

Gobekli Tepe Space, Places and Objects

by Patrick Francis Sweeney

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maps and plans?

Gobekli Tepe

The subject of this paper for site analysis will be Gobekli Tepe. Looking at the original and subsequent context of the sites importance in our view of the Neolithic. I will look at one specific part of the site, the mammoth stone pillars central to enclosure D, before discussing the sites lack of obvious human occupancy to date, any structures solely for human habitation. Gobekli Tepe was the site according to its original excavator Klaus Schmidt, that could answer the important question of why, humans moved from hunting and gathering to the sedentary world of cereal crop and animal domestication. Klaus Schmidt in his 2010 paper 'Gobekli Tepe- the Stone Age Sanctuaries. New results of ongoing excavations with a special focus on sculptures and high reliefs', first excavated the site in 1995 with the German Archaeological Institute (the DAI) and the Archaeological Museum located at Sanliurfa, Turkey. Schmidt (2010) readily admits that for him, Gobekli Tepe "is one of the most fascinating Neolithic sites in the world" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239). *one of the key points is that he identified this as the worlds earliest temple*

Gobekli Tepe is located at the highest point on the "Germus mountain range" according to Oliver Dietrich and Jens Notroff in their 2015 paper 'A sanctuary, or so fair a house? In defense of an archaeology of cult at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Gobekli Tepe', inform the reader that the artificial mound which rises to fifteen metres at its highest point, sits upon "a limestone plateau" (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75). Schmidt in his 2000 paper 'Gobekli Tepe, Southeastern Turkey: A Preliminary report on the 1995-1999 Excavations', informs the reader that Tepe is the Turkish word for "artificial mound" (Schmidt, 2000, p. 46) as *Tei* was the Arabic word for it. This human created tumulus according to Dietrich and Notroff (2015), was located at the "foothills of the Taurus Mountains" (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75), within fifteen kilometres of the modern Turkish city of Sanliurfa. *you are wasting valuable words by giving full citation of works here. Just cite normally!*

Schmidt (2010) informs the reader that this Tepe is located on the highest point on this range of mountains, standing out as a clearly visible feature for many kilometres far and wide. This mound was composed of multiple layers of material reaching a height of fifteen metres, this deposition had been accumulated according to Schmidt (2010) over several thousand years. Jens Notroff, Oliver Dietrich and Klaus Schmidt in a 2014 paper called

~~"Building Monuments, Creating Communities: Early Monumental Architecture at Pre-Pottery Neolithic Gobekli Tepe"~~, inform the reader that the site covers "about 9 ha in area and 300 m in diameter" (Notroff et al. 2014, p. 84). This site stands out against the terrain it sits upon according to Notroff et al (2014), because it was created after a series of purposeful acts where the site was backfilled and all evidence of the existence of the site was erased from sight. This state of visible invisibility of the mound was not properly investigated and then excavated until 1995 by Schmidt himself. He recognized this artificially created earthen mound as human made, and for Schmidt (2000) it was more than just finding upon the surface examples of stone slabs, sculptures and fragments of pillars that excited him. It was more than just the mounds size, nor was it the strange geographical location for the site itself. It was the fact that after excavating, for him that the whole site had been used in the creation of "megalithic architecture" (Schmidt, 2000, p.

46). *An interesting overview of Schmidt's reaction to his discovery, but I am not sure that this is really helping you develop a focused site report. Be more precise and focused with your writing.*

Schmidt (2010) informs us that for him surprisingly, no "residential buildings" (Schmidt, 2010) had been found at that time. Just to put that into context, by 2010 some fifteen years after first excavating the mound, an area of three hundred metres, composed of monumental structures. No living quarters, no homes, no residences had as yet been discovered. Just to further emphasize this point, this location was upon an exposed mountain. Schmidt (2010) might describe this place as having a particular tree upon it and having not "lost nothing of its magic appeal" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 239) but unfortunately leaves unspoken where the humans existed in this site of monumental architecture.

Schmidt (2010) points out that the site has seen two distinct periods of mammoth construction during its existence, with the oldest layer being the most imposing. In addition, to these two distinctive building periods, There were also uncovered three distinct "stratigraphic layers" (Notroff et al. 2014, p. 84). This site predates the use of pottery and therefore is labelled Pre-Pottery Neolithic (from now on PPN). The oldest layer of stratigraphy that has been excavated so far is described as "layer III" (Dietrich and Notroff, 2014, p. 84) and is dated to "the tenth millennium B.C. by archaeological dating" (Notroff et al. 2014, p. 84). Schmidt (2010) puts this date into context by describing how the world beyond "the Fertile Crescent of the Near East" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240) people were still

lived by means of hunting and gathering, and it was only here in the Near East where small village settlements were developing, which had in turn led to the development of “the domestication of plants and animals” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240). Schmidt (2000) in this earlier paper, points out that where there was much evidence of animal bones, all were from wild animals and none from tamed animals, the same was true of agricultural evidence, with no evidence of anything but “wild species” (Schmidt, 2000, p. 47).

For Schmidt (2000) from his very first seasons of excavating Gobekli Tepe in 1995, and his first published report on the site in 2000, he emphasises the undeniable nature of the site as a sacred place. He later describes it as “not a mundane settlement of the period” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240) highlighting how it belonged to “religious sphere, a sacred area” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240). He follows this point by arguing this is so because he had not excavated buildings that could be connected with living quarters for people, before he argues that this place was a hub for more than the immediately local people but a provincial centre “where communities met to engage in complex rites” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240). E Banning in his 2011 paper ‘So Fair a House: Gobekli Tepe and the Identification of Temples in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East’, argues against the claim by Schmidt that no settlement existed at Gobekli Tepe. He argues that accommodation for the living existed, that these “buildings at Gobekli Tepe may actually be houses, albeit ones that are rich in symbolic content” (Banning, 2011, p. 619).

The paper published by Dietrich and Notroff in 2015 comes to the defense of their teacher and mentor Klaus Schmidt. Both have excavated with him at Gobekli Tepe and published at least one paper with him before his death in 2014. They argue, that whilst it was true from the beginning of excavating Gobekli Tepe that the nature of the construction found there was explained and labelled as “ ‘sanctuaries’, or ‘temples’ ”, (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75), and how Banning had disputed this strict demarcation between either a purely domestic or “ritual” (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75) space at this time. Dietrich and Notroff (2015) inform us that Banning as an Anthropologist argues the archaeologist’s imposition of their view upon such sites is too Western orientated, as it is bent upon looking for a distinct separation between the “sacred and profane” (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75). Further arguing that the anthropologist view does not automatically look for

this point of separation in the space, but actually perceives how these things are actually woven together. Dietrich and Notroff (2015) argue that Banning considers that structures contain elements of both the secular and the divine. In the case of either one of them being lesser or greater in its overt or covert display. Gobekli Tepe was a particular case in question, where the structure at Gobekli Tepe where bountiful with imagery they were “nevertheless domestic in nature” (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75).

Schmidt (2010) informs us that the new layer of Gobekli Tepe “has been dated to the 9th millennium calBC (Schmidt, 2010, p. 240), and that at this time wild plants and animals had been tamed. In a joint paper from 2012, written by Oliver Dietrich, Cigdem Koksal-Schmidt, Jens Notroff, Klaus Schmidt and Cihat Kurkcuoglu “Gobekli Tepe: A Stone Age Ritual Center in Southeastern Turkey”, they argue that the evidence from the lithic finds at Gobekli Tepe suggests the people there “were still hunter-foragers” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 35). That the lithic evidence is mostly composed of a wide assortment of “projectile points” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 35) and that after analysis of both plant remains and animal bones from the site, no process of domestication of either animals or plants was evident.

No evidence of domestication particularly during the earliest construction phase of Gobekli Tepe, but definitely evidence of monumental construction has taken place. At this layer, the monumentality of the site is most striking, with the identification of “five stone circles, Enclosures A, B, C, D, and G” (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 75). The circles vary between the widest at thirty metres to the smallest of ten metres according to Dietrich and Notroff (2015). These circular and semi-circular enclosures are constructed by immense vertical blocks of limestone in “a distinct T-shape” (Notroff et al. 2014, p. 84). Gil Haklay and Avi Gopher in a paper from 2020 “Geometry and Architectural Planning at Gobekli Tepe, Turkey”, inform us that these immense vertical blocks of limestone that line the enclosures A to D, are “often decorated” (Haklay and Gopher, 2020, p. 344). That they are between three and four metres in height and are “embedded into stepped-back peripheral walls” (Haklay and Gopher, 2020, p. 344). The lower space between these “T-shaped pillars” (Haklay and Gopher, 2020, p. 344) has been constructed in such away as to form a possible seated space along these walls. Schmidt (2010) informs us that the material which was used

to construct these low-level walls or as they have been described 'benches', was from quarried stone.

Central to each of these enclosures with their three- to four-metre-tall pillars, are two even larger monoliths "(up to 5.5 m high)" (Haklay and Gopher, 2020, p. 344). Schmidt (2000) argues that the earliest layers had to have been constructed by the hunting and gathering population of beyond Gobekli Tepe was necessary to complete this. Highlighting the find of a fifty ton, "the largest T-pillar" (Schmidt, 2000, p. 48) still at its quarried site. He poses the question for the reader of how a small local community to Gobekli Tepe to move such huge, quarried stones. This he answers by asserting that it is evident that only through coordinated gatherings of multiple bands "of hunter-gatherers from the territories around Gobekli Tepe" (Schmidt, 2000, p. 48) could these things have been moved and the enclosures constructed. These gatherings Schmidt (2000) further argues were grounded in a "ritual background" (Schmidt, 2000, p. 48). Schmidt (2000) argues where there were multiple places to quarry the stone needed surrounding Gobekli Tepe, for the enclosures and the huge pillars, this would have been a time-consuming process. That it would have depleted the resources of the surrounding area for too many people to have lived there for any lengthy time period, rather than many people meet up more often for much shorter periods of time and therefore have a less potentially devastating impact on the environment.

Schmidt (2010) argues that one of the reasons this environment was chosen to construct Gobekli Tepe was because of the abundance of good limestone in the area. The pillars that formed the ring surrounding the immense pair of central pillars, needed to be constructed from "limestone of supreme quality" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 241). Dietrich and Notroff (2015) highlight an issue of habitation as yet not touched upon, water. Whilst emphasising the location as being inhospitable to habitation, with Gobekli Tepe being the only place with suitable soil for cultivation, the nearest located water source is five kilometres distant. Dietrich and Notroff (2015) point out that a series of craters found on the "western slope could represent rainwater cisterns" (Dietrich and Notroff, 2015, p. 83). They also point out that these possible cisterns would not be sufficient to store enough water for people to stay there during a rainless summer but might allow a longer period of stay outside of this time.

Without sufficient accessible water habitation becomes untenable, another piece missing from this requirement for habitation according to Schmidt (2010), there were no obvious household signs, such as “fireplaces, ovens,” (Schmidt, 2000, p. 49).

Schmidt (2010), Haklay and Gopher (2020) and Dietrich and Notroff (2014) all describe how the third layer had changed from the second layer. No longer were there “large circular structures” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 241), the second layer now had changed to “small rectangular rooms” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 241). This was a change for Schmidt (2010), but as these now differently shaped structures from layer III, also still contained the same but smaller “T-shaped pillars” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 241) as Layer III. This did not stop these newer smaller enclosures, from also being “identified as sanctuaries” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 241). Schmidt (2010) and Notroff et al (2014) both point out that in layer II the structures were not just smaller, but that the standard height of the pillars had reduced as well. Schmidt (2010) highlights the standard height difference for the pillars from layer III being three point five metres, reducing to one point five metres in the layer II structures. Notroff et al (2014) argues that none of these pillars from layer II exceeded a maximum height of two metres, with there also being a reduction in how many pillars were now within each structure, with some of these rooms containing none at all.

Notroff et al. (2015)

In a paper from 2015 by Jens Notroff, Oliver Dietrich, Joris Peters and Nadja Pollath “What modern lifestyles owe to Neolithic feast. The early mountain sanctuary at Gobekli Tepe and the onset of food-production”, they highlight that, of those enclosures labelled A-D discovered and excavated in that order, all of them had been “backfilled intentionally” (Notroff et al. 2015, p. 34). This backfilling of these structures was deliberate according to Notroff et al (2015), but a date for when this happened has as not yet been identified. Notroff et al (2015) also notes a comparison of this process of backfilling the structure to that of the burying someone. Oliver Dietrich; Laura Dietrich and Jens Notroff in their 2016 paper, “Anthropomorphic Imagery at Gobekli Tepe”, inform us that the process of backfilling was a deliberate mechanism whereby human manipulated material, sculptural carved limestone and animal bones were deposited at the base of pillars amongst the backfill material.

So far this paper has focused upon the geography of Gobekli Tepe, the timescale of the creation of its structures and some of the interpretations surrounding the purpose for which it was created and why people continued to invest time and energy upon this place. Now this paper will focus upon some of the vast amounts of imagery carved into many of the pillars within the many structures. This paper is particularly interested in looking at the low relief carvings upon the largest central T-shaped pillars and consider the arguments for what they represented or were symbolic of. Notroff et al (2012) point out that the structures labelled C-D were the biggest, with D both the biggest and in the best state of preservation and according to Notroff et al (2014) could act as a blueprint of the type “and character of the older circular PPN A enclosures” (Notroff et al. 2014, p. 86). At the time of writing the article Dietrich et al (2012) inform us that there are eleven discernible peripheral pillars surrounding the two largest central pillars in enclosure D.

This twelfth pillar was believed to be hidden in unexcavated wall material at the time, but Haklay and Gopher (2020) inform us of the same point, that this twelfth pillar is yet to be discovered, eight years later. This is a minor point but potentially highlights an aspect that appears to place an expectation of something that when there is no evidence for it. Why is it important that a twelfth pillar be there, eight years later, hidden away from sight. They highlight that this enclosure whilst being the biggest, is also the most uniformly shaped elliptical structure. With an interior width of around fourteen metres. They also inform us that the structure’s exterior wall has been conserved to a height of “over 3 m” (Haklay and Gopher, 2020, p. 347). This wall is then in turn connected to the eleven-wall connected or embedded pillars surrounding the monstrous two central pillars.

Oliver Dietrich; Manfred Heun; Jens Notroff; Klaus Schmidt and Martin Zarnkow in their 2012 paper “The role of cult and feasting in the emergence of Neolithic communities. New evidence from Gobekli Tepe, south-eastern Turkey” inform us that the two massive central pillars final height of five point five metres was finally discovered in 2009, when the excavators finally reached the bedrock base of the plateau. Notroff et al (2014) inform us that as well as standing 5.5 metres tall, they also weigh “some 10 metric tons” (Notroff et al, 2014, p. 87) and are seated upon two bases of just under twenty centimetres in height, carved from “the carefully smoothed bedrock” (Notroff et al, 2014, p. 87). Schmidt (2010)

states that the T-shape of these pillars “can easily be interpreted as anthropomorphic, as some of the pillars appear to have arms and hands” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 244), concluding this point that these images are unquestionably of humans. This point is reinforced and also slightly altered by Notroff et al (2014), when they inform us that these “T-shaped pillars possess an anthropomorphic identity” (Notroff et al. 2014, p. 88). The use of the word identity is not directly connected to human identity, yes a human-like shape, which is the same as any bipedal creature. Notroff et al (2014) and Schmidt (2010) both argue the horizontal part that forms the top of the T-shape as representing the head. Schmidt (2010) argues this point based upon the analysis of a similarly shaped “pillar from Nevali Cori” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 244), and how it was interpreted as having “the natural proportions of the human head” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 244).

Dietrich et al (2012) inform us that upon excavating to the bedrock, the features of these forms were now exposed, with low relief carving upon these limestone forms. These carved images were of “hands and fingers” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 679) and beneath these hands were “decorated belts and a loincloth” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 679). They argue that these forms were a distillation of the human form “abstracted, impersonal but clearly anthropomorphic” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 679), but that these shapes also “clearly belong to another, transcendent sphere” (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 679). This is an interesting point, that this abstraction of human-like shape might actually be a representation of actual supernatural beings and not humans. Whereas Notroff et al (2015) argues that all these low relief carvings of arms; hands; belts and loincloths accentuates the human-like nature “of these pillars” (Notroff et al. 2015, p. 36). This point of the loincloth carved into the pillar is interesting for Schmidt (2010) as it reinforces his interpretation of the pillar being genderless. Having already pointed out that there was no apparent intention upon the part of the carvers’ to distinguish between the sexes. Schmidt (2010) argues that the carvers’ skill level was not the cause of this absence of detail. He argues this austere style was on purpose as can be seen elsewhere on the site, where the carvers’ skills were “proof of the artists’ ability to produce naturalist works” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 244).

This artistic skill is demonstrated by the naturalistic reproduction of humanity, can be seen in the “approximately life-sized human heads” (Notroff et al. 2015, p. 36) found at Gobekli

Tepe. Excavated amongst the backfill material at the base of the central pillars. Notroff (2015) informs us that these carved heads have a break around the neck area, and therefore “were probably from larger statues” (Notroff et al. 2015, p. 36). The point is made by Notroff et al (2015), that between T-shaped pillar and the human headed carving, there is a clear distinction in the style of production. Notroff et al (2015) speculates that maybe this difference in representation is actually an overt separation in who or what was being represented. Notroff et al (2015) offers the view that the T-shaped pillars because of the distinctly abstract nature of their appearance, and are bigger in size, must “depict entities” (Notroff et al. 2015, p. 36).

This point of whether the T-shaped pillars were abstracted representations of non-humans is a line Schmidt (2010) is not prepared to cross, arguing that “who is represented by the highly stylized T-shaped pillars remains open” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 254). He declares that it is not possible to know whether the idea of god actually existed at that time, let alone was represented upon monolithic limestone pillars. Schmidt (2010) concludes that if the concept of “gods existed in the minds of Early Neolithic people” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 254), then in all likelihood these T-shaped limestone pillars were the “first known monumental depictions of gods” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 254). This idea of the T-shaped pillars as abstracted low relief carved images of humans, possibly ancestors or deities is an interesting speculation. But even Schmidt (2000) originally acknowledged in his preliminary report that that it was not known what belief, concept or meaning these creators of the T-shaped pillars planned to convey. Where Schmidt (2000) argues that Gobekli Tepe played a pivotal role in the Neolithic transition from hunting and gathering to sedentism, he argues that it was more than the usual suspects of economic or ecological reasons. He considers that “the impact of a transcendental sphere” (Schmidt, 2000, p. 49) has now to be included and considered when considering why humans settled down, considering the need to insert the sacred dimension into this story.

This sacred dimension that is emphasised by the abundant imagery (15) Gobekli Tepe, which I have chosen not to focus in for lack of space. Imagery; structures and carved features, to clarify the imagery I will define as that which has been carved upon the T-shaped pillars, large and small. The structures or enclosures and then carvings separate from separate

from the pillars. Both these sets of imagery, the animals and the humanlike ones have understandably become the dominate features by which Gobekli Tepe has been chosen to be analysed by. This has contributed to attempts to understand the meaning and purpose this place served, but also has hindered that understanding. Dietrich et al. (2012) points out that the amount of wild animal bones found in amongst the backfill material used to fill in and cover the structures, is too large a quantity for anything but "largescale feasting" (Dietrich et al. 2012, p. 690).

I return to Banning's (2011) argument that as elsewhere in the world, the sacred and the profane can co-exist. As I have written, Gobekli Tepe had no nearby water source, in reply, humans still today have to walk considerable distances to get water. But I must return to the question of accommodation, if Schmidt et al are so sure the structures discovered so far only served as places of some form of ritualistic worship, where did they stay during these visits. Banning (2012) points out that Schmidt argues that these spaces could not serve as habitation because of the lack of "a lack of normal domestic remains in the buildings" (Banning, 2011, p. 622).

Conclusion *this is the first time that I have heard your voice in this piece of writing*

Points that I feel have not yet approached are, if it is accepted that Gobekli Tepe served as a regional hub for communities to meet there on their hunter-gatherer life cycle, did they bring their accommodation with them. If not, why has no signs of sheltered habitation been yet discovered. Where those who visited there, so few visits and in such pleasant weather that it never became necessary to provide more permanent shelter. This seems strange considering the effort that must have been expended in creating Gobekli Tepe, and its occupation over such a long timespan before being buried. Do I consider the site as a sacred place, a place of worship or ritual experience, possibly. Most definitely, so shall we start special. Whether because you believe these structures were sanctuaries containing carved images of transcendent beings, or because of the potential effort required to create this place may have been staggering, especially when we consider materials available for carving and building Gobekli Tepe. I have spent much of this paper attempting to place Gobekli Tepe into a physical context, a context that would help me to consider, where did the those who travelled to Gobekli Tepe sleep. Most of the research seems to have not written this

into the narrative of Gobekli Tepe, regional hub, a possible example that people put down roots and gave up the hunting and gathering because they had created and could then go to 'worship' at Gobekli Tepe. Maybe as groups of people who always travelled they would have temporary shelter with them, wherever they travelled to. But Gobekli Tepe was constructively altered, there is a layer II and a later layer III, why did the site not display signs evidence of shelters. Maybe because the sacred and profane overlapped and, could the alteration to the shape and size of the enclosures demonstrate an alteration in purpose. I have only focused upon four of more than twenty enclosures, where all of them for ritual purposes, where there that many people squeezed into them that it was necessary to build more. These are just a few ideas that I would like to explore.

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Gobekli Tepe Space, Places and Objects

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

61 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

You have done a lot of reading and you have presented the views of several of the archaeologists working at GT, very much in the form of an essay.

However, you have not really done what I asked you - to write a site report considering the use of space and considered the nature of the ritual/cult practices enacted within these spaces. Some ideas such as communal gathering and feasting come out, but more as a reflection of the work of Dietrich and Notroff..

This is where a discussion of some of the theoretical approaches covered in the module would work well (hospitality, commensality, community effervescence, heterotopia etc). Instead the people behind the monuments are somewhat lacking.

This was more of an essay outlining some of the key findings for GT and your own voice was lacking until the conclusions. Be bolder!

You use up a lot of valuable words by giving the full title of articles in your main text - usual citation would work better.

If you are writing about space you should illustrate it! maps, plans, photos etc./ This makes it easier for the reader to navigate your text and to visualise the site.

Text Comment. maps and plans?

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Comment 2

is



Comment 3

no punctuation

Text Comment. full citation

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Text Comment. one of the key points is that he identified this as the worlds earliest temple



Comment 5

no need to quote this

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Comment 8

you are mixing two sentences with different sences.

Text Comment. you are wasting valuable words by giving full citation of works here. Just cite normally!

Strikethrough.



Comment 10

no need to quote thi, the citation will be enough

PAGE 2



Comment 11

this in itself is very interesting and potentially tells us about the power of the site: think of the discussions we had in class about closure ceremonies

Text Comment. An interesting overview of Schmidt's reaction to his discovery, but I am not sure that this is really helping you develop a focused site report. Be more precise and focused with your writing.

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Text Comment. worth looking at Banning here - even though this has been disproven

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5



Could be phrased better

could be phrased better

PAGE 6

Text Comment. Notroff et al. (2015)

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PAGE 7

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PAGE 8

PAGE 9



Comment 15

why are you defining this imagery as sacred?

PAGE 10



Citation Needed

Cite Source:

Please use the link below to find links to information regarding specific citation styles:

http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_citation_styles.html

Text Comment. this is the first time that I have heard your voice in this piece of writing

PAGE 11

PAGE 12

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