prelude to the social and economic changes that lead to 'civilization'?

This question raised by Cauvin's work can be explored in relation to two aspects of the data from the Middle East and Çatalhöyük. The first aspect concerns the evidence from the Middle East as a whole, and deals with the factors associated with the formation of settled villages from the 11th millennium BC onwards. But the claim can also be explored in relation to the domestication of cattle at Çatalhöyük itself in the 7th millennium BC.

In relation to the first, more general question the new evidence from Göbekli Tepe is particularly compelling.[53] There is much scholarly fascination with this site, not only with the richness of its symbolism but also with the evidence that such elaboration and complexity could occur so early, before fully domesticated plants and animals. The site seems to invite the speculation that communities first came together around large-scale and intense rituals before they intensified their subsistence economies to such an extent that genetic change occurred in crops and flocks. But it is important to recognize that genetic change in the process of domesticating plants and animals was preceded by the intensive collecting, cultivating and herding[54] of genetically wild species. Some degree of settled agglomerations, sometimes associated with ritual structures, occur from the Natufian onwards in the southern Levant.[55] Göbekli Tepe is a remarkable site and it raises in a very stark fashion the possibility of a very early role for symbolism and ritual in the formation of settled agricultural life. But it is itself only part of a larger and gradual process.

Given the answer to question 1 above, a close tie is to be expected between spiritual and religious life and increasing social and economic complexity. Different forms of religion are appropriate to different contexts (so that it is not possible to have Moses in aboriginal Australia). Shults[56] argues that changes in symbolic thought probably were a prelude to the major changes that led to complex 'civilizations'. It seems possible that the idea of living together came before the town or settled village—the idea of togetherness preceded the concrete realization. Picking apart causal chains is always fraught with

49. ROLLEFSON, 2000.
50. BONOGOFSKY, 2005.
51. SCHMIDT, 2006.
52. NAKAMURA, 2010.

53. SCHMIDT, 2006.
54. FULLER, 2007.
55. KUIJT, 2000; HODDER, 2007.
56. SHULTS, 2010.

difficulties and the most likely answer to the second question is that religious and socio-economic life were and are inextricably linked. Thus in contrast to Cauvin's views, religion accompanied and made possible domesticated and settled life rather than being an originator.

There is possible evidence that at the more specific level at Çatalhöyük, changes in the symbolic manipulation of cattle occurred before biological evidence of domestication of cattle. We await the new evidence from the site to see at what point cattle were domesticated—in the upper levels of the East Mound or only in the later West Mound. But there is certainly a decrease in the availability or use of wild cattle in the upper levels of the Neolithic East Mound, and also in the upper levels we see new forms of symbolic relationship between humans and animals, with for example domesticated animals being buried with humans. It would be possible to argue that the presence of wild bull horns in many contexts in houses in the lower and middle levels at Çatalhöyük indicates the symbolic control of wild animals that were domesticated (whether locally or brought from elsewhere) in the upper levels.

But how did the religious and the economic interact in relation to cattle at Çatalhöyük? In terms of the framework presented by Keane[57] and summarized above, cattle were marked at Çatalhöyük by killing, feasting and display, which made human agency over them a focus of attention and interest. This could have been a factor in the domestication process: various ways of marking cattle as *foci* of special attention drew attention to what humans could do to them, as Cauvin argued. Thus the symbolic and religious marking might have accelerated whatever incipient domestication was already going on. By way of contrast, sheep and goat had already been domesticated at the start of the occupation at Çatalhöyük. They were thus less useful in the production of absence—and indeed they played little to no role in the symbolism and religious practices at the site. Indeed, one might ask why cattle were domesticated so late at Çatalhöyük and elsewhere in the Middle East? After, all sheep and goat had been domesticated for one to two millennia before cattle were domesticated. At Çatalhöyük it remains possible that the cattle were specifically 'kept' wild so that they could play their role in the production of absence, the imagining and manipulation of the beyond. The houses in the early to middle levels of the site depended on this social construction of difference and otherness in transcendental experience.

Overall, there is much both general and specific data to support the notion that changes in spiritual life and religious ritual accompanied the social and economic changes that produced settled life based on domestic resources. But the second question also asks whether it was a necessary prelude and accompaniment. Settled agricultural life involved a whole series of new structures and constraints on social and economic life. Longer term relationships had to be set up to deal with the delayed returns from the investments of labor. There had to be ways of dealing with disputes in the large villages and towns. There had to be mechanisms for the passing down of property. All these changes involved new conceptions of humans in relation to each other, and in relation to the environment and its resources. The new structures had to be imagined in a spiritual realm alongside their envisioning in practice.

Some additional support for the overall conclusions at Çatalhöyük has been provided in the last few years in the excavations conducted by D. Baird and T. Watkins at the nearby sites of Boncuklu and Pınarbaşı.[58] These sites stretch back to the 13th millennium BC, and they show, especially at Boncuklu, the very early development of many of the special features of Çatalhöyük. Boncuklu has the division of houses into south and north parts, burials beneath floors, and elaborate installations on walls. And yet the site is small and low density. So it is clear that all the elaborate ritual and symbolism does not suddenly appear at Çatalhöyük as the result of agglomeration. Rather, the symbolism already existed prior to the aggregation on the Konya Plain at Çatalhöyük. The earlier small dispersed settlements were abandoned as people moved into the big center. But the inhabitants brought with them a symbolic and religious world through which they envisaged and built the town.

3 – ROLE OF NEW FORMS OF HUMAN AGENCY IN THE DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS

Do human forms take on a central role in the spirit world in the early Holocene, and does this centrality lead to new conceptions of human agency that themselves provide the possibility for the domestication of plants and animals?

This claim derived from Cauvin's work is largely a historical question to be answered by reference to archaeological data and is less amenable to broad anthropological and theological debate. As with the second question, it seems likely that the domestication of plants and animals involved changed conceptions of the world and that these changed conceptions were embedded within other realms of thought. In particular, the domestication of animals would have involved new conceptions of the relationships between humans and animals which must

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57. Keane, 2010.

58. Baird, 2007 and 2008.

have been linked to other changes in thought at the time. The archaeological evidence suggests that in contrast to the cave paintings and other symbolism of the Upper Palaeolithic in Europe, the imagery from Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük indicates a human domination of wild animals. At Göbekli Tepe, scorpions, spiders, snakes, vultures, foxes, lions and bulls are shown on stele that are undoubtedly anthropomorphic, with hands and arms shown and in one case a belt. Many of these animals were never domesticated and yet they are shown in a context dominated by large human figures. At Çatalhöyük, on the other hand, some of the animals shown in the paintings would later show morphological change indicating domestication. There are baiting and teasing scenes involving bulls and wild boar, but stags and bears are also shown baited. There are a number of figurines (clay and stone) showing humans associated with leopards or sitting on wild animals, and of course the most famous image from the site shows a woman flanked by possible leopards, her hands apparently resting on their heads in a dominating position. Many of the paintings have been interpreted as showing humans wearing leopard skins. It seems reasonable to argue that in these cases human agents were able symbolically to dominate wild animals. This conceptual domination would have been helpful as the process of actual domination of animals in terms of their domestication got under way.

In terms of Keane's[59] account of religion in terms of marking and absence it is possible to explore how such processes have historical consequences. Keane[60] has argued that marking and absence both sharpen people's awareness of their own agency or the agency of other beings. In other words, whether people are claiming agency for themselves, for example by killing dangerous animals, or displacing it onto others, for example by treating birds as spirits, they are objectifying agency. By objectifying agency, people can reflect on it. This makes it possible for them to transform habit into purposeful actions. It allows people to act in inventive, or morally responsible, or simply audacious new ways. If the Neolithic can be seen as a revolution in human abilities and efforts to intervene in the world, then self-consciousness about agency itself is a crucial part of the process.

4 – PART PLAYED BY SYMBOLISM OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN THE FORMATION OF SETTLED VILLAGE LIFE

Do violence and death act as the foci *of transcendent religious experience during the transitions of the early Holocene in the Middle East, and are such themes central to the creation of social life in the first large agglomerations of people?*

As noted above it was a key component of Cauvin's account that violence played a central role in the PPNB. In this fourth question, the Templeton project considered the broader question of the role of violent imagery throughout the Neolithic, both in relation to males and females and in relation to death.

Violent imagery is seen at Göbekli Tepe (in the animals with bared teeth) and at Çatalhöyük (for example, the wild boar teeth and vulture beaks placed in walls). Hodder and Meskell[61] have described other examples from eastern Turkey and the northern Levant, and the rather fewer examples in the southern Levant. Shults[62] has attempted to understand this imagery in terms of the intensification it produced. He argued that in such moments of intense or heightened experience there was an awareness of the need for a new understanding of the self in relation to others. The participant was thus released to find a place in the world in a new way. The productive aspects of violence, rather than negative connotations, are often overlooked by archaeologists. Indeed, the very term 'violence' might be unhelpful — as it may be other aspects of what we perceive as violent scenes that may be more salient. Thus a leopard claw may be kept and deposited in a burial[63] because it indexes a powerful animal or because it endures rather than because it represents death and violence.

R. Girard[64] has provided a useful framework for interpreting the violent imagery at Çatalhöyük. For him religion is a way of managing and evacuating the violence generated inside the human community. Most archaic religions show a narrative that involves going through violence to resolution. At Çatalhöyük there is often a pairing, two cranes, two skulls or two confronting leopards in deadlock. The other key symbol is the reverse of this — a group of people surrounding an exaggerated animal. The bull is about to be killed and taken into the house. The people will kill and be reconciled. This is not a matter of worshipping violence, but of peace produced through

59. KEANE, 2010.
60. *Ibid.*

61. HODDER and MESKELL, 2011.
62. SHULTS, 2010.
63. HODDER, 2006.
64. GIRARD, 1988.

violence. There is a destructuring in the deadlock and a resolution into a new structure if the bull is treated right.

Bloch[65] has noted that violence would have been a central theme in Çatalhöyük. His approach is more sociological[66] and based on his general assessment that Çatalhöyük was some form of 'house society'[67] in which rights and resources were passed down in 'houses' (groups of houses led together by the passing down of rights). He argued that in such contexts there would have been the violence of wrenching women from their birth 'house' and forcing them to live in a marital 'house'. More generally it seems likely that there would have been much conflict over resources in the dense town. And yet there is much evidence from the human remains at the site that the people at Çatalhöyük had lived non-violent lives. There were few indications of the cuts, wounds, parry fractures, or crushed skulls. So how had the potential to violence been so well managed at Çatalhöyük? Bloch[68] has argued that symbolic violence was a necessary part of the movement into another world. Most human societies understand that there is a permanent framework to social life that transcends the natural transformative processes of birth, growth, reproduction, ageing and death. The violence and symbolic killing take people beyond process into permanent entities such as descent groups. By leaving this life, it is possible to see oneself and others as part of something permanent and life-transcending. For Bloch,[69] mastering the virility of wild bulls in rituals and depictions in the house 'reanimated' the transcendental social and thus contributed to the continuity of the house.

The moments of danger and/or violence involved movements away from the here-and-now; they involved transcendent experiences in which the social group could be transformed and made permanent. So it seems that there could indeed be a link between the violence in the imagery at Çatalhöyük and the lack of violence on human bodies. (There may have been regional variation in the Middle East Neolithic, with perhaps more evidence of bodily violence at Çayönü.) At Çatalhöyük, social violence was dealt with by living within a symbolic, transcendent world of violence in which conflicts were resolved and social structures made permanent.

The view that the violent imagery at Çatalhöyük and other sites had a key role in creating the social and the long-term as people first settled down and formed complex societies is summarized in Fig. 2. In this diagram, on the central horizontal axis, the person is made social through violence and death, either through initiation and other rituals or in the daily interactions with bull horns and other animal parts present or made absent in the house. In the lower part of the diagram, this social process is linked to the transcendental and the spiritual as persons experience something beyond themselves that is integral to their lives. Spiritual power is gained by individuals in these experiences, but also is controlled by elders. In the upper part of the diagram these spiritual powers are related to social powers. The social manipulation of rituals and symbols of violence give power to elders and dominant houses. There is also evidence that the power of wild animals was used to provide or protect. Thus in fig. 1 the bull horns surround and protect the ancestors buried beneath the platform and in one case wild goat horns were found over, perhaps protecting, a bin containing lentils (Building 1).[70]

This is a very different conception of the symbolism and ritual associated with the origins of agriculture and settled villages from that normally outlined.[71] It has become commonplace to argue that the early farmers would have emphasized ideas of fertility, nurturing and abundance.[72] The earliest settled settlements are often associated with images of women, sometimes interpreted as pregnant or fertile and much attention is paid to the few female figurines that have been found. But in fact male and phallic imagery is common, linked to images of wild male animals at Göbekli Tepe and Çatalhöyük. Social rules and roles seem to have been established in these first communities largely through a conception of the world in which violence and dangerous wild animals played a central part, as outlined in fig. 2.

Keane[73] has discussed violence and death based on a Sumbanese example. He argues that there is a bundle of many different things that killing large dangerous animals does. The process is not unitary, and violence might not be the most important aspect. One aspect that he stresses because it is consistent with other things going on at Çatalhöyük is that killing big animals is a dramatic display of the control over the transition from life to death, visible to invisible, presence to absence. Thus, once again, social power is created through violence and death.

Turning to the social role of death, it is clear that this played an important part in the building of house-based social groups at Çatalhöyük. It is clear that while all houses were

65. BLOCH, 2010.
66. See BLOCH, 2008.
67. JOYCE and GILLSEPIE, 2000.
68. BLOCH, 2008.
69. BLOCH, 1992.

70. HODDER, 2006.
71. *E.g.,* CAUVIN, 2000; MELLAART, 1967.
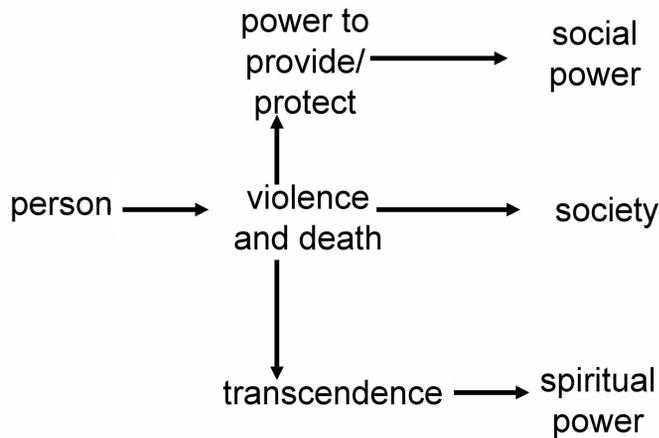72. HODDER and MESKELL, 2011.
73. KEANE, 2010.

power to
provide/ ——————▶   social
protect   power

person ——————▶   violence ——————▶   society
                          and death

transcendence ——————▶   spiritual
                                         power

Fig. 2 – *An interpretation of the role of violence in the social
and religious process at Çatalhöyük.*

very similar in size and elaboration at the site, some houses were larger, more elaborate, and lasted longer than others. These more elaborate houses often contained more burials than other houses and indeed seem to have been used as repositories of the dead from other houses. Thus some physical sun-dried mud-brick houses became 'houses' of people held together by the circulation of human remains. Because these 'houses' also seem to have amassed animal parts, to be curated and passed down as memorials of feasts and animal kills, and because they also contained other symbolic elaboration such as reliefs and paintings, these houses have been termed 'history houses'.[74]

This focus on history houses, and on the wider category of house societies to which they belong, might seem like an unnecessary tangent in a discussion about religion. But in fact this would be a misunderstanding of the role of the house at Çatalhöyük. In house based societies, houses are 'religion'. As we have seen above, the play of presence and absence that is the religious process at Çatalhöyük takes place in the floor platforms, ridges, accoutrements, burials of the house. In particular, the heads of wild animals and humans are passed down from generation to generation within individual houses and between houses. Following Bloch, we can say that the virility of wild bulls installed in the material house reanimated the social house. The passing down of the objects of the house and the remembering and reliving of earlier houses constituted the social through the religious.

A quantitative analysis of the houses at Çatalhöyük has attempted to explore the differences between history houses

and other houses.[75] Little difference could be found between these two house types in terms of access to resources. So how was it possible for some houses to gain social and spiritual power through the amassing of skulls and wild bull horns and human burials while others did not? Keane[76] has suggested that bull horns accumulated over a career. The marks in a house (horns, paintings, etc.) were historical, they were traces of events. Some houses never got marks or burials, and they might be categorically different from those that did (maybe branch or cadet lines, for example). But the differences among houses with marks may have been historical in nature, not categorical. Over generations, some houses acquired more events than others. Houses with 60 burials probably were categorically different from those with none. But houses with many bucrania or paintings were also houses that had persisted long enough to acquire more marks. As archaeologists we catch them at a late stage in the career of accumulating marks. The quantity of marks is in part a function of time. This explanation begs the question of why some houses persisted longer than others. Perhaps many contingent factors were involved. But it remains possible that the more persistent and long-lasting houses were those that most effectively manipulated marks and absences; those that came to be recognized as good at protecting the dead were also most able at reanimate the traces of kills and feasts.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that, to a large extent, recent research at Çatalhöyük, both comparative and empirical, has largely confirmed the value of responding to the ideas in Cauvin's seminal 2000 book. It may not have been helpful to separate the mental, the symbolic, the religious from daily life and certainly a separate religious institutional sphere cannot be identified at Çatalhöyük. Such separations are produced in our own time but not in the time of the Neolithic. The recent finds from Göbekli Tepe and other sites have demonstrated that female symbolism was only part of a wider suite of symbols in which males and violence played equally important roles. It seems evident that symbolic and religious components of life were central to the domestication of plants and animals and that they played an early and formative role, even if they were not originators. It also seems clear that changes in the conceptualization of

74. HODDER and PELS, 2010.

75. *Ibid.*
76. KEANE, 2010.

humans in relation to animals were an early and necessary part of the gradual process of domesticating animals in the Middle East.

The evidence thus seems to support the rather more nuanced version of the Neolithisation process found in parts of Cauvin's book and described in the introduction to this article. Rather than religion or new forms of agency being prime causes in the domestication of plants and animals and the emergence of settled villages, religion and the symbolic were thoroughly engrained within the interstices of the new way of life. Religion played a primary role, allowing new forms of agency, setting up a symbolic world of violence through which new longer-term social and economic relations could be produced, but there is not good evidence that it was an independent cause of the changes.

Perhaps more important than the specific claims of Cauvin and the particular responses to them, his work has attracted very wide discussion across a swathe of disciplines. As a result, the debate about the role of religion in the Neolithic has been transformed and brought into closer dialogue with anthropology, philosophy and religious studies. The result is richer and more complex and it is to Cauvin that we should offer thanks; he who set us on this broader and more productive path, thinking new thoughts and encountering new ideas and data on the way.

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