

R.Thomas_Assignment 2_HPAH7014_Object_Analysis_2 007350

by Rose Teresa Thomas

Submission date: 09-Apr-2021 07:54PM (UTC+0100)

Submission ID: 149030185

File name:

23964_Rose_Teresa_Thomas_R.Thomas_Assignment_2_HPAH7014_Object_Analysis_2007350_326592_1404712739.docx
(1.19M)

Word count: 2512

Character count: 13499

Object Analysis

The following analysis will examine a T-Shaped pillar residing in south east Anatolia's Pre-Pottery Neolithic (PPN) Site of Göbekli Tepe. The pillar is comprised of two stone blocks, with a separate 'offering' block at its base. The central shaft has been carved with serpent symbolism, a trend seen throughout the site as a whole, but seen specifically prevalent within Enclosure A – the circular space where Pillar 1 was found (Figure 2). Pillar 1 is of particular interest when theorising about ritual practice of Neolithic societies and determining if a form of religiosity was present here. An absence of written records from this time leads us to use symbolism to 'read' stories, messages and signifiers of information from the peoples who used the space (Gell, 1998). Due to repeated symbolism, as well as the lack of evidence to indicate domestic activity, it has been theorised that Göbekli Tepe was a place set apart from regular life; a special or *sacred* space for the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Schmidt 2010: 239, Henley and Lyman-Henley 2019: 17). The pillar in question has been named Pillar 1, as it was the first T- Shaped pillar discovered at the Göbekli Tepe site in 1994 (Figure 1) (Dietrich et al 2012: 35). It is comprised of two pieces of limestone rock; one trapezoid stone sits horizontally on top of a central vertical column, on the thinner side of the block, four snakes gliding in a winding motion move towards a singular snake (Figure 4), on the broader, flatter side there is a 'net' of seemingly 'many' snakes crossing each other to create a lattice of diamond scales (Figure 1, 3 and 5) (Dietrich 2016a; Schmidt 2010). The snake depicted is likely to have been the *Macrovipera Lebetina*, otherwise known as the Blunt Nosed Viper, and was common to the rocky outcrops and newly settled agricultural areas maintained by societies of ancient Anatolia (Henley and Lyman-Henley 2018:16 ; Peters and Schmidt 2004: 183).



Figure 1 – C. Gerber © DAI (2016) Pillar 1 with Offering Slab - Enclosure A, Göbekli Tepe.



Figure 2- M. Morsch (1997) Enclosure A in 1997.

There are over 200 pillars of similar size and shape at Göbekli Tepe, most of which are situated amongst thematic and possibly totemic circular enclosures (Peters and Schmidt 2004: 206, Haklay and Gopher 2019). Due to their central and imposing placement and repeated form of symbolism, it is likely that the large pillars were used as attention focusing devices (Renfrew 2007: 115). Although I was unable to find the exact measurements of Pillar 1, the relative uniformity of the Göbekli Tepe pillars makes Pillar 1 likely to have a height of approximately 5 – 6 meters and around 8 -10 tonnes in mass weight (Dietrich, 2016b: 30, Henley 2018: 477). The thickness of the stone (approximately 1.5 meters) has been determined by a natural strata on the south slope of the plateau where Göbekli Tepe is situated, making a basic unworked pillar another form of repeated symbolism throughout the whole site (Dietrich 2016b: 30). Neolithic tools such as awls, flint or wooden picks were used to carve out and ‘decorate’ the limestone. I theorise that there would have also been a need for a **smoothing tool** to give the blocks an even surface texture (Dietrich 2016b: 30). The T-shaped pillars have been suggested to represent anthropomorphic entities (Schmidt 2010: 244). I agree that some of the other pillars at the site are anthropomorphised forms (Pillar 18 and 31), however, I would argue that Pillar 1 is not a human form, but a snake form. The pillar represents a snake itself (the whole pillar in its entirety; figure 1 and 5), the warning defence sound of the blunt nosed viper (snake net lattice; figure 1 and 5) and, possibly, a snake mating ritual (snakes in motion: figure 4 and 5).

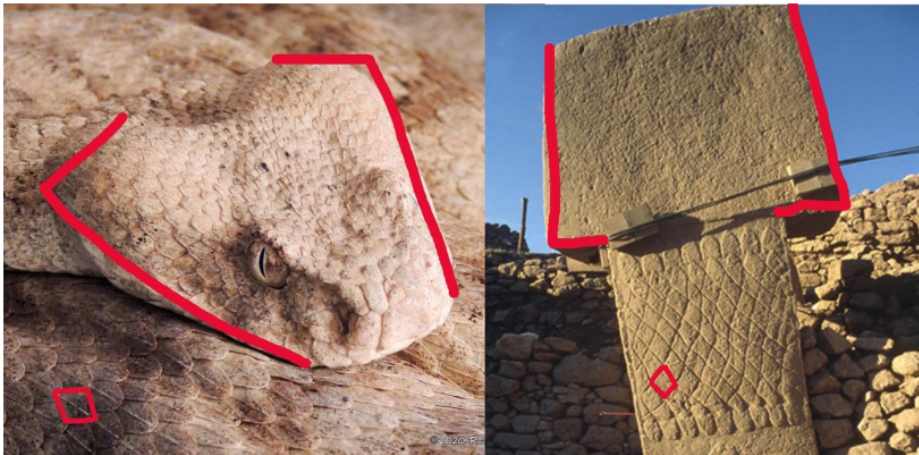


Figure 3 - Altered Photograph: R.Thomas. (2021) Original Photograph: R.Khashab (2020) & C. Gerber (2016).

Comparison of Macrovipera lebetina obtusa (Blunt Nosed Viper) and Snake Shaped T Pillar 1 (2021)



Figure 4 - D. Johannes. © (DAI). (2005) Winding Vipers in Motion. Pillar 1, Enclosure A.

Symbolically the snake signifies transformation; by shedding its skin the snake renews itself. Pillar 1 could have been used as part of an initiation space – a place for a symbolic shedding of youth, or shedding of

sickness. David Lewis-Williams suggests that it is impossible “for someone to depict an animal without in some way giving resonance to part of its symbolic associations”; those associations were hewn from this limestone rock by an ancient artisan who understood complex signifiers, symbolism, morals and messages maintained by their society (2002: 44). It is likely that those with access to the snake Enclosure A and Pillar 1, shared a collective story around the viper. Henley states: “It is important to be mindful of the more likely educational or memorial aspects of the various enclosures and the prospect that the pillars seen collectively are depicting hunting rituals, hell, myths, moral fables, communal memories, historic accomplishments, allegiances or even social lessons.” (2018 : 480). The snake’s connection to the communities of Göbekli Tepe would have come from intangible heritage, the stories and songs shared across the lands of the Fertile Crescent, probably unifying thoughts and social structures.

If the viewer encountered a snake at a previous time, the memory and emotion connected would be reinforced. If one had not encountered a snake before, the pillar could be a vehicle to arrive to a sensation of experiencing the snake first hand; the viewer would receive totemic, or archetypal associations with the notion of ‘snake’ without the actuality of a real life encounter. Perhaps this was a way to increase adrenaline or initiate a shamanic journey ritual, in which characteristics of the snake will be adopted (Harner 1989; Henley and Lyman- Henley 2019; 16). The lattice of snakes is of particular interest in determining what this object might have been used for. I theorise that the diamond shaped lattice can be viewed as the scales of the huge snake (Figure 5), but also, this lattice holds multiple meanings, such as many snakes gathering for mating purposes and the expansion of the viper snake when it is in its defensive warning mode. If contemporary analysis finds Göbekli Tepe to have been a sanctuary for the Sirius star, then we can assume the site would have been predominantly used at night; a flickering lamp light would have helped create the illusion of motion, and in this case, the movement of expansion (Magli 2013; Lewis-Williams 2002: 221). Through the use of circular breathing, a droning hiss emanates from a defensive viper, and a continuous sound is created.¹ This lattice could have been seen as a “story-form message” of warning for those who should learn to be wary of the “highly defensive” creature (Henley 2018: 481, Henley and Lyman-Henley 2018:17).

To take this theory further, the presence of the multi ridged lattice suggests to me that the carved surface is ‘playable’ like an instrument. Perhaps the sound created would not be dissimilar to the sound of the viper hiss. Much like chanting, drone can change a person’s state of consciousness “low-frequency drum-beats produce changes in the human nervous system and induce trance-states” (Lewis- Williams 2010: 223-225, Harner 1980). A modern day instrument that we can make a comparison with is the Cuban *guiro*, a percussive instrument played by running a beater over the surface of a ridged hollow gourd. However, Pillar 1 is not hollow, and the resonance of the stone would sound different to *guiro*, but the important comparable feature is how it is played. Much like circular breathing and the back and forth *guiro* rubbing, the stone could be played in a circle, so to create continuous drone. As limestone is easily mailable, if Pillar 1 was meant to be played, there would be signs of wear on the lattice ridges (Dietrich, 2016b: 2). I am restricted with my analysis of this theory if I do not see Pillar 1 in real life. By examining this carving from digital images (figure 5) it is difficult to be able to prove or disprove my theory. Even if no evidence came forward to suggest this was used as an instrument, the

¹ For sound and visual reference: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyNATyGXUNI&t=10s . (George Konstantinou - Cyprus Wildlife Tours (2020) *Hissing Sound of Macrovipera Lebetina (blunt-nosed viper)*. Video [Accessed 06/04/2021].

symbolic signifier of the lattice would be enough to convey the warning sound. Those viewing the image would know which sound it represented, a connotations it was associated with. The conception of cosmos through sound vibration is a common recurrence in various different religious groups; in some Hindu, Buddhist and Christian faiths there is a belief that The Word, or the Om brought forth creation. By means of incantation, utterance, command or sound vibration, in cosmogony mythologies “sound-emanation from higher dimensions of reality” can bring the world into being, or perhaps in the context of Pillar 1, initiate a new phase of life (Tame 1984: 207).



Figure 5 - Snake Lattice Detail. Instrument? Symbol of Continuous Drone?

Could be phrased better 

Underneath Pillar 1 there is another worked rock which bares concave circular bowls. Klaus Schmidt, the original excavator of Göbekli Tepe, has suggested these bowls were used to hold psychoactive substances before consumption, it is possible the artisans of Pillar 1 carved these images after a hallucinogenic or altered stare, thus making these images ‘entopic phenomena’ (Schmidt 2010; Lewis-Williams 2002:127 , 2010). If the shallow bowls were to contain substances given as votive offerings, we can guess at any substance which might have been given in act of benefaction. Water, beer, honey, blood might have been retained, but if we do not find evidence of a residue, that we can analyse, the bowls could have held anything that would have fit in them and we cannot draw a conclusive answer as to if psychoactive substances was the central offering. Snake venom, for smothering tips of hunting projectiles could have been held here, and this would correlate to the arrow like nature of the winding snakes seen in figure 4 (Dietrich 2016a: 4). Incorporated practice such as ritual offering could have be associated with heightened emotion, and possibly the object was viewed, received and reinforced

with veneration. As the viper is a dangerous being, likely to have taken the lives of many members of the community, offering valuable substances was a gesture of sympathetic magic to ward off a poisoned bite. If my theory is correct about this pillar representing a snake instead of a human (figure 3), placing a valuable substance in an offering gesture would be gesturing towards the viper in this instance. Could it be possible the peoples of Göbekli Tepe revered a deified snake? The high level of repeated snake symbolism throughout the site (28.4%) would suggest this animal to be held in high favour (Peters and Schmidt 2004: 185).

Paul Connerton (1989: 4) theorised that learned knowledge of the past shapes the way we perceive our experience in the present, this learnt knowledge is reformed by ritual performance often conveyed and sustained by society. If we look at the pillar from this point of view, it's likely the snake would have held an important role to hunter gather societies before the construction of Göbekli Tepe.

If a replica mould is made of the snake net lattice we would be able to determine nuances in the vibrations to better understand if this pillar signified sound, specifically the circular breathing of the defensive viper. A drone, a hum or a continued percussive rhythm is enough to reach an altered state of consciousness, "In altered states of consciousness, all the senses hallucinate" (Lewis-Williams 2002: 153, 224-225). Coincidentally, continuous breathing has become a modern day phenomena to humans during the writing of this analysis; to change one state of consciousness, "Ice Man" motivator Wim Hof suggests deep continuous breathing to elevate ones mood, decrease susceptibility to cold conditions and increase alert awareness (Carney and Hof 2020). Pillar 1 would have been made in cold climates, Göbekli Tepe emerged at the end of a glaciation period and this was potentially a time in which snakes began to rapidly multiply.² A cognitive link between breathing, renewal and snakes might have been connected to rituals performed in Enclosure A in the presence of Pillar 1. This would accurately fit with my theory of the snake lattice giving multiple messages; scales on the body, sound emanation, and snake mating gatherings. It is likely the whole of Pillar 1, and the 'offering' base, was used as a central focusing point for ritual, with the different carved forms representing complex messages to the societies who constructed them. Viewing the Pillar 1 snake lattice, under an altered state of consciousness, had the potential to have brought forth auditory hallucinations and to have come alive with associated agency of death, danger and change. These carved snakes were part of ancient allegory; mysterious supernatural beings connected with death and renewal, important enough to have been given significant attention at a specialised site.

² Further research needed into different snake species. Senckenberg Research Institute and Natural History Museum (2018) Cool Snake: Warm-Loving Grass Snake Survived the Ice Age in Central Europe. Science Daily, 9 February. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/02/180209112558.htm [Accessed: 07/04/2021].

Bibliography

Carney, S. and Hof, W. 2017. What Doesn't Kill Us: How freezing water, extreme altitude, and environmental conditioning will renew our lost evolutionary strength. Pennsylvania: Rodale Books.

Connerton, P. 1989. How Societies Remember. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dietrich, O. 2016 a. Why did it have to be snakes? In Tepe Telegrams (Online Blog) (Available: <https://www.dainst.blog/the-tepe-telegrams/2016/04/23/why-did-it-have-to-be-snakes/>) [Accessed: 31/03/2021].

Dietrich, O. 2016 b. How did they do it? Making and moving monoliths at Göbekli Tepe (Online Blog) (Available: <https://www.dainst.blog/the-tepe-telegrams/2016/05/03/how-did-they-do-it-making-and-moving-monoliths-at-gobekli-tepe/>) [Accessed: 5/04/21].

Gell, A. 1998. Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Haklay, G. and Gopher, A. 2019. Geometry and Architectural Planning at Göbekli Tepe, Turkey. Cambridge Archaeological Journal: Cambridge University Press. 30:2, 343 – 357.

Harner, M. 1980. The Way of the Shaman. New York: Harper & Row.

Henley, T.B. 2018. Introducing Göbekli Tepe to Psychology. Los Angeles: Educational Publishing Foundation. Review of General Psychology, Vol.22 (4), pp.477-484.

Henley, T.B. and Lyman-Henley, L.P. 2019. The Snakes of Göbekli Tepe: An Ethological Consideration. Neolithics. 19. 16-19. [PDF] Available: www.researchgate.net/publication/337914981_The_Snakes_of_Gobekli_Tepe_An_Ethological_Consideration/fullTextFileContent . [Accessed:07/04/2021].

Konstantinou, G. (2020) Hissing Sound of Macrovipera Lebetina (blunt-nosed viper). [Video] Available: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyNATyGXUNI&t=10s . [Accessed 06/04/2021].

Lewis-Williams, D. 2010. Conceiving God: The Cognitive Origin and Evolution of Religion. London: Thames & Hudson.

Lewis Williams, D. 2002. The Mind in the Cave. London: Thames & Hudson.

Magli, G. 2013. Sirius and the Project of the Megalithic Enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. Nexus Network Journal . Available:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253646486_Sirius_and_the_project_of_the_megalithic_enclosures_at_Gobekli_Tepe [Accessed: 07/04/2021].

Peters, J. and Schmidt, K. 2004. Animals in the Symbolic World of Pre-Pottery Neolithic Göbekli Tepe, South-Eastern Turkey: A Preliminary Assessment in *Anthropozoologica* 39 (1) Paris: Publications Scientifiques du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle.

Renfrew, C. 2007. The Archaeology of Ritual, of Cult, and of Religion. In Kyriakidis, E. (ed.) *The Archaeology of Ritual*. Los Angeles: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology.

Schmidt, K. 2010. Göbekli Tepe – the Stone Age Sanctuaries. New Results of Ongoing Excavations with a Special Focus on Sculptures and High Reliefs. *Documenta Praehistorica*, XXXVII, Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana. Pp. 239 – 256.

Tame, D. 1984. *The Secret Power of Music: The Transformation of Self and Society Through Musical Energy*. Rochester: Turnstone Press, Ltd.

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

78/100

Instructor

This is an excellent piece of work - very original in your approach and a good detailed analysis of the T-pillar from GT. Your description is clear and well supported by imagery. You also put forward an original and cogent interpretation and analysis of the imagery of the pillar and how this might have been incorporated within cult, which is grounded in both the archaeological material and appropriate theoretical literature.

Clearly presented and persuasively argued.
Excellent background reading. Well done!

PAGE 1

PAGE 2



Comment 1

perhaps sand, pumice?

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

QM

Could be phrased better

could be phrased better

Additional Comment

I am not quite sure what you mean

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8
