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Constructing a cosmos

Architecture, power and domestication at Çatalhöyük

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the structures of Çatalhöyük were constructed exemplars of a tiered cosmology comprising three interacting levels: an upper and a lower realm and, between them, the level of daily life. The dimly lit rooms were, in some circumstances, thought of as spaces in the lower realm, the walls being an interface between the people who entered a room and a spirit world of animals and supernatural beings. The domestication of the aurochs can be understood within this cognitive setting. Some ritual specialists believe that animal spirit-helpers can become 'real' animals and thereby manifest their owners' status and power. It is argued that the domestication of wild aurochs at Çatalhöyük was implicated in comparable practices of control and status display within a tiered cosmos. The domestication of the aurochs was thus neither a deliberate strategy to maximize labour, nor a fortunate accident, but rather a by-product of social processes.

KEYWORDS

altered consciousness • Çatalhöyük • cosmology • domestication • shamanism • symbolism

■ INTRODUCTION

Every year the study of the origins of civilisation in the Near East becomes more complex and thus more human. (Mellaart, 1967: 16)

... we are on the edge of a new type of understanding of a mythical world deeply embedded in a complex social system ... (Hodder, 1996b: 366)

In the early 1960s, Mellaart showed that Çatalhöyük, a double mound on the Konya Plain in southern Anatolia, affords remarkably diverse evidence for Neolithic beliefs and practices (Mellaart, 1967). New excavations, led by Hodder, began in 1993 and have re-awakened interest in the site (www.catalhoyuk.com/study; <http://catal.arch.cam.ac.uk>). Here, I draw on the older and the more recent work to argue that Çatalhöyük architecture and two- and three-dimensional imagery were interrelated components of a coherent 'mythical world' and that the domestication of the aurochs began to take place within this symbolic and social complex.

Essentially, I concentrate on a set of social processes that was intimately related to Çatalhöyük architecture and imagery – the material expression of a mythical world. In adopting this focus, I do not deny the importance of the domestication of plants and the social changes therein implicated (Hayden, 1995, gives a perceptive overview). Nor do I deny the significance of ecological and demographic pressures. But increasing sedentism, socio-economic competition, climatic change and population increase do not in themselves lead inexorably to agriculture or the domestication of animals. On the contrary, however formative they were, those forces worked through dynamic social relations and belief systems.

After an introductory overview of three-tiered cosmology, I divide my argument into four interrelated sections: (1) cosmology and architecture and what these complementary parameters meant for human movement at Çatalhöyük; (2) imagery in the built context of Çatalhöyük; (3) a brief examination of what the categories 'wild', 'death' and 'birth' might have meant at Çatalhöyük; and (4) the domestication of animals on the Konya Plain.

■ TIERED COSMOLOGY

The notion of 'shamanism' as a useful category is today contentious (Atkinson, 1992; Kehoe, 2002; Klein, et al., 2002; Lewis-Williams, 2003b). Since the first French publication in 1951 of Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1972) there has, it is true, been a tendency to dehistoricize shamanism and so to mask social and cognitive differences. Some writers today therefore tend to emphasize dissimilarities rather than the



more puzzling similarities between geographically distant 'shamanisms'. Yet, even those who recognize all the problems with the word nevertheless find it useful (Thomas and Humphrey, 1996). To avoid becoming embroiled in an arid logomachy, I restrict my use of 'shamanism' to hunting and gathering societies, both generalized and complex, and to others that give or gave prominence to hunting and have ritual practitioners (however numerous and whatever their social and political status), who enter altered states of consciousness (by whatever means) to perform such tasks as healing, divination, control of animals, control of the weather and extra-corporeal travel (Lewis-Williams, 1996, 2002). Further, I use 'shamanistic' to refer to general cosmological beliefs held by such communities and 'shamanic' to refer more specifically to rituals and experiences of shamans (Taçon, 1983; Whitley, 1998).

Throughout the world, shamanistic peoples believe in a tiered cosmos. Its ubiquity suggests great antiquity and, I argue, neuropsychological origins (Clottes and Lewis-Williams, 1998; Lewis-Williams, 1996, 2002). Neurologically 'wired' experiences of altered consciousness include sensations of passing through a vortex or tunnel and flight. At its simplest, the tiered cosmos comprises three levels: a subterranean realm inhabited by its peculiar spirits and spirit-animals (the tunnel experience and associated hallucinations); an upper level situated in or above the sky, similarly populated by its own spirits and creatures (flight and associated hallucinations); and an intermediate level on which human beings live and on which the lower and upper levels impinge in various ways. Some shamanistic communities believe in multiple subdivisions of these basic levels. No level is, however, immune to spiritual influence. Shamans are those who are believed to have acquired the ability to travel between levels of the cosmos in order to interact with the spirits and spirit-animals that they encounter. Writers often refer to the shamans' mediatory route as the *axis mundi*.

Owing to its neuropsychological origins, this kind of tripartite cosmology is found, in one form or another, in all shamanistic societies. It is aptly illustrated on some Siberian shamans' drums. The various ways in which the representations on these drums are structured is governed by the perspective adopted; on some, one of the tiers may be implied rather than depicted. All three components are present in a Turkic Barabin drum drawing that Philippe von Strahlenberg published in 1730 (Oppitz, 1992: Fig. 2). The upper section represents the realm above and contains a winged figure that is the shaman's guide on spiritual journeys, three heavenly bodies and three stars that serve as points of orientation for the shaman on his transc cosmological journeys (Figure 1). The three animals depicted in this section carry the shaman on his spiritual travels. Between the upper and lower components is a band formed by two parallel lines between which are two mirror-like zigzags; it represents the earth (Oppitz, 1992: 62). The lowest and largest section represents the underworld; in it are images

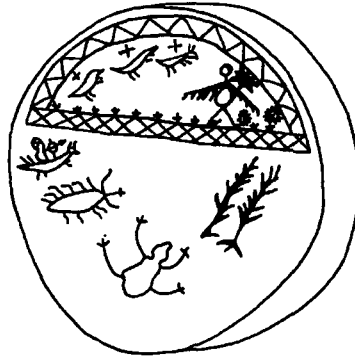


Figure 1 Siberian Barabin drum drawing showing the three-tiered shamanic cosmos. First published by P.J. Strahlenberg in 1730. (After Oppitz, 1992: Figure 2)

of the shaman seated on an animal that, like the ones above, carries him on his journey, a frog that is the bearer of the shaman's offerings to the supernatural, a bristly monster (also identified as a mammoth, a porcupine or a wild boar) that devours anything that impedes the shaman's progress and two trees that serve as ladders to reach the heavenly spheres; in other words, the trees are the *axis mundi*.

The ubiquity of comparable beliefs and experiences (e.g. flying, passing through a tunnel or vortex and encounters with animals) among hunter-gatherers, together with the universality of the human nervous system in *Homo sapiens* and the fundamental structure of some of the experiences that it generates in altered states, suggests that the potential for harnessing, or socializing, altered consciousness for ritual purposes has great antiquity. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine human life that does not define and accommodate altered states of consciousness in one way or another (I include dreaming and certain pathological conditions, such as temporal lobe epilepsy and schizophrenia, among altered states; Lewis-Williams, 2002). There is therefore some a priori reason for suggesting that the people of Çatalhöyük may have had a tiered cosmology and socio-religious framework that embodied the central features of shamanism, as I have restricted the meaning of the word. The *specifics* of their beliefs and cosmology would, of course, have been historically and culturally situated; they need to be explicated in the light of the varied and temporally diverse evidence at Çatalhöyük.

It now remains to be seen if this broad suggestion makes sense of and co-ordinates the evidence at Çatalhöyük in a persuasive way. The form of my argument is to assess the explanatory power of a hypothesis: does it



explain diverse data and show them to be parts of a coherent, rational whole?

■ COSMOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE AT ÇATALHÖYÜK

The architecture of Çatalhöyük was, I argue, implicated in attempts to define and, at the same time, manipulate both a tiered cosmos and social relations within that cosmos.

Apart from completely immured discard areas, there were few spaces or walkways between the self-contained groups of rooms, at least in the part of the settlement so far excavated. In effect, the roofs of the town created a new land surface. Each complex of rooms was entered through the roof by climbing down a wooden ladder set on the south wall, or, possibly, via a shaft at the north end (Hamilton, 1996). Recent excavations show that in some rooms a bench was constructed to facilitate entry from above (http://catal.arch.cam.ac.uk/catal/Archive_rep02/a01.html). The rooms to which the ladders led may have been naturally lit by small, highly positioned windows and, in some cases, possibly by light shafts.

Some rooms, generally those farthest from the entrance, were richly decorated. Mellaart called these rooms 'shrines' (Figure 2), but today the distinction between so-called shrines and living-rooms seems increasingly less clear-cut (Hodder, 1996a: Figures 1.8–1.17). I therefore abandon the use of 'shrine'; when referring to specific rooms that Mellaart identified as shrines I nevertheless retain an upper case S before the Roman numeral that designates the layer and the Arabic numeral that signifies the room. This convention enables the rooms to which I refer to be located easily on Mellaart's maps (Hodder, 1998: Figures 1.8–17; Mellaart, 1967: Figures 4–10). The abandonment of 'shrine' helps to avoid an imposed distinction between sacred and secular concepts, spaces and relationships. Rather than use 'house', another word with unwelcome connotations, I prefer the more neutral word 'structures'. It seems probable that domestic and ritual activities were not rigidly – spatially or conceptually – separated. There was probably a dynamic, creative *amalgam*, a seamless conceptual fabric, of what Westerners see as 'sacred' and 'secular'. As Last (1998: 373) rightly remarks, 'obsidian manufacture is as likely to have been a shamanistic practice as painting walls'.

Movement through the spaces created by the structures was almost certainly meaningful and socially contextualized. Access between rooms was afforded not by full-length doors, but by small porthole-like openings (72–7 cm high) through which people were obliged to crawl. Similar openings sometimes led to much smaller chambers behind richly decorated rooms. Entry into a complex of rooms thus entailed descent into a dimly

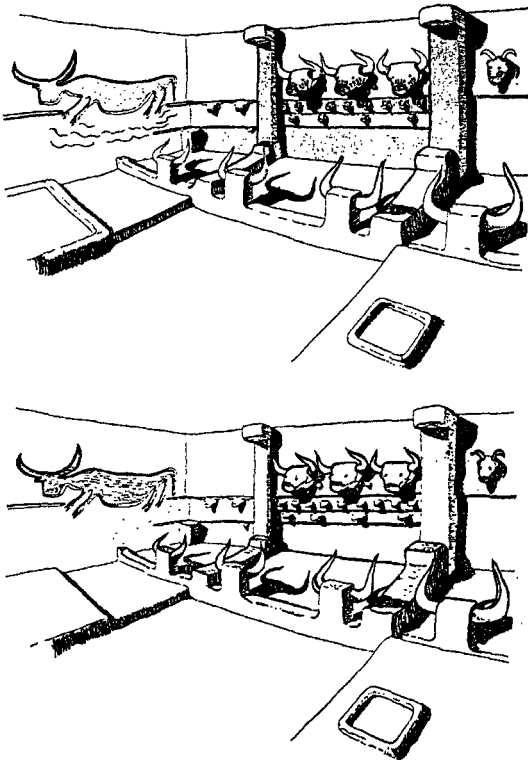


Figure 2 Reconstruction of the north and east walls of S.VI.A.8, showing platforms with bulls' horns along the edges, columns, wall panels, bucrania, an image of a bull cut into the plaster and a hearth. Above: third phase; below: fourth phase. (After Mellaart, 1967: Figures 41 and 42)

lit area; then, having descended, people had to crawl or bend low in order to move from one walled space to another.

To understand the way in which the people of Çatalhöyük conceptualized the structures and the experiences that they informed, I consider the significance of deep limestone caves. At Çatalhöyük, descent, limited light and the need to crawl through small openings between chambers are akin to the experience of moving through limestone caves. This suggestion is not as fanciful as it may at first seem. Such caves occur in the Taurus Mountains, only a couple of days' travelling to the south. That the people of Çatalhöyük knew and explored them is shown by some pieces of stalactite and limestone concretions from them that were found in the structures. Some of these were partly carved; others, suggestive of breasts, udders and human figures, were left uncarved. Although the data are sometimes



imprecise (Hamilton, 1996: 217), these pieces were deposited in decorated rooms together with 'cult statues' (e.g. S.VIA.10). Stalactite, along with blue or green apatite, was also used to make necklaces. Mellaart notes an implication of these finds: 'It does not require an overdose of imagination to imagine a host of deities, humans and petrified animals in the grandeur of one of the stalagmitic caves, of which plenty were available in the Taurus Mountains' (Mellaart, 1967: 178). Certainly, the presence at Çatalhöyük of broken-off stalactites suggests cosmological and religious beliefs about an underworld to which caves afforded one mode of access. In bringing the stalactites to the structures at Çatalhöyük, people may have been taking parts of that topographic underworld to their own built underworld. The structures may therefore have paralleled limestone caves in certain ways and yet, at the same time, created conceptual distance between the structures and the natural caves.

Some of the architectural details may now be considered. Vertical and horizontal features seem to have both expressed and constructed notions of a tiered cosmos.

First, *verticality* was initially and powerfully suggested by wooden ladders that gave access to the dimly lit rooms. Then, too, verticality was suggested by columns set in the walls (Figure 2). Mellaart believes that the form of these columns evolved from the structure of timber houses (Mellaart, 1967: 634). This is particularly clear in the earlier levels (X–VI A), where wooden posts of juniper and oak were separated by brick panels that did little to support the building. As I have pointed out, trees are sometimes associated with a shaman's vertical spiritual journeys (Oppitz, 1992).

There are no juniper trees on the Konya Plain, the nearest juniper forests being in the valleys of the Taurus Mountains. Wooden posts, beams and ladders are therefore further evidence for contact with the region of the limestone caves. By the time of Level II there was much less emphasis on timber, but the visually prominent vertical lines of the columns were not abandoned; wooden posts were replaced by skeuomorphic mud-brick pillars engaged against the walls.

The importance of columns, both timber and brick, beyond any structural function or aesthetic fashion is suggested by a number of observations. Pillars were sometimes emphasized by the use of red paint, a colour that almost certainly had symbolic connotations (Mellaart, 1967: 64). Two pillars on the north wall of S.VIB.44 were further embellished with parallel zigzags that give a diamond chain effect; in the centre of each diamond there is a dot (Mellaart, 1967: Figure 31). (I return to these patterns in a subsequent section.) When S.VI.10 was built on top of S.VII.10, the central post set in the north wall was duplicated, together with a plaster ram's head that seems to support it but in fact served no structural function. This sort of repetition is characteristic of cult continuity, a common but not inevitable feature at Çatalhöyük (Hodder, 1996b, 366; Mellaart, 1967: caption to Pls 9, 10).

Plaster bulls' heads are, however, more frequently associated with columns than are rams' heads. They are at the feet of columns or set in positions on them (Mellaart, 1967: Figures 14, 17, 19, 20, 24, 28, 32, 38, 39). By contrast, images of felines are never associated with columns, only with the panels set between columns. Finally, shorter columns were often constructed on the edges of the low platforms that subdivided the floors of rooms; these short columns were surmounted by plaster bulls' heads, often moulded around frontal bones and horn cores (Figure 2).

The construction of these platforms was, I argue, a further expression of verticality: they subdivided the floors into discrete levels, some of which were painted red. The dead, or rather selected dead, were buried beneath these platforms. A small platform that is usually in the north-east corner seems to have been associated with male burials, while the larger but lower eastern platform was associated with female burials, though continuing work at the site suggests that this generalization may require revision (Hamilton, 1996: 251–4). The spaces created by the platforms were probably socially significant, though not rigidly so. As people moved around in the rooms, they were obliged to step (or avoid stepping) from one level to another, physical movement thus repeatedly emphasizing and sometimes no doubt challenging social distinctions and the place of those distinctions within the overall verticality of the cosmos. In some instances, moving from one floor level to another entailed passing bucrania that were liminally situated on the edge of the step.

There seem thus to be two modes of verticality. First, columns, frequently associated with bulls' heads and ladders, reach from floor to roof of the structures. Second, the level on which people moved, the floor, was subdivided by platforms set at different heights. As the columns are sometimes supported and embellished by bucrania, so too are the edges of the platforms marked by bucrania. There may therefore be an implication that bulls' heads were associated with liminality and movement on the vertical axis of the cosmos and were thus associated with transition between levels, in other words, with spiritual journeys in a tiered cosmos.

Notions of *horizontality* are set within and defined by the vertical framework: horizontality develops, or opens up, some of the implications of the vertical axis. This dimension is portrayed principally by the frequent division of the plastered panels between columns into three horizontal levels. The lowest level is often painted red, certainly more often than any of the other levels. Other, more elaborate, patterns are also usually associated with the lowest level. While bulls' heads were also placed within the horizontal levels, the inter-columnar panels are pre-eminently the place of the so-called 'goddess' figures. The ways in which these figures were made and related to the panels deserve comment.

Apart from one highly stylized exception (which may not be a female figure at all; S.VI.14; Mellaart, 1967: Figure 32), female figures were not



modelled on vertical posts. Second, animal heads are solid and moulded in clay; often, especially in the later levels, actual skulls, horns and jawbones were set in the plaster. By contrast, the female figures were made of plaster moulded on bundles of reeds (Mellaart, 1967: 101). Notwithstanding technological considerations, the different materials and the different ways of gathering them (on the one hand plaster and parts of animals and, on the other, plaster and reeds) are suggestive of social distinctions in the process of production. Further, the different materials and construction techniques mark distinctions between the verticality of the posts and the horizontality of the panels. While posts are associated with bull and other imagery only, the panels carry diverse animal imagery and virtually exclusively female figures. Bulls, especially, control the columns; then they share the panels with other animals and female figures (Hamilton, 1996: 225–7).

At this point, the explanatory power of my hypothesis that Çatalhöyük architecture was embedded in some form of tiered cosmology may be summarized as follows. The notion of verticality may have been linked to the *axis mundi*, the transcological route travelled by and probably the preserve of shamans, who may have been members of most of the Çatalhöyük families, rather than a priestly class or rare spiritual figures. The columns were embellished with the imagery of bulls' heads. Bulls were probably the shamans' pre-eminent (if not exclusive) spirit-animals, the power of which made transcological travel possible. At the same time, notions of cosmological horizontality were reflected in the usually tripartite division of the intercolumnar panels and the differentiating platforms. Both the panels and the platforms may have been associated with the three principal subdivisions of the cosmos or possibly with subdivisions of the lowest level of the cosmos; the second of these possibilities is suggested by the fact that the platforms were encountered after descent into the 'subterranean' rooms. The continuing excavations may elucidate the significance of the panels and their relationship, if any, with the levels of the floors. The levels of the cosmos that the panels opened up were associated with bulls and with female imagery, the so-called goddesses. All in all, descent into the structures took people into a complexly constructed nether level of the cosmos that had social implications.

■ PERMEABLE WALLS

The walls at Çatalhöyük were not only painted; they were also moulded so that three-dimensional images were an integral part of the vertical surfaces. I have already referred to the moulded plaster heads of rams and, especially, bulls; there are also what appear to be moulded breasts. Some of these contain the beaks of vultures, fox teeth and, in one instance, a

weasel skull. Other animal parts moulded into the walls included jaws of wild boars (S.VI.8). Importantly, all these forms, especially the animal heads, are not only part of the walls: they also look out from the walls. From Level VIII onwards the use of horn-cores and skull bones increased and the heads were constructed around these parts of actual animals. As time passed, it seems that animals came to emerge more and more 'literally' from the walls.

Most of these three-dimensional images were replastered many times. The six-foot-long facing leopards of S.VIB.44 were replastered at least 40 times, during which process they began to lose their original sharp outlines (Mellaart, 1967: 118–20). Replastering was also practised on female figures. Some images were replastered up to a hundred times (Mellaart, 1967: 132). The renewal of images by means of the very substance of the walls themselves was, I argue, a meaningful act, not just an aesthetic refurbishing. The fact that, in the case of the leopards and indeed other images as well, the patterns painted on some layers of plaster were similar to but not identical with those on earlier layers suggests repeated appropriations and recreations of the images. The act of making was as important as (or even more important than) the finished image.

Over and above imagery integrated with walls, additional features and evidence for other practices are of interest. Many rooms had red-painted niches cut into the walls, seemingly to receive some sort of object. These niches were present in even the earliest decorated room (X.1: 104). They may parallel the Upper Palaeolithic practice of placing objects in the walls of caves (Bégouën and Clottes, 1981; Clottes and Lewis-Williams, 1996; Lewis-Williams, 2002). Then the importance of 'getting into' the walls is powerfully suggested by a remarkable brick burial in S.E.VIA.14 (Mellaart, 1967: 83). The body of a prematurely born child was wrapped in fine fabric together with a 'tiny bit of bright shell and a small chip of obsidian' and then enclosed in a brick that became part of the wall of the decorated room. The shell, associated with other burials as well, may have referred to a subaquatic nether world (the neurologically generated vortex is frequently accompanied by sensations of immersion) and the obsidian, probably obtained from the slopes of the volcanoes Göllü and Nenezi Dag, may similarly have referred to the underworld. Also stuck between bricks (though not exclusively so) were 'crude clay figurines, mainly of animals but including clumsy and highly schematized human figures' (Mellaart, 1967: 180). This is particularly true of the rooms of Level VIA (Mellaart, 1967: 78).

Finally, the importance of walls and movement of various kinds through them is powerfully suggested by what happened when a room was abandoned (Mellaart, 1967: 82). Not only were the plaster figures defaced by having their hands, feet and faces broken, but the small porthole-like 'doorways' between rooms were bricked up. Any further emergence of figures from the walls, as well as the possibility of human beings or, more



probably, spirit beings crawling through walls, was thus both literally and symbolically terminated before a new room was built.

In sum, the evidence I have outlined suggests that the walls of Çatalhöyük structures were ritually important. They were, I argue, thought of as a permeable interface between people in the structure and therefore already in a lower level of the cosmos and a spirit world that lay behind the walls. Images could, by oft-repeated ritual replastering and repainting, be coaxed through this mediatory surface; each replastering and repainting may have been a new celebration and enactment of the emergence of spirit-animals and 'goddesses'; other replastering may have been intended to conceal the images, perhaps for a ritually determined period. Control of the spirit world and its inhabitants was socially important and needed to be repeatedly demonstrated by replastering. In addition, objects and offerings of various kinds were placed in the walls; there was a two-way traffic. These observations suggest that the small undecorated chambers behind the walls of some highly decorated rooms were not exclusively storerooms or granaries (though grain and other evidence for domestic activity were found in some) and lightshafts but retreats that were reached by crawling through walls and where solitary religious experiences could be induced away from the rich imagery of other areas. Both walls and roofs were penetrable interfaces between divisions of a tiered cosmos as it was (in part) constructed above ground at Çatalhöyük. The walls were like 'membranes' between components of the cosmos; behind them lay a realm from which spirits and spirit-animals could emerge and be induced to emerge.

Contact and movement between those divisions, vertically and horizontally, was probably controlled. It seems likely that the built environment of Çatalhöyük was a site for the negotiation of social status and, significantly, that the mode of negotiation was related to the tiered structure of the cosmos itself. Cosmology and society went hand in hand. Within the processes of negotiation, control of altered states and the imagery of those states probably played a significant role (Lewis-Williams, 2002). This last point becomes clearer if we consider further the kinds of images found at Çatalhöyük.

■ IMAGERY IN A BUILT COSMOS

As I have pointed out, many of the rooms at Çatalhöyük were richly decorated and invested with imagery of various kinds: plaster reliefs, wall paintings, bas reliefs cut into multiple layers of plaster and statuettes. I do not attempt a full survey of this imagery. Rather, I consider the implications of selected features.

Mellaart notes that the Çatalhöyük imagery comprised both representational and geometric motifs. Both kinds of imagery can be understood in

the light of their location in a built shamanistic underworld. The imagery should not be abstracted from its physical and conceptual contexts and analyzed simply as 'pictures in a book'. 'Context' is, however, more problematic than is often allowed (Lewis-Williams, 1991). Physical 'neighbourhood', as described by an archaeologist, does not necessarily capture the social and conceptual contexts that informed the imagery. Indeed, every 'context' is a construct put together by theory-oriented archaeologists. So when I write of 'context', I do not mean an observable given; rather, I refer to a selection of features that seem to me to have been significant in meaningfully situating the imagery and the ways in which it was 'consumed'. Then, too, we should remember that the physical environment of the imagery was not temporally rigid; on the contrary, as the recent excavations have shown, structures themselves were subject to change (Last, 1998).

Perhaps the most celebrated imagery at Çatalhöyük, along with the bucrania that I have already discussed, is the 'goddess figures'. A particularly interesting example in S.VII.23 (Mellaart, 1967: colour plate VII; 113–14) is a female figure that was covered with painted patterns in red, black and orange that extended beyond the figure itself onto the panel. (Some scholars now believe that this image may represent a reptile; Hodder, 2003, personal communication.) Mellaart believes that the pattern represents a dress or veil thrown wide. That may or may not be correct; either way, the extended pattern causes the figure to blend with the wall. Indeed, Mellaart himself, referring to another female figure set between pillars (S.VII.45), writes of the 'effect of coming through a door to show herself' (Mellaart, 1967: 114) – an apt description in view of the ideas that I have developed about the walls as 'membranes' between built spaces set in the nether world and the spirit world that lay just beyond their surfaces.

The association of female figures with the underworld is also implied by carvings of stalactites that appear to represent a 'goddess'. This association recalls an earlier manifestation of the same idea. The 'vulvas' of Upper Palaeolithic art are carved into the walls of many Franco-Cantabrian caves. Although they are often taken to refer to a concept of fertility, some features of Upper Palaeolithic art suggest that spirit-animals came out of the walls of the caves (Lewis-Williams, 1996, 2002). The walls themselves were thus, in a sense, giving birth to spirit-animals. It was to the fecundity of 'membranous', mediatory walls that the Upper Palaeolithic vulva motifs referred, not to 'fertility' in general or as conceived by some in the modern Western world. It seems probable that some aspects of this more specific notion were present, no doubt in transmuted form, at Çatalhöyük.

On the other hand, shamanic travel is sometimes thought of as a journey into the womb (Vitebsky, 1995: 70). Depictions of female genitalia therefore do not necessarily stand for fertility and birth. Notwithstanding the notion of the Çatalhöyük female figures being in what is often taken to be a birth posture, we should allow that some may have been associated with



Figure 3 Wall painting from S.A.III.1 showing human figures and deer. To the right, some of the figures with bows and clubs appear to be hunting deer. To the left are what appear to be dancers and a person with a drum. Two half-red, half-white figures are headless. (After Mellaart, 1967: black-and-white plate 61)

shamanic *entrance* into the 'womb'. Certainly, the female figures may have had little to do with 'fertility' as it is commonly conceived today by some writers on 'goddess' figurines. Haaland and Haaland (1995) and Meskell (1995) have recently explored other possible significances.

In addition to the female figures, there are more complex representational wall paintings that appear, at first glance, to be realistic scenes in the sense that they depict happenings observable in the material world of the Konya Plain. The great 3.4 m-long frieze in S.A.III.1, for instance, appears to depict a hunt (Figure 3), as do other friezes in the room. The frieze was plastered over and renewed at least three times. The earliest of the three paintings is polychrome and shows, on the right, two stags and a fawn together with at least ten hunters with bows and slings. A possible narrative reading of the scene is, however, rendered problematic by a number of figures to the left that are apparently dancing. With the exception of a man holding a circular object (probably a drum) and a Bowman, who also holds a sling, these left-hand figures all face away from the hunt on the right. The drum is a typical shamanic instrument; insistent, rhythmic sound alters consciousness and carries both drum players and some listeners into the spirit world (Vitebsky, 1995: 78, 80–1). The making of a shamanic drum, its decoration and taking into use are often accompanied by complex rituals. The way in which the figures in the S.A.III.1 panel are dressed is also important. A number of the dancers wear leopard-skin garments; two figures, said by Mellaart to be acrobats, are naked (Mellaart, 1967: 174). Two of the central figures are headless. In view of other paintings to which I come in a moment, Mellaart suggests that these acephalic figures represent ancestors, 'great hunters of the past ... invoked to partake in the hunting-rites of the living' (Mellaart, 1967: 175).

The headless figures and the association of what appears to be a dance with a hunting scene implies a somewhat, though not entirely, different reading. In shamanistic societies the hunting of meat-producing animals is often inextricably bound up with the acquisition of the animals'

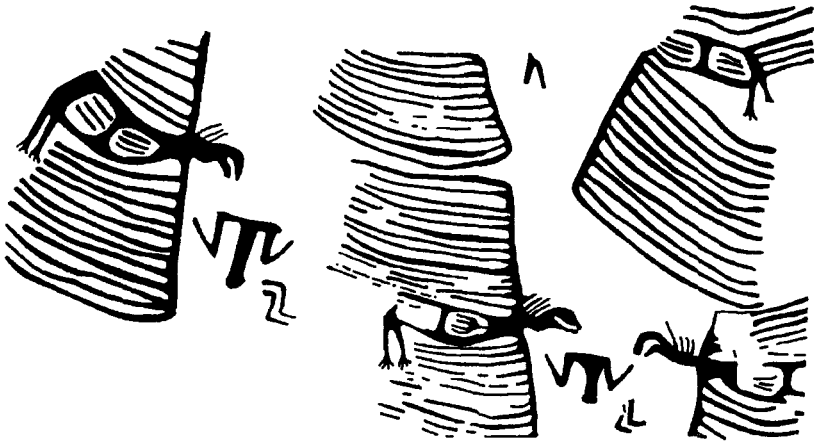


Figure 4 Wall painting from S.VII.8, showing vultures and headless human figures. (After Mellaart, 1967: black-and-white plate 49)

supernatural power. For the southern African San, the eland antelope provides not only meat but also more potency than any other creature. When hunting eland, the Ju/'hoansi San use the respect word *tcheni*, dance, because acquisition of that antelope's potency will facilitate an especially efficacious trance/healing dance (Lewis-Williams, 1981; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1999). Set in a constructed nether world, the Çatalhöyük hunt frieze may depict a similar conception, one that did not distinguish decisively between 'materiality' and 'spirituality'. It may therefore not be a daily-life 'scene' as we generally understand the word. As Mellaart argues, the headless figures may well represent the dead, though not simply concerned ancestors: more probably, they were ancestors who, in the lowest level of the cosmos, continued to be involved in the control and acquisition of animal power.

The interpretation that takes headless figures to represent the dead is supported by another set of wall paintings, the remarkable vulture scenes of S.VIIB.8 (Mellaart, 1967, Pls 46–9) and S.VII.21 (Figure 4; Mellaart, 1967: Figures 14, 15; 166–8). In these paintings large, carrion-eating vultures (*Gyps vulvus*, the Griffon vulture) are associated with small headless human figures. The figures lie on their left sides, as do many of the burials beneath the floors. Skulls separate from bodies were also found in some of the highly decorated rooms. The relative positions of the vulture and human images imply that the vultures are responsible for the mutilation of human corpses. Mellaart interprets these scenes as depicting excarnation prior to burial, a practice for which he claims to have found evidence at Çatalhöyük (Mellaart, 1967: 166; see also Hamilton, 1996: 257–8; recent

work suggests that excarnation was rare, Hodder, 2003, personal communication). This may well be so, but, as in the case of the headless dancers, there is more than is immediately noticeable. As Mellaart points out, the legs of some of the vultures painted in S.VII.8 are clearly human (Mellaart, 1967: 82, Figures 14, 15). Therianthropy is a common component of shamanistic beliefs. It therefore seems likely that the vultures are another blurring of the distinction between 'materiality' and 'spirituality': the vultures are not merely scavenging birds, but rather 'beings' associated with excarnation and disarticulation, a practice that requires further comment.

In some instances of ethnographically recorded excarnation and the severing of skulls from bodies, the practice is a ritual enactment of the 'death' and 'rebirth' of a shaman in the widely reported spiritual experiences of reduction to a skeleton and dismemberment (Eliade, 1972). For example, Katz (1982: 235) found that San shamans say that their 'body parts become separated' when they are in an altered state of consciousness. When asked to draw themselves, some southern African San shamans drew separated zigzags and spirals. Pointing to a zigzag with legs attached, an experienced shaman said that this was his spinal cord; seven adjacent but separate zigzags were, he said, the rest of his body. Katz concluded that the image that shamans have of their bodies 'is determined more by their own inner states than by external anatomical criteria . . . as body lines become fluid, body parts become separated'.

Because so many shamans around the world report dismemberment and skeletalization as components of their initiation into shamanic status, it seems probable that the sensation, or hallucination, of one's body coming apart in an altered state of consciousness is, like the sensations of entering a vortex and flying, wired into the human nervous system. Some of the Çatalhöyük people who went into altered states probably experienced reduction to a skeleton and dismemberment, though exactly how they understood these experiences and why they valued them would have been culturally and historically situated. That actual excarnation was rarely practised at Çatalhöyük probably suggests special treatment reserved for selected people.

It is crucial to note that the 'hard-wired' experiences and imagery of altered consciousness always constitute a *potential* resource, not an ineluctable given, on which people are able, but not obliged, to draw in the negotiation of their social statuses. We must distinguish between the psychic (neurologically generated) experience of excarnation and the ritualized enactment of the experience. It seems that, at a particular time in the history of Çatalhöyük (Level VII; about 8500 B.P.), some religious specialists chose to emphasize the experience of dismemberment beyond the literal practice of excarnation by making, in complex ritual circumstances, wall paintings of therianthropic vultures and headless human beings on the interface between themselves and a spirit realm.

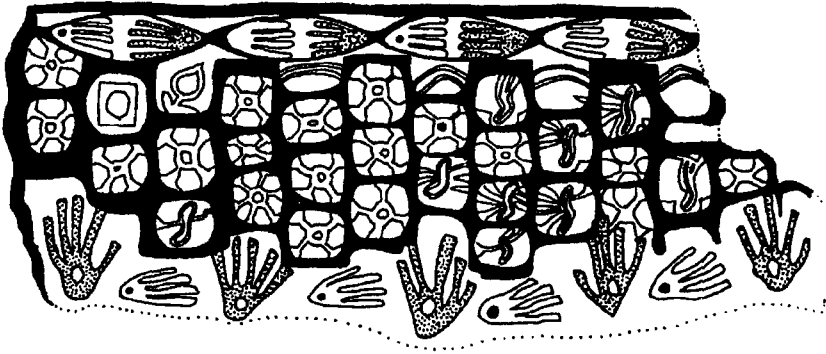


Figure 5 Paintings of hands and a honeycomb pattern containing what Mellaart identifies as stylized flowers, insects and grubs. At the top is a series of ovals containing four-fingered hand motifs. This is the later of two superimposed layers of painting in S.VI.B.8; the earlier painting depicts a similar set of images. (After Mellaart, 1967: black-and-white plate 41)

The apparent rarity of images of dismemberment suggests that some ritual specialists attempted to differentiate themselves from those who emphasized other components of the Çatalhöyük shamanistic complex and the ‘wired’ experiences of altered consciousness. By making the paintings on the membranous walls, behind which the spiritual experiences of reduction to a skeleton and of dismemberment were believed to take place, a specific group was, I argue, able to further the process of social differentiation and establish for itself a special status *vis à vis* other shamanic groups. The limited number of vulture scenes, compared with, say, bucrania, suggests that the shamanistic group that associated itself with excarnation and therianthropic vultures was ephemeral. Çatalhöyük shamanism was neither monolithic nor static; on the contrary, it was a dynamic engine for change.

Before I come to the apparently non-representational art of Çatalhöyük, there is a category of images seeming to lie between the representational and non-representational: handprints. At Çatalhöyük there are both positive and negative prints (Mellaart, 1967: 164–5). The positions of these handprints clearly had significance. In S.A.III.8 a small child’s hand-imprint was made on the body of a female figure; in S.E.VIA.7, there are larger handprints on the bull’s and ram’s heads (Mellaart, 1967: 83). In S.E.VIB.10, handprints were placed around a bull’s head, while in room S.VIB.8, handprints are associated with a pattern of squares (Figure 5; Mellaart, 1967: Figures 41, 42) and with a net-like pattern, zigzags and diamond chains. More examples could be given. Far from being randomly scattered, Çatalhöyük handprints were systematically integrated into a malleable symbolic complex.



Figure 6 Paintings on the north wall of S.VI.A.66. Motifs include horizontal zigzags, 'flower', or quatrefoil designs (as Figure 5), an archer and several 'goddess' figures in the childbirth posture. (After Mellaart, 1967: black-and-white plate 40)

Although the image of a hand no doubt had significance as the residue of ritual, I argue that the processes of production of those images mattered a great deal, as did the act of making plaster reliefs. Moreover, the paint that was used in the making of handprints was probably itself not merely a technical material, as Westerners may think of paint, but a powerful substance that effected or enhanced contact with the supernatural (Lewis-Williams, 1995, 2002). Handprints were therefore a product (not necessarily the end-product) of a ritual sequence that entailed, in the case of positive handprints, the preparation of a powerful substance, the application of this substance to a human hand and the pressing of the hand against the surface from which the forms of animals sprang. In the case of negative prints, paint was applied over both the hand and the adjacent wall surface. As the human hand was painted on to the wall, it was also painted *into* the wall; it disappeared behind the paint (Clottes and Lewis-Williams, 1998; Lewis-Williams, 2002: 216–20; Lewis-Williams and Blundell, 1997). Whatever other, no doubt numerous, connotations they may have had, the images of hands are, I suggest, evidence for and symbols of manual contact with the spirit world.

The association of some of these handprints with grid and other forms brings me to the apparently non-representational geometric imagery of Çatalhöyük. In addition to 'chequerboards' (one of which surrounds a niche surmounted by a boar mandible; S.VIB.10) and net-like patterns (one of which is around the head of a bull, also just above a niche in S.VIB.10), there are zigzags and diamond chains on a bull's head (Mellaart, 1967: Figures 14, 34–36), diamond chains that are not associated with representational imagery (S.VIB.44; Mellaart, 1967: Figure 31), horizontal zigzags (Figure 6; S.VIA.66; Mellaart, 1967: Figures 39, 40), vertical zigzags (S.VII.8; Mellaart, 1967: Figure 43), crenellations (Figure 7; S.A.III.8; Mellaart, 1967: Figures 33, 34) and cross-hatching to create triangles (A.III.8; Mellaart, 1967: Figure 31), the so-called kilim patterns, some of

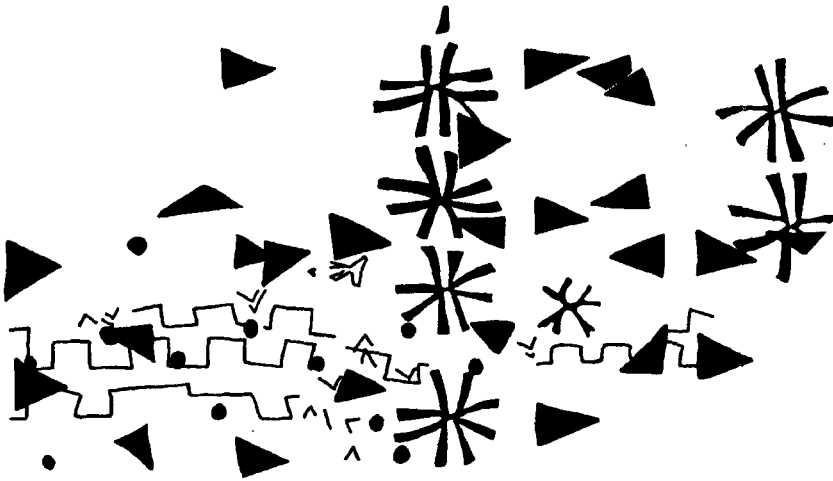


Figure 7 Four superimposed layers of painting were found on the west wall of S.A.III.8; each painted layer was separated from the others by a layer of white plaster. Images include quatrefoils and 'castellations'. (After Mellaart, 1967: black-and-white plate 33)

which are also cut into the plaster (S.VIII.21; Mellaart, 1967: colour plate VIII).

If we accept the hypothesis that altered consciousness played a role in Çatalhöyük religion and social differentiation, we must go on to consider the possibility that these motifs derived from entoptic phenomena (also known as 'phosphenes' and 'form constants'). These are luminous geometric percepts that are first seen in an early, or 'light', stage of altered consciousness; later, they become part of the imagery of deep trance and are associated with hallucinations of animals, people and so forth. Laboratory research has shown that entoptic phenomena include zigzags, crenulations, grids and diamond chains (Burke, 2002; Eichmeier and Höfer, 1974; ffytche and Howard, 1999; ffytche et al., 1998; Klüver, 1966; Siegel, 1977; Siegel and Jarvik, 1975). Because these forms are wired into the human nervous system, all people have the *potential* to experience them, no matter what their cultural background (Lewis-Williams, 1991; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1988; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1978). What is cultural is the selection of certain forms from the potential range and the ascription of meaning to those forms (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1972, 1978). The ways in which such percepts are experienced are also significant. Altered states of consciousness often involve the projection on to walls and other surfaces of entoptic phenomena along with animal imagery; the images 'float' on the surfaces rather like a slide or film show (Siegel, 1997). Both the 'internal'



experience and the projection of such mixed imagery were, I suggest, probably part of rituals enacted in the 'subterranean' rooms of Çatalhöyük. People entering the most highly embellished rooms were confronted by representations of the diverse kinds of imagery experienced in altered states and those images triggered similar visions and so generated complex *interactions* between 'real' images painted on the walls and projected 'spiritual' images.

Thus the apparently diverse imagery of Çatalhöyük is consistent with a shamanistic worldview that included a tiered cosmos, spirit-animals, supernatural personages, concepts of supernatural potency, reduction to a skeleton and dismemberment, the mediation of cosmological realms along an *axis mundi* and visions of those realms. The multifaceted nature of this complex permitted diverse forms of social and personal manipulation: there were maintained 'givens', such as repeated (though malleable) architectural forms, and also variations, such as the different kinds of imagery on the walls. As certain people moved down into the constructed underworld and then (both literally and spiritually) through the walls, the movements of their journey and the existing imagery primed their minds for what they would see if they themselves experienced altered consciousness. Constructed architectural space, a conceptually constructed underworld and a constructed (selected) visual vocabulary were implicated in the reproduction and subversion of the social order.

The shamanistic interpretation thus brings a range of diverse features at Çatalhöyük into a co-ordinated and, within its own terms, rational framework. There is coherence in the diversity at Çatalhöyük. Shamanistic cosmology is, however, an overarching construct; it should not be taken to mean that *every* image or figurine is *directly* related to a specific shamanic belief or ritual. On the contrary, the richly resonant motifs probably did not all have the same focus of meaning (Hamilton, 1996: 270). What their focus and their connotations may have been is a topic for further research (on 'focused polysemy' and 'multivocality', see Lewis-Williams, 1998, 2001a).

■ RE-THINKING CATEGORIES

The architecture and imagery that I have described lead us to explore the concepts of 'birth', 'death' and 'wild' as they may have existed in the mythical world of Çatalhöyük and have been implicated in the process of domestication of the aurochs.

First, in shamanistic communities 'birth' is more than parturition: it involves beliefs about the origin of a child's spirit as well as the 'birth', or 're-birth', of a shaman. Cross-culturally, 'birth' is associated with diverse sets of ritual observances and contingent nuances of belief. At Çatalhöyük,

the complexity of the notion of 'birth' is demonstrated by the female figures that are apparently giving birth to horned bulls. Clearly, 'birth' meant more than bringing human children into the world. The 'birth' of spirit-animals in the lowest cosmological tier seems to have been part of a complex conceptual and symbolic order, the outlines, but not the specifics, of which we can discern in other shamanistic traditions.

Second, 'death' in shamanistic communities often means 'transition to the spirit world *by whatever means*'. When a San shaman falls in deep trance, he is said to have 'died'. That 'death' is thought to be, in its essence, identical with physical death: the spirit leaves the body and journeys to the spirit world (Katz, 1982). It is therefore the notion of spiritual *transition* between a material world and a spirit world that infuses the concept of 'death', not (so much) decay of the body after physical death. The shamans' mastery of death/transition – their ability to return from the spirit world – gives them social status and respect and, in some instances, political influence. Descent into the lowest realm of the cosmos as constructed at Çatalhöyük was itself probably a form of 'death' in the sense of transition between cosmological realms: people 'died' when they entered a 'deep' and highly decorated room, though at the same time they were simply entering part of a dwelling. It was therefore appropriate that the dead, or rather certain dead, should be buried beneath the platforms and that vultures performing the service of shamanic dismemberment and excarnation should appear on the walls of certain rooms (Level VIIB).

Approaching the concept of 'wild', Hodder (1990: 11) rightly allows that 'wild' and 'natural' are categories constructed within social processes: 'society is dialectically created out of its own negative image.' A particular notion of 'wild' as one of the elements in that dialectical process is evident in his interpretation of the prominent female imagery of Çatalhöyük. Citing the presence of 'death-dealing beaks, tusks and teeth' (Hodder, 1990: 5) in moulded plaster representations of breasts and the relationship between female figures and leopards, he argues that women appear to be associated with danger and wild animals. Female figures are also shown giving birth to animals, including horned bulls (Hodder, 1990). On the other hand, male figures in the wall art and the grave goods of male burials seem to suggest a male association with hunting; hunting is, in turn, taken to 'mean' control or subjugation of the 'wild'. From here, it is a short step to reading Çatalhöyük symbolism in terms of male-female relationships, an absorbing concern of contemporary Western society that much archaeology today 'naturalizes'. Putting his reading in general terms, Hodder (1990: 12) argues that 'the process of domestication – control of the wild – is a metaphor and mechanism for the control of society'. While I concur that domestication was a 'mechanism for the control of society', there are other aspects of 'the wild' that require consideration.

In shamanistic cosmologies, wild animals come from God or a Lord of



the Animals. Some of them are richly imbued with supernatural power, the very power that shamans need to reach god and the spirit world. Hunting is therefore more than meat-acquisition, a material technology. It entails interaction with and acquisition of supernatural power and is attended by ritual observances. By 'hunting' power as much as meat, those engaged in the dance-hunt on the walls of S.A.III.1 were, I suggest, interacting with one of the lowest tiers of the cosmos. Moreover, wild animals have spiritual counterparts that inhabit, for the most part, another tier of the shamanistic cosmos and that can become spirit guides or helpers. It is perhaps in terms of these concepts, rather than as signifiers of 'danger' and 'death', as we generally understand those words, that the beaks, tusks and teeth set in moulded breasts should be seen. It was the *mouaths* of wild creatures that were being associated with breasts. From both breasts and the mouths of wild animals there emerged sustaining spiritual power.

■ DOMESTICATION OF THE AUROCHS

The concepts of 'birth', 'death' and 'wild' and the constructed mythical world of Çatalhöyük were, I contend, the context for far-reaching changes in relationships between people and animals.

Mellaart ascribes the domestication of the aurochs and other animals at Çatalhöyük (Hodder, 1996b: 364) to 'food-conservation and the production of milk and, in the case of goats and sheep, hair and wool' (Hodder, 1996b: 19). In line with much thinking on this issue, he sees domestication in terms of increased productivity and security. There are problems with this 'reasonable' approach: we cannot be sure that the people of the time would have seen it that way. Domestication no doubt did lead, later if not immediately, to easier availability of milk, animal fibre and so forth, though whether greater security of production was also attained is a moot point; domesticated animals are more susceptible to disease and the vagaries of nature than are wild animals. A desire for secure production was not necessarily the reason why people tried to domesticate animals, as many accounts of the domestication of animals imply. There is a teleological trap here. In any event, appeal to principles such as efficiency of production and access to products masks social processes and the role of sentient human beings.

By contrast, I argue that the domestication of animals was embedded in the worldview and socio-ritual complex I have described. In place of ecological imperatives and ineluctable forces of capitalist optimization, I point to the negotiation of social status and so link the domestication of animals to the aspects of the history of Çatalhöyük that I have discussed. There was, I argue, a creative, dynamic interplay between the cosmology

and imagery of Çatalhöyük, together with their social concomitants and the domestication of animals. More specifically, domestication of the aurochs was implicated in one of the ways in which social identities were negotiated at Çatalhöyük. This is, I believe, a more human scenario than Mellaart's or, for that matter, those conventional in the literature on domestication. It should, however, be borne in mind that I do not suggest that the domestication of animals took place in the same way in all parts of the world; I am concerned here with one instance only. Another caveat is in order: present work at the site suggests that domesticated cattle were not a prominent part of life at Çatalhöyük; consequently, we are talking about the initial stages of the process of domestication that I now describe.

The social statuses and supernatural capabilities of shamans are often posited on relationships with spirit-animals from which they derive potency, a kind of enabling 'electricity'. These relationships afford a measure of control over real animals. Often, shamans are believed to have the ability to guide the movements of animals into the hunters' ambush and, by tricking or placating a Lord of the Animals, to ensure the release of animals to the hunters and their reproduction. One of the ways in which this three-cornered shaman/spirit-animal/real-animal relationship can develop is well illustrated by beliefs recorded in the 1870s in southern Africa (for more on these verbatim manuscripts, see Deacon and Dowson, 1996 and Lewis-Williams, 2000).

The /Xam San of the central part of the subcontinent distinguished several overlapping categories of shaman, one of which comprised shamans of the game, *opwaiten-ka !gi:ten* (the clicks of the southern African Khoisan languages are represented by signs such as !, = and /). Some shamans of the game wore caps made from the scalp of a springbuck and sewn so that the ears stood up (Bleek, 1936: 144); they often appear in rock paintings (Lewis-Williams, 2003a, Figures 23, 39, 55; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1999, Figures 16d, 28, 41a, 45, 46, 49a and 72). Tānō-!khauken, a woman who was a healer and a shaman of the game, explained that the springbuck would follow the wearer of such a cap wherever he or she went. The cap thus afforded its wearer control over the movements of the game (Bleek, 1935: 46); more than that, it was visible evidence for that ability – it made a social statement.

In this account, Tānō-!khauken told of keeping a castrated springbuck 'tied up' by means of a thong so that it did not 'wander about' (Bleek, 1935: 45). She said that she untied the springbuck and sent it among wild springbuck so that it would lead the herd to the place where her people were camped. Tānō-!khauken described this springbuck as her 'heart's springbok' (Lloyd used the Dutch/Afrikaans spelling; Bleek and Lloyd, 1866–77: MS L.V.4729 rev.). It is highly improbable that she was speaking of a tamed and trained springbuck; the species is insufficiently tractable. More probably, she was referring to a spirit-springbuck that was her 'animal



helper'. Her phrase 'heart's springbok' probably means just that: a springbuck experienced in her 'heart'. She said that she 'owned' (with connotations of 'controlled') not just this one springbuck but springbuck in general (Bleek, 1935: 47). The verbatim phonetic transcript of this passage shows that the /Xam used one word (/ki) to mean both supernatural possession of a spirit-animal and ownership of real flocks and herds (Bleek and Lloyd, 1866–77, MS L.V.10.4742–4743). Diä!kwain, the narrator who told about Tānō-!khauken, said of his mother, =Kamme-an, that she did not own flocks of sheep and goats: 'For those [wild] springboks they were those of which mamma made her flocks' (Bleek and Lloyd, 1866–77). Wild animals thus became akin to domesticated animals through the notion of shamanic /ki.

Another component of 'ownership' is evident in Tānō-!khauken's account of how her spirit-springbuck assumed materiality in unfortunate circumstances. She said that Diä!kwain's father, Xā:ä-tin, inadvertently shot a springbuck that was the one that she owned/controlled and had sent among the wild springbuck. Diä!kwain's elder brother, K"obo, fell ill as a result of eating the meat of this springbuck and she said that it was her intervention as a healer that saved him from death. The invisible 'heart's springbok' thus turned into a real animal and became visible proof of Tānō-!khauken's powers as a shaman of the game and, as subsequent events showed, as a shamanic healer. This demonstration of her shamanic status was taken a stage further when Diä!kwain's mother made her a new eared cap from the scalp of the killed springbuck. (We do not know if all eared caps were believed to come from spirit-antelope.) All in all, this series of events confirmed and enhanced Tānō-!khauken's own social status and, by extension, that of shamans in general.

This account highlights four points about relationships between shamans and animals:

- Supernatural power was believed to derive, in part, from supernatural animals.
- These spirit-animals gave shamans at least partial control over wild animals, as a food (and probably ritual) resource.
- Shamans were believed, under certain circumstances, to cause their spirit-animals to mingle with and be *indistinguishable from* real animals.
- Such incarnated spirit-animals were taken to be visible and tangible proof of a shaman's powers and hence confirmation of his or her social status.

I do not claim that these generalized points were present at the beginning of the Neolithic in exactly the same ways that they were among the nineteenth-century /Xam San. Nevertheless, I argue that shifting relationships

between spirit-animals and real animals, an important part of a shaman's negotiation of status, were a factor in the domestication of animals.

To trace this relationship in the historical trajectory of domestication at Çatalhöyük I go back to the ninth-millennium BP site of Suberde near Lake Sugla in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains. Some 90 per cent of the animal bones here belonged to wild sheep, pig and red deer, the remaining 10 per cent being aurochs, goat, wolf, fox and tortoise. Small pigs may have been the only species domesticated at Suberde. By contrast, the Konya Plain surrounding Çatalhöyük 'teemed with wild life' as late as 8000 BP. Aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), a pig (*Sus scrofa*) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) attained maximum size for these species in this favourable ecological niche. Mellaart suggests that it was the presence of these great herds that attracted people to the grasslands of the plain. He may well be right, though not entirely for the reasons he puts forward.

World ethnography suggests that the shamans of a community do not *all* seek power relationships with one species only; for instance, some may claim relationships with dangerous animals, such as felines, while others may relate to birds. At the beginning of the Neolithic, this kind of differentiation held the potential for social struggle. It is possible that some Neolithic shamans in southern Anatolia may have placed their faith in the more readily controlled species, such as sheep, goats and pigs, that can be corralled comparatively easily and so could have become visible evidence of their power. Indeed, sheep and goats seem to have been domesticated at Çatalhöyük (Hodder, 2003, personal communication). But the flocks of sheep and herds of swine would, I argue, have soon lost their mystique: they would have become 'ordinary', whereas shamans need to derive their power from 'out there', beyond society; domestic animals are part of society. Other shamans who were competing for social status therefore put their faith in larger and physically more powerful wild animals, such as the aurochs. Around the world large and physically powerful animals, such as bears and felines, are associated with shamans. The status of Çatalhöyük shamans may have derived from the vast herds of aurochs on the Konya Plain, not from corralled, smaller species. The attraction of the plain therefore consisted not only in its potential meat supply, but also in the physical manifestation of supernatural power and status in the proud herds of wild aurochs.

A new struggle was thus initiated. Shamans concentrated more and more on aurochs bulls as incarnations of supernatural power. Spirit-bulls were among the real herds as well as in the underworld and people's religious leanings may have been divided between the stalagmitic caves of the Taurus Mountains and the real herds of the Konya Plain, as the range of finds at Çatalhöyük suggests. In their efforts to demonstrate more and more unequivocally their relationship with spiritual animal-power, shamans provided an impetus to controlling, both supernaturally and literally, the animals of the plain. As Tānō-!khauken's 'heart's springbok' went into the



springbuck herds, so spirit-aurochs may have been believed to mingle with the wild herds, probably indistinguishably to the untutored eye (Mellaart, 1967: 223). As social negotiation and struggle developed between competing shamans and various kinds of people who were themselves not shamans, it became more and more imperative for shamans to demonstrate their power. Real skull bones and horns (perhaps from animals believed to be spirit-animals) were incorporated more and more into the built cosmology of Çatalhöyük. Animals and their power were being brought into domestic space. Further, non-real relationships between animals and shamans were depicted in wall art (e.g. the apparent baiting of deer) and statuettes (e.g. people seated on leopards). These relationships point to a desire to control and to be associated with these animals in unique, inimitable ways, ways that cannot be duplicated by ordinary people. Once controlled, aurochs herds made greater display statements, provided animals for sacrifice – rituals that demonstrated shamanic power – and, at the same time, facilitated the control of meat distribution.

Domestication of animals was, then, something that *people* did, not in inevitable response to inexorable external forces but in the construction of their own society and history. The production of meat supplies was a by-product, not a consciously formulated end, of social processes. These processes involved the definition and social appropriation of certain altered states of consciousness (Lewis-Williams, 2002). As I remarked at the beginning, altered states are a resource that is manipulated in specific historical circumstances. The people at Çatalhöyük constructed a cosmology (derived in part from 'hard-wired' experiences of certain altered states) and reproduced that cosmology in architecture and images. Shamans, appropriating and exploiting the experiences of altered states, asserted themselves by modifying that cosmology and by manipulating a symbolic vocabulary. This manipulation extended beyond the fields of iconography and hallucination to herds of actual animals with whom spirit-animals were believed to consort. Economic behaviour cannot be divorced from symbolic behaviour.

Eventually, I suspect, the mystique and power of corralled aurochs herds evaporated. Too many people came to possess animals and the notion of wild, powerful spirit-animals was weakened. As the last shamans of the Upper Palaeolithic gradually painted themselves into a subterranean corner that afforded little opportunity for further manoeuvre, so Neolithic shamans eventually corralled themselves and new sources of spiritual power, other than now-domesticated animals, had to be sought. Classic animal-shamanism was left behind. Çatalhöyük, it should be recalled, was a precocious and early Neolithic town. The common pattern in the later Neolithic of Anatolia and beyond does not include the elements that I have here considered as consistent with a shamanistic society. Elsewhere, especially in Western Europe, other kinds of imagery came to the fore (Bradley, 1989; Dronfield, 1995; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1993; Patton, 1990).

■ SHARPENING FOCUS

To show more concretely how the cosmology, architecture, imagery and the process of domestication came together in thought patterns and, at the same time, to give something of the possible flavour of life and belief at Çatalhöyük, I turn to a Samoyed (Siberian) narrative (Eliade, 1972: 38–43; first published by Popov, 1936 and Lehtisalo, 1937). In recounting these Samoyed beliefs, I do not imply that they were held in an identical way at Çatalhöyük. Although the Samoyed beliefs probably derived in part from universal experiences of altered consciousness, such as entering a dark cave and flying, they were socialized, explored and manipulated in historically specific ways. Still, the Samoyed account shows that widened understandings of the subterranean birth of animals in a tiered cosmos and historically contingent notions of ‘death’ and ‘wild’ help to bring the symbolism of Çatalhöyük into tighter focus.

I divide the Samoyed narrative into eight stages.

- 1 A certain Samoyed shaman journeyed at the time of his initiation to a mountain where he met the Lady of the Water and he began to suckle at her breast. She said, ‘You are my child; that is why I let you suckle at my breast’. (Eliade, 1972: 39)

The initiation of the shaman was thought of, at least in part, as a kind of birth and suckling. The Lady of the Water’s milk contributed to the development of his shamanic powers. One thinks of the moulded breasts on the walls of Çatalhöyük and the female figures apparently giving birth to horned bulls. The ‘birth’ represented by those female figures may have related, *in part*, to the ‘birth’ of a shaman and the breasts to the suckling of a novice. The apparently ‘death-dealing’ bones and teeth in those breasts may have referred not to death and danger, as we may prosaically understand those words, but to the power of the wild ‘out there’ and so to supernatural power: both mouths and breasts are orifices through which ‘life-essence’ escapes. The connection between this power and the concept of birth and suckling will become apparent in a moment.

- 2 Then the husband of the Lady of the Water, who was the Lord of the Underworld, gave the initiate his two guides, an ermine and a mouse, to lead him to the underworld. He was then carried to an island where a young birch tree rose to the sky: it was the Tree of the Lord. As, flying with the birds, the initiate left the place of the tree, the Lord of the Tree told him to make a drum from one of its branches. (Eliade, 1972: 40)

The verticality of the tree, joining as it did earth and sky, suggests that it was the *axis mundi*. In this concept, I have suggested, lay the significance of trees and the posts embellished with red paint and bulls’ heads at Çatalhöyük. That the initiate’s drum (its rim) was made from a branch of the



Tree of the Lord implies a connection between drums and the *axis mundi*. Drums are, as I have pointed out, common shamanic instruments: their insistent beating induces altered states of consciousness and thus passage along the *axis mundi*. Speaking of supernatural travel, Yakut shamans say, 'The drum is our horse' (Halifax, 1980: 15).

3 Later the initiate entered a cave that was covered with mirrors. (Eliade, 1972: 41)

From the upper level of the cosmos, the initiate descended into the lower level via a cave. The images in the mirrors and their brightness suggest the hallucinations that appear on the sides of the 'tunnel', or vortex, that leads to deep hallucinatory experiences and also the initiate's participation in his own projected hallucinatory imagery, both well documented experiences (Lewis-Williams, 2001b). The reflecting walls, with their implied imagery, also recall the decorated rooms of Çatalhöyük, in some of which polished obsidian mirrors were found in burials.

4 In the cave the initiate saw two women, naked but covered with hair, like reindeer. The underground chamber in which they were was lit by a light that came from above, through an opening. (Eliade, 1972: 41)

The therianthrope nature of the women and their association with the underworld should be noted: these are women-animals. Again, the dimly lit decorated rooms of Çatalhöyük into which people descended by ladders are suggested by 'a light that came from above'.

5 One of the women told the initiate that she would give birth to two reindeer that would become sacrificial animals, one for the Dolgon and Evenki, the other for the Tavgi, all three being Samoyed groups. (Eliade, 1972: 41)

The giving birth to sacrificial animals thus had dual significance. First, 'birth' was a source of supernatural power. Second, the 'birth' of the two reindeer had social significance: social divisions were being 'naturalized' in the initiate's experience. At the same time, the ambivalence of 'the wild' was being created.

6 The other woman would also give birth to two reindeer, but these would be 'symbols of the animals that would aid man in all his works and also supply his food'. (Eliade, 1972: 41)

The Samoyed reindeer here are comparable to the Çatalhöyük aurochs in the process of domestication and, of course, to other species in so many shamanistic communities. The subterranean births recall the Çatalhöyük female figures seemingly giving birth to bulls. The creation of and the closeness between spirit-animal helpers and real animals is clearly brought out by this episode of the Samoyed account: for shamanistic people, animals remain a mystery (in the religious sense of the word) with great power. That power needs to be accessed and harnessed so that it can 'aid man in all his works'.

7 From the cave of the reindeer-women the initiate went to another cave where he suffered death and dismemberment. A man 'cut off his head, chopped his body into bits' and put everything into a cauldron. Later, the man put the shaman's bones together again and covered them with flesh and gave him preternatural sight and hearing. (Eliade, 1972: 41–2)

Here we encounter divisions of the underworld – '*another cave*' – that recall the differentiated spaces of Çatalhöyük. As I have suggested, the wall paintings of vultures at Çatalhöyük and the practice of excarnation on some bodies were probably a manifestation of the widely reported shamanistic experience of dismemberment and restoration.

8 The candidate found himself on the summit of a mountain and finally he woke in the yurt, among his family. Now he can sing and shamanize indefinitely, without ever growing tired. (Eliade, 1972: 42)

Such were the initiatory experiences of a Samoyed shaman. Subsequently, as a fully fledged shaman, he turned 'mentally' towards the cave of the reindeer-women when he wanted to perform shamanic interventions (Eliade, 1972: 41); in other words, he relived or recaptured or recreated some of the experiences that made him a shaman in the first place. In a similar way, Çatalhöyük shamans probably returned, literally as well as in their religious experiences, to their built environment, places where those spiritual experiences could, by the induction of altered states of consciousness, be repeatedly relived. In the caves and in the embellished rooms the underworld was re-created and contacted.

This is a simplified version of the rich Samoyed account; more could be said about its relevance to the evidence at Çatalhöyük. Nevertheless, it shows that the modern Western categories of 'death', 'birth' and 'wild' need to be expanded if we are to understand the symbolic code at Çatalhöyük and the social processes embedded in it. Re-thought in terms of shamanism, these categories bring the complexity of Çatalhöyük architecture and imagery into clearer focus. Moreover, the 'mechanism for the control of society' of which Hodder writes and its role in the domestication of animals is better understood. The 'mechanism' was a historically contingent form of shamanism that explored a tiered cosmos and engendered a complex symbolic and social order that was constructed, literally and metaphorically, at Çatalhöyük. Domestication was embedded in the kind of thought-world of which the Samoyed narrative gives us a glimpse.

■ MATERIALITY AND SYMBOLISM

Both the epigraphs to this article, written nearly 30 years apart, point to human complexity at Çatalhöyük. Above all else, the site suggests the



importance of complex thought patterns as a resource that sentient actors could manipulate (Thomas, 1991, on the West European Neolithic). In addressing those patterns, I have adumbrated an overarching yet dynamic 'mythical world' that brings to light connections between cosmology, architecture, human movement in built spaces, imagery and domestication: there was an intricate process of mutual construction.

The details of the trajectory of thought at Çatalhöyük need to be worked out and, as the present excavations continue, they will doubtless be filled in and modified. They will, as I have tried to do here, lessen the gap between materiality and symbolism. The materiality and symbolism of so much at Çatalhöyük will be shown to have had a dynamic interrelationship that led to changes through time as human beings engaged with, constructed and reconstructed the articulation between their material and conceptual environments. This articulation reduced rather than reinforced any division of the world into the wild and the tame and prepared the way for the domestication of the aurochs.

In addition to being living spaces, the structures of Çatalhöyük were a manifestation of the cosmos, as, throughout the world, many other buildings, tombs and alignments were to be in succeeding millennia. During the West European Upper Palaeolithic, caves had been part of an invisible universe: the material and the spiritual were one. The underground passages and chambers were a given, awaiting adaptation and embellishment by those who entered them (Lewis-Williams, 2002). At Çatalhöyük, on the other hand, people constructed a model of the cosmos and, as a result, human control of the conceived form of the cosmos increased markedly. This control created a more flexible and effective mechanism for social control. Therein lies the innovative essence of the Neolithic.

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