

Critical Review assignment 1

Spaces, Places and Objects

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Critical Review of
Gobekli Tepe- the Stone Age Sanctuaries.
New results of ongoing excavations with a special focus
on sculptures and high reliefs
by Klaus Schmidt

The key text I have chosen to review is Klaus Schmidt's paper on Gobekli Tepe, published in 2010. The primary purpose of Klaus Schmidt's article is to inform the reader of the latest results from a series of excavations, with particular attention and focus upon the "sculptures and high reliefs" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239) of this site. Schmidt (2010) in the abstract for this paper, ~~he~~ succinctly explains that the age, location, and nature of this site should help us to understand why humans transitioned away from hunter gather~~er's~~² and into domesticating "plants and animals" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239). Schmidt (2010) acknowledges this question of the radical change to domestication, as having consumed the intellectual interest of "generations of archaeologists" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239). Now with new data obtained from Gobekli Tepe, Schmidt (2010) promises to supply "explanations that differ from the generally accepted wisdom on this issue" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239).

This paper starts by informing the reader of the date of the site, ^{its} ~~this~~ importance and its context in human history. Schmidt (2010) informs the reader within the first sentence of the world importance of this location. Excavated from an "tell, an artificial mound" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239), consisting of multiple layers of "deposition" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239), this has been accumulated over a period of a few thousand years⁴ the geography of the location is described as being upon a mountain range, and "15km north-east of the Turkish city of Sanhurfa" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239).

Within Schmidt's first few sentences he informs the reader that the site "was not used for habitation" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239) and that "it consists of several sanctuaries in the form of round megalithic enclosures" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239). Whilst this first statement upon there being no evidence of anyone living there, is followed by the information that "at least two phases of monumental religious architecture have been uncovered" (Schmidt,

2010, p. 239). Here, Schmidt has told the reader what to expect the direction of evidence will take them on, through the context and particular significance of the buildings that were erected here, in this case religious in nature. No living space for those who built this place, and no living space for those who would visit it over its two thousand years of existence is an interesting conclusion. Where then did these pilgrims stay once they arrived here? Did they bring temporary shelters for themselves? Answers to these questions or some acknowledgement of them, seems to be missing here. Not knowing how far people travelled to be at this place, not considering the very necessary aspect of the human need for shelter, what then of water? The animal bones attest to food and potential feasting, but where did they sleep, and keep warm at night?

To give Klaus Schmidt some context with his pronouncements upon the nature of Gobekli Tepe as a exclusively religious site, he acknowledges his first visit to the site as being in 1994, which is not mentioned until page 250, twelve pages into this nineteen-page article. This same reference points out that the site was not ready for excavation until 1996. Schmidt (2010) on the first page informs the reader that the site was first excavated back in 1995, by a combined team of German and Turkish archaeologists, omitting that the detail that he led that team. This reader considers that initial omission to emphasis the fact that this article requires prior specialist knowledge before engaging with. Other details such as describing particular enclosures as sanctuaries without defining what his parameters for such a definition would be is another issue.

Schmidt (2010) explains to us that the site is composed of two particular stages of development. The first in the "10th Millennium" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240) and a slightly less monumental stage in scale in the 9th Millennium. He emphasises the dramatic scale of this first stage over the second stage and explains that imposing "T-shaped pillars weighing several tons" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240) were upraised here at the "centre of large circular enclosures" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240). These enclosures, four in this case have been designated A-D, are the focus of this paper. He goes on to explain the first stage of building occurred at a time when the rest of the world was still in the hunting and gathering process and domesticating livestock. Here Schmidt describes how "Gobekli Tepe was not a mundane settlement of the time" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240), which seems strange considering

he only a few lines before, he informs us the rest of the world outside of “region of the Fertile Crescent” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240) was still hunting and gathering, not erecting buildings.

The point of this site not being composed of anything as banal as homes and therefore it must be for a divine or spiritual purpose, and therefore a midpoint attracting other groups to “engage in complex rites” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240) there, appear an interesting and as yet still unfounded idea. It would be a failure of imagination on our part if we went from if we have not discovered scenes of habitation, therefore it must be religious. As a proposal it should not be excluded, but to become a scene of worship is still only an interesting speculation. This point of needing to defend the assertion of Gobekli Tepe as a place of some form of religious practice has been recognised by others. Oliver Dietrich and Jens Notroff do an interesting job of this in a 2011 paper titled “A sanctuary or so fair a house? In defense of an archaeology of cult at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Gobekli Tepe”. They build up their evidence of it being potentially a cultic place by at least defining the parameters and arguing against contradictory views point by point, whilst highlighting and comparing examples justifying Schmidt’s interpretation.

good contextualisation of the Schmidt's work

Schmidt (2010) further informs the reader that the site was filled in at some unknown point in time. That maybe this backfilling took place repeatedly before this final time. Within the material that filled this site, human and animal bones were found. Varying in size, but generally small broken pieces. Here Schmidt (2010) informs us that finding human bones in this state and in the infill material, should bolster the interpretation that Gobekli Tepe was a site of fundamental importance for burial, and that the bones of those buried at the site, were used in some particular practice or custom that we do not understand. Schmidt (2010) then proceeds to detail the size, shape, weight and designs upon the “T-shaped pillars” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 244) found in the enclosures. Here he points out that these pillars are in pairs and found in the middle and dwarf all other pillars surrounding them. Then he informs us that they are likely to represent twins, or at the very least two brothers or sisters as that was common motif in “mythology” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 244). He dismisses the counter argument that they could represent man and woman, because of the find in one enclosure of what appear to be two men. Here Schmidt (2010) details what both

appear to be wearing based upon interpreting the low relief carving upon their surfaces. It is the description of a "loincloth" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 245) that appears to define their maleness, whilst also making their sex ambiguous at the same time.

Schmidt (2010) then precedes to describe the carved images upon the various pillars found at the site, speculating that we do not yet understand how to interpret the imagery, to make sense of their potential meaning and this is something that needs to be done. He concludes this point on interpretation, by speculating as to whether this imagery upon the various pillars served as a possible shield or guardian role, or maybe as something not yet considered. He concludes this point with comparing the purpose of some of the imagery as to that of "Dante's Inferno" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 246), as that of a terrifying plot. I am not certain of the value of this comparison or value in this context. *something you might draw out - or otherwise consider how other scholars have reacted to this imagery* The paper then proceeds to cover other sculptures and statuary found at the site, and a particular sculpture he calls "A Totem pole" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 248). The last three and a half pages are spent describing "porthole stones" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 251). Explaining why when first discovered back in 1998, they were given that name. From the idea that they served as a "portable pillar base" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 251), acting as the support of now lost central pillars.

Schmidt (2010) concludes his paper with two points I am not certain were not meant to induce further controversial speculation within his peers. Those are the idea that that this site served a "diffusionistic" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 254) purpose to the world, and that if those who occupied this site for those millennia believed in deities, then these enormous stone obelisks were representations of those deities. His final statement that the study of Gobekli Tepe and its imagery needs to include specialists from outside the field of archaeology, is a valid point well made and long overdue and not just at the site of Gobekli Tepe. This is not an inaccessible article to the non-specialist reader in this field. It is an engaging article, both for the detailed descriptions of the carved reliefs at the site, but also for the omissions and assumptions that pepper this paper. From informing us that the enclosures are sanctuaries without defining why, to anthropomorphising the T-pillars as human shaped because the T-bar could be a human head. Gobekli Tepe is unquestionably a fascinating site and immeasurably valuable to human history not least because of its age, but that is why analysing the carved imagery and searching for human habitation is

essential before we can consider the site as more than a of the earliest human 'potential' sites of religious belief.

Bibliography

alphabetical order: perhaps read a bit more widely (or demonstrate that you have!)

Schmidt, K. (2010) 'Gobekli Tepe – the Stone Age Sanctuaries. New results of ongoing excavations with a special focus on sculptures and high reliefs', *Documentaria Praehistorica* XXXVII, pp. 239-256.

Dietrich, O and Notroff, J. (2011) 'A sanctuary, or so fair a house? In defense of an archaeology of cult at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Gobekli Tepe' *Current Anthropology*, 52 (5), pp. 619-660.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

64/100

Instructor

There is a clear improvement in your writing and your critiquing of articles (in written form). I get a real sense here of the content and some of your reactions to it. It would be good for you to explain how this article fits in with your research project. Also, there is plenty of you and your reaction to the article, (which is good!) but perhaps situate it more in a wider understanding of the site. Note that excavations are still ongoing and that our understanding of the site is still shifting. This is very much an early discussion by Schmidt. I think this sort of nuance is important in reflecting upon people's work.

I know you are reading widely - you need to demonstrate this!

Beware the occasional grammatical errors - but much improved. and much better structure.

Also, be careful. This was a bit clunky: the repetitive Schmidt says this.... throughout!

Otherwise a good start to the module

PAGE 1

~~Strikethrough.~~



Comment 2

no apostrophe

Text Comment. its

~~Strikethrough.~~



Comment 4

do you need this?

PAGE 2

Text Comment. good questions

Text Comment. good observations

Text Comment. but

QM

Frag.

Fragment:

A sentence fragment is a phrase or clause that is in some way incomplete. Such fragments become problematic when they attempt to stand alone as a complete sentence. The most common version of this mistake occurs when a writer mistakes a gerund (a verb that acts like a noun) for a main verb, as in the following sentence: "In bed reading Shakespeare from dusk to dawn."

Text Comment. ? not sure what point you are making

Text Comment. give the reference

PAGE 3

Text Comment. good contextualisation of the Schmidt's work

PAGE 4

Text Comment. something you might draw out - or otherwise consider how other scholars have reacted to this imagery



Comment 5

explain

QM

Frag.

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PAGE 5

PAGE 6

Text Comment. alphabetical order: perhaps read a bit more widely (or demonstrate that you have!)