
Ritual and Ideology in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B of the Levant and Southeast Anatolia

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The study of ritual is an important and indeed essential part of prehistoric archaeology, and is reported at several early Neolithic sites in the Levant and Anatolia. In this study, the evidence for ritual at five Pre-Pottery Neolithic B sites ('Ain Ghazal, Kfar HaHoresh, Nevali Çori, Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe) is compared. This comparison serves as the basis for an interpretation which focuses on the ideology of PPNB ritual rather than on its social function. It is argued that there are four basic structuring principles in PPNB ritual and ideology: communality, dominant symbolism, vitality (including the notions of domestication, fecundity and life-force), and human–animal linkage. These concepts are related in an attempt to delineate the PPNB ritual system and the place of these specific sites therein.

This article deals with ritual practice and ideology (in a non-Marxist sense: 'worldview') during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (PPNB, dated c. 8600–7000 BC: Cauvin 2000, 76)¹ in the Levant and Anatolia. The PPNB:

witnessed some of the most profound transformations in human history: the inception and spread of agriculture and animal husbandry, permanent settlement in solid houses, growing populations around fixed locales, long-distance trade in raw material such as obsidian, craft specialization in lithic production (...), the use of pyrotechnology in the making of plaster (...), and the construction of structures for sacred rituals (Hole 2000, 191).

The focus will be a number of sites which provide key evidence for understanding rituals in both regions, i.e. 'Ain Ghazal and Kfar HaHoresh in the Central Levant, and Nevali Çori, Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe in Southeast Anatolia (Fig. 1). In both regions, archaeological excavations at these important sites have yielded spectacular remains which are commonly held to be indicative of ritual practices, e.g. 'temples', stelae with depictions of humans and animals and deposits of plastered human skulls. These results raise some interesting questions: Are these finds really the remains of ritual practices? If so, what kind of rituals were executed? What was the function and meaning of those rituals? What are the

similarities and differences between rituals in the Levant and Southeast Anatolia, and how do we account for them? In this article I wish to explore these basic questions, and in particular to offer an interpretation of PPNB ritual practice. The discussion is based upon the above-mentioned key sites, but other important PPNB sites with indications of ritual will be included in order to reach an understanding of the scope and variety of ritual practices.

The article is divided into four main parts. In the first, the study of ritual in prehistory is briefly introduced. The second part is devoted to discussion of the key sites in the Levant and Anatolia.² In the third part, developments in Neolithic ritual are considered, and the differences and similarities between Levantine and Anatolian PPNB rituals are analyzed. In the final section, an interpretation of ritual practice and ideology in the PPNB of the Levant and Southeast Anatolia is presented.

The study of ritual

Some basic notions

The study of prehistoric ritual is still regarded by many researchers as a generally unscientific activity, and it is often said that when archaeologists do not understand specific features or artefacts at a site they call them 'religious' or 'ritual' (see e.g. Whitehouse



Figure 1. Map of the Near East with Neolithic sites discussed in the text.

1996). It could be argued, however, that the investigation of ritual in prehistory should not be regarded in this way, and that it is an important, fruitful and indeed necessary part of prehistoric archaeology (Verhoeven in press a). In this respect it is worth repeating Garwood and colleagues, who stated that:

... little sense can be made of even the secular 'pragmatic' world, unless this stems from an understanding of the systems of classification, explanation and belief that give meaning to social life: ritual and religion in this respect must be central concerns of archaeological study. (Garwood *et al.* 1991, v)

Moreover, from a methodological point of view, ritual does not have to be a 'trash-bin category'; I believe that it can be approached using basic concepts. I will turn to these in a moment, but first of all it seems useful to deal with certain basic definitions and properties of ritual. Anthropologists have for many years

dealt with religion and ritual in great detail, and it is on their work that my initial understanding of ritual was based. The anthropological literature on ritual is huge (see e.g. Alexander 1997), and this is not the place to discuss it in any detail (but see Verhoeven in press a).

What in the first instance seems to be very frustrating, but is indeed rather interesting, is that it is impossible to give a clear-cut definition of ritual. In fact, what may be called the anthropology of ritual consists of many different approaches, each with different definitions and each highlighting one of the many possible dimensions of rituals, i.e. intellectualism, emotionalism, functionalism, symbolism, structuralism, cognitive approaches, marxist approaches, relational approaches, performance approaches and practice theory (see e.g. Bell 1997; Bloch 1989; Brück 1999; Cunningham 1999; De Coppet & Iteanu 1995; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Morris 1987; Rappaport 1999; Schechner 1994). These different ap-

proaches indicate that ritual is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and that instead of highlighting one particular aspect the various dimensions of ritual should be studied in a comprehensive analysis. In fact, in Firth's much used and general definition, he considered ritual to be:

... a kind of patterned activity oriented towards the control of human affairs, primarily symbolic in character with a non-empirical referent, and as a rule socially sanctioned. (Firth 1951, 222)

In this definition a number of different aspects are mentioned: formalism, explicit symbolism, reference to the supernatural, and social control. To these may be added traditionalism, disciplined invariance, rule-governance and performance (Bell 1997, 138–69).

Analyzing and recognizing ritual

In a new model for the analysis of ritual in prehis-

Table 1. *Properties of framing.*

Location	the building, deposit or object is located in a special area, e.g. on a promontory, clearly separate from domestic buildings and areas, etc.
Shape, texture and colour	the form, texture and colour of buildings or objects may differ significantly from that of other domestic buildings and objects
Size	the size of buildings or objects may differ significantly from that of other domestic buildings and objects
Orientation	the orientation of buildings or objects may differ significantly from that of other domestic buildings and objects
Construction material	the construction material of buildings or objects may differ significantly from that of other domestic buildings and objects at the site
Presence of special features	the building or object may be marked by some unusual features that are not found in other domestic buildings or at other objects
Inventory	the building or deposit is marked by finds that do not occur normally
Association	the association of objects is uncommon, and cannot be explained functionally
Number	the building, object or deposit is special in that it is either single or rare
Functionality	the building, object or deposit cannot be interpreted in direct functional, domestic, terms
Knowledge/analogy	from the researcher's 'frame of reference' it is known that a building, object or deposit such as the one under investigation is usually ritual

tory (Verhoeven in press a), five basic concepts were proposed, viz. *ritual framing*, *syntax*, *symbolism*, *dimensions* and *analogy*. In this article PPNB ritual will be analyzed largely by use of these concepts. For the present purposes the concept of framing is the most important, and hence must be discussed in some detail. But first let me explain the other terms. *Syntax* refers to the structure of rituals. The following components can be distinguished: context (the chronological, cultural and spatial context of the ritual remains); object (which objects and symbols were used and how?); act (a reconstruction of the ritual practice); typology (what kind of ritual was it, e.g. a mortuary ritual, a harvest ritual, etc.); agent (who were involved?). *Symbolism* is an important concept because many rituals are marked by an elaborate use of symbols. Basic concepts in this respect are dominant symbols: objects that both focus and evoke in a more persistent manner than conventional symbols; metaphors, which are used to link different cultural domains, and positional meaning, or the way a symbol is related to other symbols. *Dimensions* refers to the fact that rituals have many

dimensions, of which the various anthropological approaches to its study are indicative (see above). Finally, *analogy* is part of the model since it has been argued that it is only through analogical reasoning (in its widest sense, including the use of ethnographic 'parallels') that we can comprehend the past (Verhoeven 1999; in press b).

Let us now return to the concept of *ritual framing* (from now on simply termed *framing*). As Tilley (1999, 264) has noted:

Material forms most frequently attract our attention when we realize that there is something wrong with them . . . It is usually only in special circumstances, in the performative contexts of ceremonial practice and ritual, when material metaphors may be explicitly foregrounded and become the subject of verbal discourse.

Framing is defined as the way, or performance, in which people and/or activities and/or objects are set off from others for ritual, non-domestic, purposes. A difference is being made, a special moment is constructed. Framing is mainly achieved by creating a special place, a special time, and by the use of uncommon objects: e.g. a stage is set up, special clothes are worn, distinctive objects put on display, etc. Burials are among the most obvious framed and ritual contexts. In architecture, objects and deposits, framing in the archaeological record may be recognized by paying attention to some general properties which indicate 'special contexts' at the site investigated, as indicated in Table 1.³

Framing offers a prehistoric archaeologist a flexible way of recognizing and dealing with rituals. In contrast to static and universal checklist approaches as advocated by Renfrew in his *The Archaeology of Cult* (1985, and see e.g. Bienert in press), in which (conveniently!) the outcome of the analysis is already specified at the start, framing offers the possibility of studying ritual in its context and discovering new things about prehistoric ritual.



Figure 2. Anthropomorphic statue made of lime plaster. 'Ain Ghazal; found together with six other statue fragments, possibly including five two-headed busts, in cache 2. Height: 1.07 m. (Source: Rollefson 2000b, fig. 1.)

It is acknowledged that ritual can invade all aspects of life, and that many 'mundane' (= unframed) objects have both ritual and non-ritual aspects, but as a starting point it is virtually impossible to detect and analyze their ritual 'content'. An analysis of prehistoric ritual should therefore start by distinguishing framed objects and deposits (see also Wasilewska 1994). Once detected and described/interpreted, these objects and deposits should be contextualized, i.e. related to the other elements of the archaeological record. In a dialectical manner, then, the framed and unframed elements may give meaning to each other. Framing is only about isolating and recognizing *possible* ritual practices; it is only the starting point. In the interpretation, sense has to be made of such practices, i.e. the function and meaning of rituals has to be dealt with.⁴

Key sites

The following discussion focuses on five key sites: 'Ain Ghazal and Kfar HaHoresh in the Levant, and Nevali Çori, Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe in Southeast Anatolia. All these sites are marked by typical PPNB assemblages (tanged arrowheads, 'small finds' such as figurines and stone vessels, etc.). The few obsidian blade fragments at 'Ain Ghazal and Kfar HaHoresh seem to indicate contacts with eastern Anatolia. At 'Ain Ghazal, Nevali Çori and Çayönü plant and animal species were domesticated, the diet being supplemented by hunting and the collecting of wild plants. The subsistence at Kfar HaHoresh and Göbekli Tepe was based on wild resources only.

'Ain Ghazal

The site of 'Ain Ghazal is located in the eastern part of Amman in Jordan, on two hills bordering the Wadi Zarqa. Apart from occupation in the Middle PPNB, Late PPNB, and Pre-Pottery Neolithic C (PPNC), the site was also occupied in the Yarmukian Pottery Neolithic period. Here I shall only deal with the PPNB and PPNC occupation, dated between c. 8200 and 6500 BC (Rollefson 1998b). On this 12–13 ha 'megashite' (e.g. Gebel *et al.* 1997), one of the largest PPNB sites in the Near East, excavations were conducted in four areas: the Central, South, North and East Fields. Together, these areas comprise an area of about 2355 m² (Rollefson *et al.* 1992).

Indications of rituals: In a number of important contributions, Rollefson has dealt with ritual at 'Ain Ghazal (Rollefson 1983; 1986; 1998a; 2000a). He recognizes the following 'classes' of ritual objects: ritual buildings (also called ritual structures, temples, special buildings or shrines); lime-plaster statues and busts; burials; skull caches; plastered human skulls; human and animal figurines.

The ritual buildings, clearly different from the domestic architecture, are marked by special interior 'furniture' such as plastered hearths, basins and 'altars' (Late PPNB Special Building, PPNC Special Building, Apsidal Buildings), subfloor channels (Circular Buildings), and painting (Apsidal Buildings). The dimensions of the various buildings have been listed in Table 6. The ritual buildings were remarkably clean, and nothing was found on their floors (Rollefson pers. comm.). Interesting was the recovery of five pairs of gazelle horns in one area on the second storey of a domestic building; perhaps this building also served some special, ritual purpose (Rollefson 1998a, 56).

The second class of supposedly ritual objects is quite spectacular, and is represented by two caches containing respectively 26 (cache 1) and 7 (cache 2) large anthropomorphic statues, including two-headed busts, made of lime plaster (Fig. 2, and see Grissom 2000; Rollefson 1983; 1986; 2000b; Schmandt-Besserat 1998a,b; see also Garfinkel 1994).⁵ Both caches stem from Middle PPNB deposits, and both were found beneath the floors of houses that had been abandoned long before the statues were buried.

The PPNB burial record is represented by approximately 120 human interments. Rollefson (1986, 50) distinguishes three burial styles: 1) subfloor and courtyard, decapitated, flexed; 2) courtyard, skull intact, not flexed; 3) infant. To these styles skull burials may be added. The first type is dominant. From Middle PPNB contexts 12 isolated human skulls, belonging to adults as well as to children, were recovered. One of the skulls was recovered from a house floor, the others were found in pits beneath house floors or in courtyards. Apart from skulls, the plaster remains of three plastered skulls were found (Rollefson 2000a, 171).

From Middle PPNB deposits around 150 animal figurines and around 40 human (mostly female) clay figurines were recovered (McAdam 1997, 136). Of the identifiable animal figurines more than 90 per cent represent cattle, the other species depicted are sheep/goats and equids. Interesting is the find of two bovine figurines with flint bladelets in their bodies. Almost all of the human figurines were headless, and it is possible that they were decapitated, just like some of the humans from 'Ain Ghazal. Apart from the two 'killed' cattle figurines, found in a pit, all figurines came from refuse deposits outside houses, or from the fill of abandoned houses (Rollefson pers. comm.).

Table 2 presents a general assessment of the framed/ritual nature of these categories, applying the properties of Table 1.⁶ As can be seen in Table 2, the classes of ritual buildings, statues and busts, skull caches and plastered skulls are clearly framed, most likely indicating that they were objects with an important ritual function and meaning.⁷ Figurines (human as well as animal), however, represent a more ambiguous picture: they seem to be less 'special' than the other classes of ritual artefacts. In fact, here we encounter the

problem of interpretation of prehistoric figurines which has been dealt with by a series of authors (see e.g. Bailey 1996, and the various contributions in Goodison & Morris 1998). Mainly on the basis of ethnography, many of these researchers have argued that apart from ritual functions ('cult figures' and 'vehicles of magic') figurines can have many functions, such as 'teaching figures' and 'toys'. As indicated by the 'Ain Ghazal case, figurines, then, represent a category of objects which are 'special', but less so than 'true' ritual artefacts. Therefore spatial context and association with other objects are especially important for figurines in assessing ritual functions and meanings (Tringham & Conkey 1998). The prehistoric figurines of 'Ain Ghazal, as well as the other figurines that are mentioned in the present study, are regarded as ritual objects, rather than as toys, mainly on the basis of the recognition that: 1) in all cases the figurines have quite specific distributions, and are not randomly distributed in the settlement (as one would expect if they were made and used by children); 2) the figurines seem to be part of a 'ritual system', i.e. their form, function and meaning are logically related to other aspects of this system (see below).

Kfar HaHoresh

Kfar HaHoresh is a small (0.5 ha) site located in the lower Galilee Nazareth hills of Israel (Fig. 1), situated on a secluded slope of a small wadi. An area of approximately 320 m² has been excavated. At least five architectural phases have been distinguished, which have been provisionally assigned to the Middle PPNB. Obvious domestic buildings have not been encountered, but the presence of plaster floors, fragments of stone walls, hearths and pits and domestic artefacts (ground-stone tools) in fact appear to indicate at least some domestic activity. The span of

Table 2. Assessment of the framed nature of the 'Ain Ghazal ritual classes. + = positive (i.e. framed); - = negative (unframed); ? = unknown; i = irrelevant.

	Ritual buildings	Statues and busts	Skull caches	Plastered skulls	Figurines
Location	-	-	+	+	+
Shape	+	+	i	i	+
Size	-	+	i	i	-
Orientation	-	i	+	?	i
Material	-	+	i	+	-
Features	+	+	i	+	+
Inventory	+	+	+	+	i
Association	i	+	+	+	-
Number	+	+	+	+	-
Functionality	+	+	+	+	+
Knowledge	+	+	+	+	+

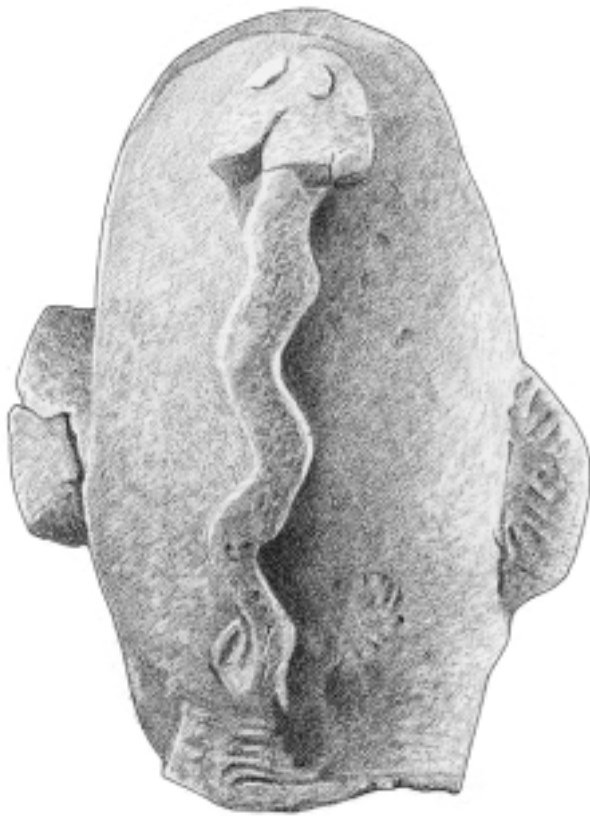


Figure 3. Sculpture of limestone with snake on the back of a bald head. Nevali Çori, originally placed in a niche in ritual building II. Height: 37 cm. (Source: Hauptmann 1999, fig. 10.)

occupation seems to have been short (Goring-Morris 2000).

Indications of rituals: In all the areas of excavation quite unusual and spectacular remains of funeral ceremonies have been encountered. Beneath the floor of a rectangular structure, a well-preserved human plastered skull was found just above a complete but headless gazelle carcass. Other human bones, including skulls, were associated in a variety of ways with the bones of wild animals, i.e. of aurochs and gazelle (Table 7, and Goring-Morris 2000; Goring-Morris *et al.* 1998).

A most fascinating discovery was a large shallow pit filled with ash in which mostly disarticulated human and gazelle bones had been intentionally arranged in such a manner that when viewed from above they depicted an animal in profile (Goring-Morris *et al.* 1998, figs. 3 & 4). The human bones in this 'mosaic' stem from at least four individuals. The head, foreleg, back and tail were clearly visible, but the other parts of the



Figure 4. Limestone sculpture of human and bird. Nevali Çori, ritual buildings II/III. Height: 1 m. (Source: Hauptmann 1999, fig. 14.)

depiction were rather disturbed. The animal depicted may be a wild boar, an aurochs, or perhaps a lion.⁸

The special and framed nature of the Kfar HaHoresh discoveries is obvious, and it seems beyond doubt that here we have an important ritual site, referred to as a 'mortuary centre' by Goring-Morris and his colleagues.

Nevali Çori

Nevali Çori is located in the Taurus foothills south-east of Diyarbakir in the province of Şanlıurfa in Southeast Anatolia (Fig. 1). The site is situated on either side of the Kantara creek, a tributary of the Euphrates river. Radiocarbon dates between 8400–8100 BC indicate that the site was occupied in the early and middle PPNB (Hauptmann 1999).

Indications of rituals: Several classes of evidence can be distinguished: a ritual building; burials; skull caches; large stone sculptures of people and animals; small figurines.

Let us start with the famous 'temple' (Hauptmann 1993; 1999). From level 2 onwards, a more or less rectangular stone building with a lay-out and inventory that is wholly different from the domestic buildings was located in the northwestern part of the terrace. Buildings II and III⁹ (building III was set within the walls of building II: Table 6) were marked by terrazzo floors, internal benches, niches and large anthropomorphic T-shaped stelae. Built into the back wall of a niche in building III was a large limestone head with a snake on it (Fig. 3).

With the exception of a pillar fragment with a male head and bird found in house 3, as well as a limestone bowl with two human figures surrounding a tortoise (?) (Bienert 1989), all the large stone sculpture ($n = 11$) stems from cult buildings II and III. Interestingly, this sculpture is from secondary contexts, as it had been incorporated within the walls. The sculpture depicts humans, birds, and, interestingly, linkages between humans and birds (Fig. 4, and see Hauptmann 1993, figs. 19–27; 1999, figs. 10–17).

The subject matter and context of the small stone figurines are rather different from the clay figurines. It is thought that they should be regarded as miniature representations of the large stone sculpture from cult buildings II and III; they include human heads and miniature pillars which repeat the motifs seen on the large anthropomorphic pillars. Apart from these, different sorts of wild animals (e.g. lions, bears, vultures) seem to have been depicted (Morsch pers. comm.). The clay figurines are of a different shape, and depictions of animals are rare. The human figurines are subdivided into sitting female figurines (females with child, pregnant women) and male figurines which, contrary to expectation, are the most frequent type. The few clay animal figurines are mainly bovids (Morsch in press). Both the clay and the stone figurines are virtually absent from the cult buildings (Morsch pers. comm.).

Human burials and skull caches were only found beneath the house floors; they were deposited in the foundation platforms. The burials, up to twelve in one house (no. 2), consisted mainly of deposits of one or more skulls together with long bones, deposits of long bones, isolated skulls (one or more), and some skeletons, either with or without skulls, in contracted positions (Bienert in press).

Çayönü

The site of Çayönü is a flat oval mound in the Ergani plain just above Diyarbakir. The site has been extensively excavated, resulting in an exposure of Pre-Pottery Neolithic layers of around 4650 m², representing

about 22 per cent of the PPNB surface, which was approximately 200 × 100 m. The basal levels of the tell date to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) period, but here we are concerned with the substantial PPNB occupation, dating from c. 8800 to 6900 BC, thus from the Early PPNB to the Late PPNB (Özdoğan 1999).

Indications of rituals: Three 'framed' classes may be distinguished: ritual buildings, burials, and figurines. As is well-known, a number of special buildings were found in the various subphases (Table 6): Skull Building (Early PPNB, Middle PPNB); Flagstone Building (Early PPNB, Middle PPNB?); Terrazzo Building (Late PPNB); Bench Building (Middle PPNB); Building BL (Middle PPNB).

All these 'special' stone buildings were located on the eastern part of the mound, and were similarly oriented. The Flagstone Building and Skull Building were used for extended periods of time.

The Flagstone Building was marked by two large upright stone slabs, which were aligned with two buttresses in the north wall. Another stone slab was present in the northeastern corner, possibly in front of a stone bench. The floor was constructed of large flat flagstones.

The Skull Building was rebuilt several times. On the floor of the original building human skulls had been deposited, and in two pits many human skeletons were found, in one case accompanied by aurochs skulls and horns. In small cellars of later phases, skulls and other human bones have been found. In the rooms a total of 49 burnt human skulls were found, which from their position seem to have fallen from shelves. Cattle horns were found in a floor pit of the first and second phase building, and on the floor (probably fallen from a wall) of the second phase building. Most interestingly, traces of human, aurochs and sheep blood were observed on the large stone 'table'. Moreover, both aurochs and human blood residue was present on a long flint knife found in the Skull Building (Wood 1998). Taken together, at least 450 individuals are indicated by the human bones recovered from the Skull Building (Özdoğan & Özdoğan 1998, 584).

The Terrazzo Building was marked by internal buttresses and a terrazzo floor, and had a circular basin in the northwestern corner. On the stone rim of the basin traces of human blood were found, and traces of human blood were also present on a flat stone slab found just beside the Terrazzo Building (Wood 1998).

The Bench Building, built partly over the Flagstone Building, is the smallest of the 'special' buildings. It consists of a single room which had massive



Figure 5. T-shaped pillar with depiction of lion. Göbekli Tepe, Lion Pillar Building, pillar 2. Height: 1.45 m. (Source: Schmidt 1998a, fig. 6.)

stone benches running along its walls.

The Late PPNB Earth Plaza, an open area in the southeast of the settlement and lying above the first Middle PPNB Pebbled Plaza, was marked by two rows of uncarved stelae and two large grooved limestone slabs found close to each other (Özdoğan 1999). The PPNB burial record is of a varied nature: the burials were primary, either single or multiple, and flexed. In one case a boar's lower jaw had been placed over two burials.

As at 'Ain Ghazal and Nevali Çori, the clay female and animal figurines were found exclusively in the domestic occupation areas. They were more often found within the houses than in the open areas (Broman Morales 1990; Özdoğan 1999).

Göbekli Tepe

Göbekli Tepe is located in the Harran Plain, just east of Urfa. The site is located on a large limestone ridge and consists of several mounds, the total area of occupation measuring about 300 m in diameter. This

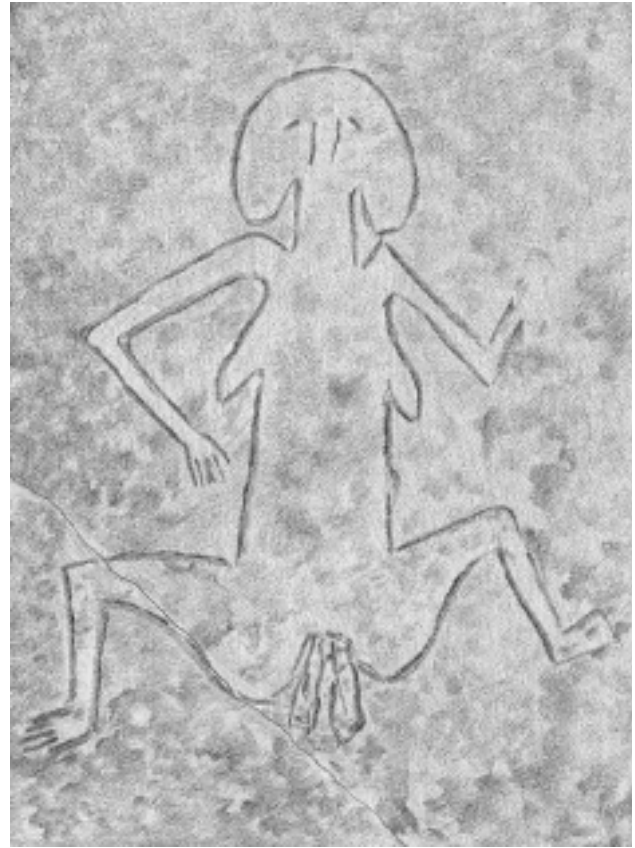


Figure 6. Stone slab with depiction of woman. Göbekli Tepe, Lion Pillar Building. Height: 28 cm. (Source: Hauptmann 1999, fig. 35.)

is a rather unexpected location, close neither to water or farmland, and the site was overlooked in many surveys (Schmidt 1998b, 1).¹⁰ Excavations, covering an area of approximately 1000 m², have been carried out on the top and the southern slope of the southeastern mound. The oldest layers on the southern slope have been radiocarbon-dated at c. 9100–8500 BC (Kromer & Schmidt 1998), indicating Late PPNA/Early PPNB occupation. According to Schmidt (2001a, 48), the oldest layers are what he calls Proto-Neolithic, and related to hunter-gatherer society. On the basis of artefact typology, the younger layers at the mound have been assigned to the Middle PPNB and Late PPNB period (Schmidt 2001a).

Indications of rituals: Göbekli Tepe has yielded spectacular evidence of what were undoubtedly ritual practices, indicated by several stone buildings with terrazzo floors and large decorated T-shaped pillars, and a large stone sculpture with various human and animal depictions (Table 6; Schmidt 1998a,b; 1999; 2001a,b). So far,

no domestic structures or burials have been reported.

At least six what may be termed ritual buildings have been excavated: the Bedrock Structure, the Snake Pillar Building (structure A), the Lion Pillar Building, the Double Pillar Building, and structures B and C. The Lion Pillar Building and structures A, B and C belong to the oldest PPNA/Early PPNB layers. Structures A, B and C and the Double Pillar Building were found close together on the southern slope (Schmidt 1999, fig. 2), the Lion Pillar Building on top of the southeastern mound, and the Bedrock structure on the western plateau. The Bedrock Structure presents a more or less circular (9-metre-diameter) depression lined by a low bench. In the centre were two platforms which must have been bases for pillars (Beile-Bohn *et al.* 1998, fig. 20). The other buildings are marked by the presence of large (up to 3 m tall) T-shaped pillars decorated with animals in relief (Fig. 5). Structures B and C are circular, but the other buildings were rectangular. Some of the buildings showed internal benches. The discovery of a limestone slab with a channel leading to a depression in the floor of structure B probably indicates that liquids (offerings?) were used here (Schmidt 2001b, 10). The Lion Pillar Building was sunk into the mound, while structures A, B and C are regarded as *temenoi* without roofs (Schmidt 2001a, 51).

From the surface of the site and from the fill of the various buildings a substantial number of different large limestone sculptures and incised figures of humans and animals were recovered. Schmidt (1998b) distinguishes the following classes: ithyphallic person; seated person; animal with human head; bird on human head; animal on human head; wolves; reptiles; boar; dog; headless lion; turtle; sceptre; giant phallus; incised snake; snake relief; human body and arm; human arms; cravattes¹¹; finger. To this may be added the carving of a woman on a stone slab from the Lion Pillar Building (Fig. 6).

Interestingly, all the depicted animals on the pillars and other objects are male (Fig. 5). Furthermore, a marked difference has been noted between the iconography of the older and younger layers. In the early deposits a wide range of animals is depicted, but humans occur rarely. In the later layers, however, humans predominate (Schmidt 1999, 13–14).

The development of Neolithic ritual and symbolism

The PPNB sees a development and florescence of ritual and symbolism (a ‘revolution of symbols’:

Cauvin 2000) that seems already to have started in the preceding PPNA. At PPNA Jerf el Ahmar on the Syrian Euphrates, a number of large round subterranean buildings have been found that seem to have been communal and multi-functional (used for storage, meetings and rituals: e.g. Stordeur 2000). They were equipped with stone benches, engraved friezes and, probably, wall paintings. In one of these buildings a partially burnt human skeleton of an adult person was found on the floor with its arms and legs stretched out wide, and without a skull. I have argued elsewhere that the burnt debris covering the body indicates that the building was set on fire after the deposition, most likely as part of a death ritual (Verhoeven 2000a, 62). Other evidence for PPNA ritual comes from Hallan Çemi in eastern Anatolia and Qermez Dere in northern Iraq, two sites marked by semisubterranean rounded buildings. At Hallan Çemi the arrangement of three sheep crania with horns strongly suggests ritual framing, and moreover specific concentrations of animal bones and firecracked stones has been taken as evidence of public feasting (Rosenberg & Redding 2000). At Qermez Dere deposits of human crania and peculiar (non-structural) clay pillars also betray non-domestic, ritual, activities (Watkins 1990).

Compared with the PPNB, not much is known about the PPNA, but as more data becomes available it will be interesting to investigate further the relationships between PPNA and PPNB ritual. What are the similarities and differences? Is the PPNB really so outstanding with regard to ritual, or did ritual and symbolism gradually grow out of earlier Neolithic traditions?

It is clear that the Pottery Neolithic period (c. 7000–5000 BC) that follows PPNB is totally different from the aceramic Neolithic. Dramatic indications for ritual are largely absent. Indeed, apart from burials and figurines there are very few clear indications of ritual practices of any kind (Verhoeven in prep.).

The Levant vs Anatolia: differences and similarities

Analysis of the differences and similarities of PPNB ritual practices at the five key sites in the Levant and Southeast Anatolia, leads us to conclude that despite various differences between the sites (Table 3), both regions show very clear similarities (Table 4). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the PPNB as a whole covers a long period of around 1600 years (excluding the ‘Ain Ghazal PPNC), and it is clear that there were developments in ritual practices, e.g.

Table 3. Differences and similarities of indications of rituals at selected PPNB sites in the Levant and Southeast Anatolia.

Differences		Similarities
'AIN GHAZAL vs KFAR HAHORESH		
ritual buildings	no ritual buildings	plastered skulls
figurines	no figurines reported	burials beneath floors
large statues	no large statues	decapitated skeletons
human–animal linkages present, but modest	very marked human–animal linkages	skull caches
no animal burials	animal burials	
'AIN GHAZAL vs NEVALI ÇORI		
large lime-plaster statues	no large lime-plaster statues	ritual buildings
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	possible 'burial' of ritual buildings
human–animal linkages present, but modest	very marked human–animal linkages ('Mischwesen')	large statues
		skull caches
		sub-floor burials
		decapitated skeletons
		human and animal figurines
		figurines virtually absent from ritual buildings
'AIN GHAZAL vs ÇAYÖNÜ		
large lime-plaster statues	no large lime-plaster statues	ritual buildings
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	possible 'burial' of ritual buildings
no evidence for blood used in rituals	evidence for rituals with human and animal blood	internal furniture in ritual buildings
no burials in ritual buildings	burials in ritual building (Skull Building)	skull caches
		decapitated skeletons
		human and animal figurines
		figurines virtually absent from ritual buildings possible use of horns in ritual contexts ('Ain Ghazal: gazelle horns; Çayönü: aurochs horns)
		pig jaws in burials
'AIN GHAZAL vs GÖBEKLI TEPE		
no T-shaped pillars	large T-shaped pillars, many with animal depictions	ritual buildings
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	possible 'burial' of ritual buildings
skull caches	no skull caches	internal furniture in ritual buildings
burials	as yet no burials found	large statues
many figurines	only very few figurines	
no large sculpture of animals	large sculpture of animals	
large lime-plaster statues	no large lime-plaster statues	
KFAR HAHORESH vs NEVALI ÇORI		
no ritual buildings	ritual buildings	marked human–animal linkages
no figurines reported	figurines	skull caches
no large statues	large sculptures	decapitated skeletons
animal burials	no animal burials	
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	

Table 3. (cont.)

Differences		Similarities
KFAR HAHORESH vs ÇAYÖNÜ		
no ritual buildings	ritual buildings	skull caches
no figurines reported	figurines	decapitated skeletons
animal burials	no animal burials	human–animal linkages (Çayönü: mix of human and animal blood; aurochs horns related to human burials)
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	
no evidence for rituals with human and animal blood	evidence for rituals with human and animal blood	
KFAR HAHORESH vs GÖBEKLI TEPE		
no ritual buildings	ritual buildings	figurines very rare
animal burials	no animal burials	major animal symbolism
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	only wild animals
skull caches	no skull caches	special non-domestic sites
large T-shaped pillars, many with animal depictions	no pillars	
no sculpture	large sculpture	
NEVALI ÇORI vs ÇAYÖNÜ		
large sculpture	large sculpture virtually absent	ritual buildings
burials absent from ritual buildings	burials in ritual building (Skull Building)	furniture in ritual buildings
		possible burial of ritual buildings
		burial of stone objects in walls of ritual buildings
		skull caches
		sub-floor burials
		decapitated skeletons
		human and animal figurines
		figurines virtually absent from ritual buildings human–animal linkages (but in Çayönü much less conspicuous)
		plastered skulls absent
NEVALI ÇORI vs GÖBEKLI TEPE		
large sculpture buried in walls of ritual buildings	large sculpture found in fill of ritual buildings	ritual buildings
burials	no burials	furniture in ritual buildings
skull caches	no skull caches	possible burial of ritual buildings
figurines	figurines almost absent	plastered skulls absent
marked human–animal linkages	human–animal linkages much less marked	considerable animal symbolism
ÇAYÖNÜ vs GÖBEKLI TEPE		
animal symbolism less conspicuous	considerable animal symbolism	ritual buildings
figurines	figurines almost absent	furniture in ritual buildings
burials	no burials	possible burial of ritual buildings
skull caches	no skull caches	plastered skulls absent
almost no large sculpture	large sculpture	

Table 4. General differences and similarities of indications of PPNB rituals in the Levant and Southeast Anatolia.

Differences		Similarities
LEVANT vs SOUTHEAST ANATOLIA		
ritual buildings not very elaborated	ritual buildings quite elaborated	presence of ritual buildings made of stone
plastered skulls	no plastered skulls	furniture in ritual buildings
no evidence for 'blood rituals'	evidence for 'blood rituals'	possible burial of ritual buildings
no burials in ritual buildings	burials in ritual building (Skull Building in Çayönü)	decapitated skeletons
large lime-plaster statues ('Ain Ghazal)	no lime-plaster statues	skull caches
		figurines
		figurines virtually absent from ritual buildings
		large statuary
		marked human–animal linkages
		presence of special non-domestic sites with marked animal symbolism

the different ritual buildings at Çayönü, or the break with earlier practices attested by the PPNC at 'Ain Ghazal (Rollefson 2000a). Nevertheless, there seems to have been a remarkable chronological and geographical continuity, that is confirmed by other Near Eastern sites.¹²

Public and possibly ritual buildings have been uncovered at Middle PPNB Beidha and Jericho in the Levant and perhaps at Early PPNB Dja'de in Syria as also at a new PPNB site in Urfa (Byrd 1994; Kenyon 1981; Coqueugniot 1998, and see below). Large lime-plaster human statues like those from 'Ain Ghazal were also found at Jericho and Middle PPNB Nahal Hemar in the Levant (Garfinkel 1994). Large human statuary comparable to the material from Nevali Çori has recently been reported from the Urfa site just mentioned, and from Kilisik (see below). Animal horns in 'special' contexts have been reported from Levantine sites including 'Ain Jamman (Late PPNB), Atlit Yam (Late PPNB), Beidha, Munhata (Middle PPNB) and Ramad (Late PPNB) (Bienert in press). Animal and human figurines have been recovered from almost all PPNB sites. Likewise, various types of burials and skull caches occur at many sites. Skull plastering seems to have been less widespread: it has been observed at Abu Hureyra (Middle PPNB, Late PPNB), Atlit Yam, Beisamoun (Late PPNB), Jericho (Fig. 8), Nahal Hemar and Ramad. In Anatolia the practice of plastering skulls has only been observed at Çatalhöyük and Kösk Höyük, both located in the central Anatolian plain, and dating to the early Pottery Neolithic (Bienert 1991; in press).

Similarities are also observed in aspects other than ritual, such as domestic material culture (flint

typology, rectangular architecture, use of burnt lime for floors and walls) and subsistence (the PPNB being marked by the domestication of plants and animals). Several researchers have already pointed to the relationships between PPNB communities in the Levant and Southeast Anatolia (e.g. Cauvin 2000; Garfinkel 1994, 182; Goring-Morris 2000, 105; Rollefson 1983, 37).

The chronological and geographical continuity of PPNB ritual practices seems to indicate that in this period both regions shared very important traits, and that there were general structuring principles of meaning and symbolism (social rules, ritual taboos, etc.). This may be expressed by the notion that there was figuratively speaking a general PPNB 'language', but that within this language there were diverse 'dialects', accounting for the differences noted (Goren *et al.* 2001; Verhoeven 2000a, 78). It is with this general 'language', or structure, which was at the basis of an apparently shared ideology, that I am concerned, rather than with local PPNB traits. Thus the focus is on uniformity, but without of course denying diversity.¹³

PPNB ritual and ideology

Limitations of space prevent discussion here in any detail of previous interpretations of our five sites or with PPNB ritual in general (e.g. Bar-Yosef 1997; Bienert in press; Cauvin 1972; 2000; Garfinkel 1994; Gebel *et al.* in press; Goring-Morris 2000; Hauptmann 1999; Kuijt 2000a,b; Özdoğan & Özdoğan 1998; Rollefson 2000a; Schmandt-Besserat 1997; Schmidt 2001b; Wasilewska 1993).

Most previous interpretations consider the so-

cial function of PPNB rituals, and stress that such 'collective' rituals would have been of major importance for creating and maintaining community cohesion. While acknowledging the importance of these views (and building upon them), my own interpretation focuses on the nature, meaning and ideology of ritual practices *per se* in the PPNB of the Levant and Southeast Anatolia. I shall also try to delineate the relationships (or lack thereof) between the various ritual practices which seem to be attested. It is obviously impossible to reconstruct such practices in any detail, but the general underlying structure might be identifiable, i.e. the basic structuring principles of PPNB ritual practice. To start with, however, I wish to present five general observations.

First of all, it should be noted that with regard to ritual there seems to have been a site hierarchy, represented by: 1) 'normal', domestic, sites where conspicuous ritual objects such as ritual buildings or large statuary were absent; 2) settlement sites where ritual buildings, large statuary, etc., were present ('Ain Ghazal, Nevali Çori, Çayönü); 3) special ritual sites, with no (Göbekli Tepe) or restricted (Kfar HaHoresh) domestic activities.

Second, the different indications for rituals most likely point to the existence of different rituals, and the different ritual buildings may have had specific functions. In Table 5 the various indications of rituals have been *tentatively* linked to classes of rituals, as distinguished by Bell (1997, 91–138).¹⁴

Third, a basic distinction can most likely be made between private, household and 'public' rituals (cf. Table 5).

Fourth, there seem to be various kinds of relations between the different rituals, suggesting that there was something like an overarching ritual 'system'.

Fifth, and most importantly, I argue that four structuring principles underlie PPNB rituals and ideology:

- communality
- dominant symbolism
- vitality
- human–animal linkage

In the following, each of these principles will be dealt with in some detail.

Communality

Communality refers to the observation that many PPNB rituals (in contrast to later Neolithic rituals) seem to be marked by public display, as witnessed by large sculptures, masks and public ritual build-

ings, such as reported from 'Ain Ghazal, Nevali Çori, Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe (Figs. 2, 3, 5 & 7). As has been stressed by many researchers, it is probable that communality served to integrate communities and to counterbalance social stress that may have arisen owing to the 'Neolithic way of life', i.e. living in large settlements, a lack of clear leadership or social hierarchy, and the adoption of farming. In this respect, it is well-known that structural social norms and values are symbolically expressed through ritual (e.g. Turner 1969). Generally, this results in a reinforcement of ideas and rules shared by the society as a whole. Through ritual the social order can be legitimized, and group solidarity and identity can be maintained. In other words, ritual can regulate social behaviour and sanctify the social structure (Rappaport 1999).

Communality as normally perceived, however, seems to be a somewhat problematic concept for the PPNB. When we look at the estimated internal dimensions of the ritual buildings at the five key sites it appears that the number of people these buildings could have contained is not as high as one would initially think (see Table 6). Obviously, the estimates in Table 6 are very approximate, but even if the number of people is doubled, it seems that only a small portion of the entire (settlement) population could be assembled in the ritual buildings. The Plaza at Çayönü is a clear exception, but it has to be acknowledged that the arguments for labelling this ritual area are the least secure.

How then do we account for the probability that in the ritual buildings only small portions of the communities were present? First, it is possible that PPNB people simply lacked the building techniques that would have enabled them to build very large structures. If, however, large ritual congregations were really fundamental to the ritual system, and if these could not be housed, one would expect much more evidence for large open spaces.¹⁵

Second, it could be argued that several of the ritual buildings at the investigated sites were in use simultaneously (i.e. at 'Ain Ghazal or Çayönü), and that together they could have housed most of the population. Here, too, we encounter problems. First, even when taken together, the floor area is not very large, and secondly, different ritual practices seem to have taken place in the different ritual buildings (Table 5). Moreover, exact contemporaneity is hard to prove in most cases.¹⁶

Third, and this seems to be the most likely, it could be that the ritual buildings were used by certain people only for specific purposes. All of the

Table 5. *Indications for PPNB rituals and the nature of these rituals.*²⁰

Indications for rituals	Possible rituals
<i>Ritual buildings</i>	
ritual buildings with large statuary	'public' rituals involving 'gods', mythical ancestors, animals: - rites of passage (initiation, marriage, death) - calendrical rites (fecundity) - rites of affliction - feasting, fasting, festivals - political rites
ritual buildings with hearths	'public' rituals involving fire: - rites of exchange and communion (offerings)
ritual buildings with basins	'public' rituals involving fluids: - rites of affliction
ritual buildings with residues of human and animal blood on stone slabs	'public' rituals involving blood: - rites of exchange and communion (offerings)
aurochs horns in ritual buildings	'public' rituals involving wild bulls: - rites of passage (initiation, marriage, death) - calendrical rites (fecundity) - rites of affliction - feasting, fasting, festivals - political rites
<i>Burials</i>	
burials in domestic areas	household mortuary rituals: - rites of passage
decapitated skeletons in domestic areas	household mortuary rituals and 'skull cult': - rites of passage
burials in ritual buildings	'public' mortuary rituals: - rites of passage
decapitated skeletons in ritual buildings	'public' mortuary rituals and 'skull cult': - rites of passage
burials at special sites	'public' mortuary rituals: - rites of passage - feasting, fasting, festivals
decapitated skeletons at special sites	'public' mortuary rituals 'skull cult': - rites of passage - feasting, fasting, festivals
<i>Skull caches</i>	
skull caches in domestic areas	household 'skull cult'
skull caches in ritual buildings	'public' 'skull cult'
skull caches at special sites	'public' 'skull cult'
<i>Plastered skulls</i>	
plastered skulls in domestic areas	household 'skull cult'
<i>Human-animal linkages</i>	
hybrid sculpture in ritual buildings	'public' rituals involving human-animal linkages: - rites of passage - calendrical rites - political rites
human-animal linkage in burial in domestic areas	household rituals involving human-animal linkages: - rites of passage
human-animal linkage in burial in ritual buildings	'public' rituals involving human-animal linkages: - rites of passage - calendrical rites - political rites
human-animal linkage in burial in special sites	'public' rituals involving human-animal linkages: - rites of passage - calendrical rites - political rites

Table 5. (*cont.*)

Indications for rituals	Possible rituals
<i>Large statuary</i>	
Large statuary in caches	'public' rituals involving 'gods', mythical ancestors: - rites of passage (initiation, marriage, death) - calendrical rites (fecundity) - rites of affliction - feasting, fasting, festivals - political rites
<i>Figurines</i>	
human figurines in domestic areas	individual or household magic rituals: - rites of exchange and communion - rites of affliction
decapitated human figurines in domestic areas	individual or household magic rituals: - rites of exchange and communion - rites of affliction
animal figurines in domestic areas	individual or household magic rituals: - rites of exchange and communion - rites of affliction
<i>Horns</i>	
horns in 'domestic' buildings	household rituals involving animals: - rites of passage - rites of exchange and communion - rites of affliction

recorded buildings at Göbekli Tepe seem to have been the foci of ritual activities. At the other sites, however, ritual buildings were clearly different from 'domestic' buildings.¹⁷ At these sites the ceremonies in the ritual buildings may have been conducted and/or experienced by the representatives of households (e.g. the senior men/women). This would account for the various ties that seem to exist between 'public' and household rituals. Here we should recall the miniature carvings of temple furniture that were found in the houses of Nevali Çori, and of the ritual importance of human skulls in ritual buildings as well as in domestic contexts. In the case of 'secret societies' based in ritual buildings, one would not expect that. In this view, the ritual buildings indeed served the community at large, that is to say they were 'public', but not everyone necessarily participated in rituals related to those buildings. Thus the concept of communality should

Table 6. *Dimensions of PPNB ritual buildings at selected sites.*

Ritual buildings	Interior dimensions	Estimated no. of persons ²¹
'Ain Ghazal Late PPNB ritual building Late PPNB circular buildings Late PPNB apsidal buildings PPNC ritual building	at least 5 × 2.5 m c. 2.5 in diam. c. 3 × 3 m 5 × 2.5 m	at least 6 1–2 4 6
Nevali Çori (people on benches) Building II Building III	c. 9 × 9 m c. 8 × 8 m	22 20
Çayönü Flagstone Building Skull Building Terrazzo Building Bench Building Clayey Plaza	at least 9 × 5 m at least 8 × 7 m c. 10.75 × 8 m ? (small) c. 50 × 25 m	at least 22 at least 28 43 ? 600
Göbekli Tepe Bedrock Structure Snake Pillar Building Lion Pillar Building Double Pillar Building Structure B Structure C	diam. c. 8 m at least 9 × 5 m c. 5.5 × 3.4 m 15 × 5 m diam. c. 8 m diam. c. 9 m	20 at least 20 9 35 20 22

probably indeed be regarded as basic for PPNB ritual life at settlement sites, albeit in a somewhat different sense to its normal use.

To use an ethnographical source, the PPNB ritual buildings may be compared to the men's houses from small-scale societies such as that of the Iatmul



Figure 7. Stone mask. Hebron, stray find. Height: 20 cm. (Source: Mellink & Filip 1974, fig. xix.)

of Papua New Guinea. In this view they were places where the most important ritual objects were present and stored, where rituals were practised, and where congregations and feasts could be held. They were the focal points of ritual life, and in a sense it was mainly through them that society's ideology and cosmology was communicated and (re-)created. But how do we account for the presence of different ritual buildings (and not just one), as at 'Ain Ghazal and Göbekli Tepe? There seem to be two possibilities. Different buildings may have had different functions; this seems to be the case at 'Ain Ghazal. Or different buildings may have had more or less similar functions, but may have been related to specific social groups. This seems to be the case at Göbekli Tepe, where many more or less similar ritual buildings have been uncovered. The differences in animal symbolism on the pillars in the various buildings may have been an expression of group differences.

Dominant symbolism

The appearance of the Neolithic in the Near East saw an explosion of symbolism (cf. Hodder 2001, 108). Dominant symbolism is the use of highly visual,

powerful and evocative symbols in PPNB contexts. Well-known examples are the ritual buildings, large stelae, large sculptures (Verhoeven 2001), stone masks, animal horns, and plastered human skulls. These are found at 'Ain Ghazal, Kfar HaHoresh, Nevali Çori, Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe (Figs. 2–5, 7 & 8).¹⁸ Why were the ritual symbols used by PPNB communities — in contrast to those of later Neolithic societies — often so dominant and evocative? Most likely, there is a correspondence between the dominance of ritual symbolism and the importance of rituals in social life. On the basis of this general observation, I would suggest that PPNB ritual symbolism was very marked because ritual played a crucial role in PPNB communities. As many researchers have emphasized, these communities may have faced numerous uncertainties associated with the new Neolithic way of life. Of course, the transition to the Neolithic took a long time, and the new way of life was implemented gradually, but nevertheless the PPNB can be regarded as a transformative period in which important social and economic changes took place. Ritual may have been of basic importance as a means of coming to terms with these changes. In fact, many of the dimensions of rituals discussed earlier seem to apply to the PPNB situation: the world had to be understood and explained (intellectualism), all kinds of emotions had to be dealt with (emotionalism), society had to be regulated (functionalism and structuralism), a — partly new? — cosmology had to be communicated (symbolism), (new) knowledge had to be transmitted (cognitive approaches), and (new) relations between nature and culture and between people, ancestors and spirits were important (relational approaches). Rituals would have provided means for dealing with all these things.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that the dominance of PPNB ritual symbolism was related to domestication. Domestication refers to the taming of animals and the cultivation of plants, but as Cauvin (2000) and Hodder (1990) have argued, domestication was also a wider-ranging social and ideological process. Put simply, it has been maintained that the process of domestication, the control of the wild, was a metaphor and mechanism for the control of society. In the PPNB this process entailed the domestication, or control, of settlement space and the landscape (territoriality). Compared to the preceding hunting-and-gathering way of life, people began to exert ever-more control over their surroundings. As regards rituals, I would propose that the marked PPNB ritual symbolism was an expression

of the desire to control ritual behaviour and the supernatural world, in order to control the human world.

Vitality

Vitality is a complex issue, referring to three related notions: domestication, fecundity, and life-force. *Domestication* has already been introduced above. *Fecundity* in general refers to fertility (more specifically to soil fertility and birth-giving), and the related notion of sexuality (Hodder 2001). By *life-force* is meant the vital power which principally resides in the head. Clearly, domestication and fecundity are important notions for interpreting PPNB ritual life. Life-force is perhaps less obvious, but I hope to show its heuristic value. Let us start this discussion of vitality with some remarks about the PPNB 'skull cult'.

The display and caching of human skulls in the PPNB (especially the plastered ones), as at 'Ain Ghazal, Kfar HaHoresh and Nevali Çori, is traditionally viewed as indicative of ancestor-worship (e.g. Bienert 1991; 1995; Bienert & Müller-Neuhof 2000; Goren *et al.* 2001). At first sight this seems a probable explanation. Quite a number of skulls of (young) children, however, appear to have been removed and cached, and it is questionable that they, having no offspring, were regarded as real ancestors. Another problem with the ancestor interpretation is indicated by a study by Arensburg & Hershkovitz (1988). They have noted that plastered Neolithic skulls in the Near East (Fig. 8) were selected on the basis of their morphological characteristics; only abnormally wide skulls were plastered. These skulls were probably deformed *in vivo* at a young age. Likewise, Meiklejohn *et al.* (1992) have found evidence for artificial cranial deformation at Neolithic sites in the Near East. Thus there was probably a relationship between deformation and the selection of skulls for ritual treatment *post mortem*. Consequently there seems to have been more to human skulls than ancestor worship alone.

To exemplify this, and to clarify the relations between domestication, fecundity and life-force, I would like to present two cases of the ritual use of human skulls, plastered as well as unplastered, in ethnographic contexts; the Naga of Pakistan and the Iatmul of Papua New Guinea. These ethnographic sources are *examples*, rather than parallels. Admittedly, these examples are, both in time and in space, far removed from the PPNB, and there are many differences between the communities on the source and subject sides of the comparison. On a *structural*



Figure 8. Plastered human (female) skull, juvenile/early adult, Jericho, trench I, found in roomfill, together with six other plastered human skulls. (Source: Kenyon 1981, pl. 52.)

level, however, (referring to basic social, and ritual principles), the examples are most useful for understanding aspects of PPNB ritual practice (Verhoeven *in press b*).

The Naga: The Naga comprise a number of tribal groups living in the mountainous area of northeastern Pakistan (Assam). The Naga believe in a large number of invisible beings who can affect the living. These beings can be either good or evil, and must be kept content with different kind of offerings. The souls of human beings are believed to go eventually to a Land of the Dead. Furthermore, they believe in the existence of a powerful life-force which is principally located in the head. This life-force of a person can be transmitted in various ways, both during life and after death, and it can benefit individuals as well as the village as a whole. The life-force assures well-being and fecundity. In fact, fecundity is central to Naga life. Simoons (1968, 110) writes:

The belief in a manipulatable life-force, together with the Naga concern with fertility, is the founda-



Figure 9. *Decorated human skull, Papua New Guinea (Iatmul people, Sepik province). These skulls were of ancestors or slain enemies. The painting resembles the facial painting of both men and women on ritual occasions; it was a means of identifying oneself with mythical beings or ancestors. (Source: Caille & Sauvage 1999, 156.)*

tion upon which several practices common to most Naga rest. Headhunting, certain death ceremonies, the Feasts of Merit, and the erection of memorials of stone and wood are all directly related to this belief. The life-force is particularly valued for its fertility-granting powers, which are operative during a person's lifetime and can also be utilized after his death. 'Fertility', to the Naga, has very broad connotations, which include the general well-being and prosperity of the community and not only the actual fertility of the fields, domestic animals, and human inhabitants of the village.

In many varying rituals, life-force and fertility/fecundity are explicitly linked to human heads. For instance, taking an enemy head and bringing it back to the village is done in order to increase the 'store of fertility'. In the so-called Feasts of Merit, the source of the fertilizing power stems from the heads of human beings, which in various rituals is transferred to the symbols used in the feasts. Interestingly, like

the Feasts of Merit, death rituals are related to harvest or sowing, thus again showing a connection between death and fecundity.

The Iatmul: As we have observed, the culture and ceremonial life of the Iatmul, who live near the Sepik river in Northeast Papua New Guinea, is based around the men's house. Somewhat paradoxically, there are many indications in the Iatmul men's house of the female and of female fecundity. In fact, the whole house is regarded as a female entity. Smidt (1996, 61) writes 'It is only on the cultural level that man can achieve the fertility that nature has accorded to women'. This male concern for fecundity and birth is above all expressed in initiation rituals, where boys undergo a transition from 'mother darlings' to 'brave adult men'. The art (sculptures, masks, paintings) in the men's house basically deals with the origins of life:

... the special bond between mankind and nature and that between mankind and the supernatural; the division between life and death and the abolition of that vision; contact with ancestors, mythical founders of clans, and spirits; the basis for social organization; war and peace; birth, initiation, marriage and death (Smidt 1996, 62).

The art in the men's house also serves to illustrate the communities' history, expressing the (mythical) origins of the village or clan.

The most important objects stored in the men's house are decorated human skulls, both of ancestors and slain enemies (Fig. 9). Plastered and painted skulls were mounted on large painted skull racks made of bamboo and sago leaves. Skulls were also placed in niches, or hung from suspension hooks. In particular, the skulls of important community members or especially beautiful people were decorated. The skulls strongly resemble PPNB plastered skulls, which also seem originally to have been painted in most instances (compare Figs. 8 & 9). They are plastered with clay and painted. The painting resembles the facial painting of both men and women on ritual occasions; it was a means of identifying oneself with mythical beings or ancestors. The designs also seem to indicate personal characteristics. The hair of the deceased is fixed to the top of the skull. The eyes are indicated by shells. The skulls played a role in various rituals, especially fertility rituals and death rituals (Smidt 1996). As in the Naga case, human skulls were not only related to death, but also to fecundity.

PPNB vitality: The above ethnographic accounts offer fascinating clues (and not parallels) for under-

standing PPNB ritual behaviour, and interestingly, the concept of vitality links various seemingly unrelated domains including death and fecundity. With regard to human skulls, the examples indicate that the ritual significance of human skulls, plastered as well as unplastered, is not necessarily related to ancestor worship alone. In fact, it seems to be the case that in many cultures all over the world (human) skulls are regarded as powerful symbolic and ritual objects which refer to life-force, fecundity and related concepts (Fig. 10, and see Holsbeke 1996). With regard to the PPNB therefore I would like to propose that, while ancestors, as mythical persons, were probably worshipped, human skulls (plastered as well as unplastered), were specially honoured because they were the seat of life-force, which could be used to ensure fecundity (of the fields, domesticated animals and women) and well-being.

In the Levant there may have been a two-level ritual and ideological hierarchy consisting of: 1) plastered human skulls, all of adults and probably once belonging to especially important persons (ritual leaders?); and 2) unplastered skulls, which perhaps represented less-important ancestors. In Southeast Anatolia, however, the absence of plastered PPNB skulls suggests an absence of such a hierarchy.

The presence of aurochs horns in PPNB ritual contexts may perhaps also be explained by invoking the concept of vitality. As in the Naga example, the Skull Building at Çayönü gave evidence of the caching of human skulls, of aurochs horns (which probably hung on the wall), and of aurochs and human blood on a stone 'altar', perhaps of sacrifice. Maybe, as Cauvin (2000) has argued, the bull in general, and especially powerful and liminal elements like horns and blood (Verhoeven 2000a, 57–9), were metaphors for male dominance, power and vitality.

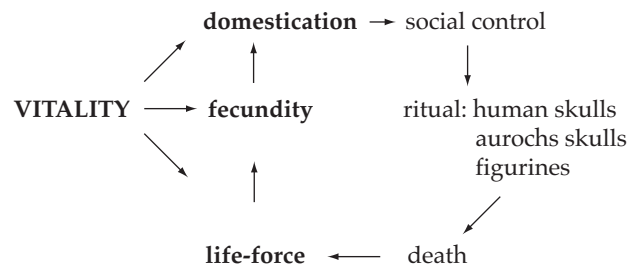
Also, in general, PPNB female figurines with their exaggerated breasts, buttocks and vulvas seem to indicate a basic concern with vitality (fecundity and sexuality). The probably intentional removal of their heads (see e.g. Morsch in press) may have released the life-force; thus the figurines may have been ritually 'killed' for the sake of giving life (cf. Bell 1992, 176; Hodder 2001, 110). Finally, the stone slab from Göbekli Tepe (Fig. 6), should be mentioned here: while it is unknown whether birth-giving, menstruation or sexual penetration is depicted, it is clear that fecundity and/or sexuality is depicted. Although it is questionable, as Cauvin (2000) has argued, that PPNB ideology centred around the cult of the woman and the bull (there are many more elements), both women and bulls do seem to be



Figure 10. Skull korwar. Irian Jaya (Geelvink Bay). These objects were abodes of a dead person's soul, and were made to communicate with the dead. Korwars could protect and aid, but also punish and kill. Height: 55 cm. (Source: Kerchache & Bouloré 2000, 303.)

related to vitality, i.e. domestication, life-force and fecundity.¹⁹

In the following diagram the concept of vitality in PPNB rituals is illustrated.



Human–animal linkage

Human–animal relationships (most clearly at Kfar HaHoresh, Nevali Çori, Çayönü and Göbekli Tepe) seem to have played an important role in PPNB rituals. For want of a better term, these relationships shall be termed human–animal linkages, indicating the physical and symbolical attachment of humans with animals.

How should we understand the various human–animal relationships in PPNB contexts? First of all, it should be noted that evidence for human–animal linkages (see Table 7 & Figs. 3–4) has been found almost exclusively in clear ritual contexts, such as burials and ritual buildings. Table 7 suggests a number of additional observations. In the human–animal linkages large mammals, birds and reptiles are depicted. Apart perhaps from ‘Ain Ghazal, all these animals are wild. Thus people seem to have been explicitly related to wild animals. Large animal sculpture is only found at Göbekli Tepe; it is made of stone and represents only wild mammals, reptiles and birds, seemingly all male (Fig. 5). Animal figurines at ‘Ain Ghazal are made of clay and represent cattle, sheep/goats and equids. At Çayönü the animal figurines are also of clay, and depict horned animals (cattle?), (wild?) pigs and dogs. Small stone figurines at Nevali Çori represent wild animals such as lions, bears and vultures, but the clay figurines represent species characteristic of domestication (i.e. domesticated or to be domesticated): bulls, sheep/goats, pigs and dogs.

The set of links:

human–wild–male

seems to indicate that within early agricultural societies in the Near East people were symbolically attached to the wild, to nature, and that this domain may have been regarded as generally male. In this respect it is interesting to note that the bull, perhaps a fertility-giving beast, when used in rituals was both male and wild. Moreover, at Çayönü aurochs blood was directly associated with human blood. Could it be then that PPNB human–animal linkages were an expression of the wild, dangerous, aggressive dimensions of the domain of nature, where it was the men who hunted, as opposed to the domestic and more peaceful domain of culture, where women were symbolized as giving life and bringing fecundity (e.g. Hodder 1990):

wild	domestic
male	female
nature	culture
death	life
stone	clay

The above diagram is an oversimplification, but the evidence for human–animal linkage points out that it was important to PPNB people to connect themselves to wild animals. This can be regarded as a sort of counteraction to the domestication of society,

plants and animals. It is as if people were bringing the undomesticated and wild into domestic (and ritual) contexts. Animal symbols, then, were indeed good to think with (Lévi-Strauss 1962, and see Douglas 1990). They seem to have been true dominant symbols, i.e. emotionally arousing, and condensing many meanings in a single form (Turner 1969). The basic relation expressed was between humans and male wild animals, but this may have acted as a vehicle for thinking about other aspects such as gender, control of nature, and vitality. A link with the hunting/gathering way of life, which

Table 7. Evidence for PPNB human–animal linkages.

Site	Human–animal linkages
‘Ain Ghazal	- burials: pig bones (wild?) in PPNC human burials
Kfar HaHoresh	- spatial relations of human and animal remains (burials): human–gazelle ‘mosaic’ (depicting a wild boar, aurochs, lion?) human plastered skull–headless gazelle decapitated human–postcranial aurochs bones human bones–articulated gazelle remains head of infant–bovid pelvis
Nevali Çori	- sculpture: human–bird (vulture?) humans–tortoise(?) human–snake
Çayönü	- spatial relations: human skeletons–aurochs skulls and horns (Skull Building) - blood: blood of humans, aurochs and (wild?) sheep on ‘altar’ (Skull Building) blood of humans and aurochs on flint knife (Skull Building) - burial: boar’s jaw in human burial
Göbekli Tepe	- large sculpture: animal with human head bird on human head animal on human head

was still important but no longer dominant, was thus symbolically maintained.

Conclusions

I should like to combine the various elements of PPNB rituals, in order to delineate the 'ritual system' (Fig. 11). It seems convenient to organize this discussion around the three basic classes of rituals: individual, household and 'public' rituals.

Individual rituals, or magic, were probably represented by human and animal figurines. They were unrelated to the concepts of communality, dominant symbolism and human-animal linkage, but vitality (especially fecundity and life-force) does seem to have been relevant. It is not expected that private rituals were important at special ritual sites (Kfar Hahoresht and Göbekli Tepe), but at 'Ain Ghazal, Nevali Çori and Çayönü they were most likely practised in domestic contexts, such as houses and courtyards.

Household rituals are indicated by burials, skull caches, plastered skulls and animal horns in domestic contexts, and possibly also by figurines. In these rituals, mainly concerned with death, the concepts of dominant symbolism, vitality and human-animal linkage are significant. Again, they must have been practised at 'Ain Ghazal, Nevali Çori and Çayönü, but most likely not at special ritual sites.

'Public' rituals, which, as has been argued, probably did not involve the entire community, involved all concepts, viz. communality, dominant symbolism, vitality and human-animal linkage. They were directly related to ritual buildings such as those found at 'Ain Ghazal, Nevali Çori and Çayönü. The special sites Kfar Hahoresht ('burial site') and Göbekli Tepe ('ritual building site') were also probably the focus of public rituals. The many relationships between the various concepts and rituals (Fig. 11) strongly suggest that there was indeed a PPNB ritual system in which different rituals were hierarchically organized and linked by certain basic concepts.

It should be recalled that at Göbekli Tepe and Kfar Hahoresht only wild resources were exploited. The emphasis on wild, undomesticated species is thus twofold, as it is seen in the symbolism and in subsistence. Who then used these most likely periodically visited sites? Non-domestic ritual sites like Göbekli Tepe and Kfar Hahoresht were probably special sites serving a large region, and perhaps representatives from surrounding settled sites may have visited them in order to perform rituals. These rituals may have been accompanied by communal feast-

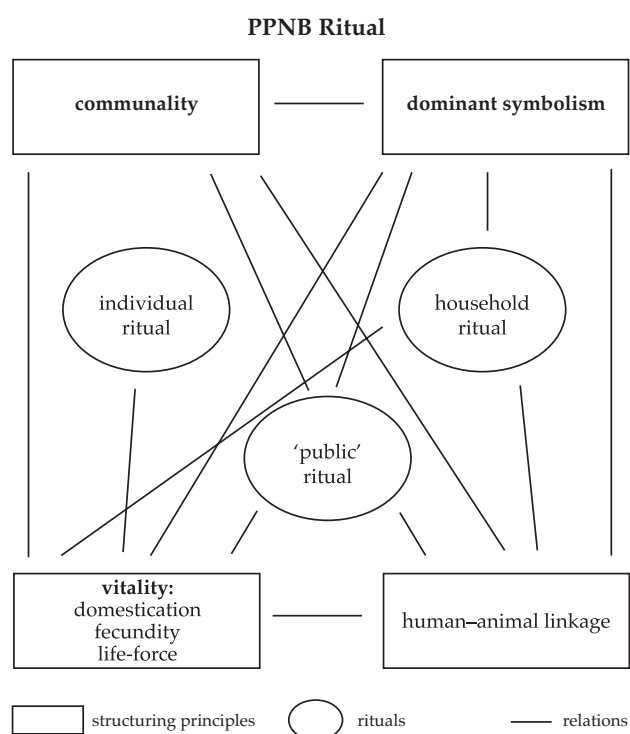


Figure 11. A model of PPNB ritual.

ing and the consumption of hunted wild animals. Alternatively, these special sites may have been related to mobile groups within PPNB society, i.e. 'nomads'. Or were they the focal point of hunting/gathering groups which co-existed with (and in the case of - early - Göbekli Tepe perhaps also preceded) sedentary communities?

Interestingly, a site which seems to be similar to Göbekli Tepe has recently been reported (Çelik 2000b). At Karahan Tepe, located east of Urfa, in the same general area as Nevali Çori and Göbekli Tepe, some 266 (!) *in situ* T-shaped pillars similar to those from Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori were found over an area of approximately 32 ha (!). Karahan Tepe has not yet been excavated, but testifies the existence of a very large site reminiscent of Göbekli Tepe. As at Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori, stone statues of animals (among them a 'totem-pole'-like statue of superimposed animals) and depictions of animals (such as snakes) on the pillars were observed. On the basis of artefacts and comparisons, the site has been assigned to the Middle PPNB. Another site reported by Çelik (2000a), found in the centre of the city of Urfa, is represented by a possible ritual building (marked by a terrazzo floor) and a large (approximately 1.90 m) limestone statue of a human male. Finally, I would like to mention a recent report by

Hauptmann, of a large and carefully made anthropomorphic statue which had already been found in 1965 near the village of Kilisik in the Taurus mountains about 85 km north of Nevali Çori, but which was not recognized as a Neolithic statue at the time (Hauptmann 2000; Verhoeven 2001).

These exciting new discoveries seem to indicate that Nevali Çori and Göbekli Tepe were not exceptional in the PPNB of Southeast Anatolia. These, along with many other PPNB sites in the Near East, are a testimony to the widespread practice and importance of rituals in communities that were not only domesticating plants and animals, but also themselves.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Council for the Humanities, which is part of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). A number of people have contributed by offering constructive criticism and/or providing information: Peter M.M.G. Akkermans, Hans-Dieter Bienert, Anna-Karina Hermkens, Ian Kuijt, Michael Morsch, Olivier Nieuwenhuyse, and Gary Rollefson. I wish to thank all of them for their generous help. The suggestions and recommendations of two anonymous reviewers helped to improve the text in important respects. Henk de Lorm produced the map and Erick van Driel made the other drawings. Ans Bulles corrected the English text.

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Notes

1. All dates mentioned are calibrated. PPNB is subdivided into Early, Middle and Late PPNB, respectively dated c. 8600–8200 BC, 8200–7500 BC and 7500–7000 BC. The PPNC as found at 'Ain Ghazal dates between c. 7000 and 6200 BC. PPNA precedes PPNB and is dated between c. 10,200–8600 BC. The presence of Early PPNB in the Central and Southern Levant remains a matter of debate (e.g. Cauvin 2000; Rollefson 1989). Ceramics were introduced in the Pottery Neolithic, dated c. 7000–5000 BC.
2. Apart from some personal communications, the present study is wholly based on published data.
3. It could be argued that agency is always framed, i.e. that people always demarcate their activities, domestic as well as non-domestic. The concept of framing as used here, however, refers to the creation of a special, non-domestic, context, marked by an explicit use of evocative symbols, i.e. to *ritual* framing.
4. Two concepts related to framing are *ritualization* and *structured deposition*, coined by respectively Bell (1992) and Richards & Thomas (1985). Ritualization is the way in which certain social actions distinguish themselves in relation to other activities, it is '... a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities' (Bell 1992, 74). Structured deposition refers to special 'non-domestic' archaeological deposits which are recurrently patterned in terms of associations and disassociations between different types of finds and their spatial distribution. See Hill 1996 for a critical discussion of structured deposition.
5. These different authors mention different numbers of statue fragments in the two caches; the numbers given in the present article are taken from the most detailed study of the statues (Grissom 2000).
6. Burials excluded, as their ritual character is obvious.
7. Table 2 also serves as an example of how ritual objects at the other sites have been isolated, or framed.
8. In the most recent publication, however (Goring-Morris 2000), the 'mosaic' is no longer mentioned, and the original article in which it was presented (Goring-Morris *et al.* 1998) is not included in the bibliography of this publication. One wonders whether the initial interpretation is correct; perhaps it has been discovered that the 'mosaic' was an artefact of excavation procedures rather than an ancient cultural feature?
9. The building may have had a predecessor in level 1 (building I).
10. Nevali Çori is a 'normal' site, with water and land for agriculture nearby.
11. It is not clear what is meant by 'cravatte'.
12. See note 1: the presence of Early PPNB in the South and Central Levant remains debated.
13. About terminology: *structuring principles* represent *structure* (or 'language'); *ideology* (or worldview) is based upon structure. *Ritual* is part of ideology.
14. The notions 'public' and 'skull cult' will be dealt with in detail below.
15. It should be acknowledged, however, that large open areas at the periphery of settlements may be under-represented owing to selective excavation procedures. At Late PPNB Tell Sabi Abyad II in northern Syria, for example, a large open platform was situated at the edge of the settlement (Verhoeven 2000b, 40–41).
16. At Göbekli Tepe, however, the Snake Pillar Building and Structures B and C seem in fact to have been in use at the same time (Schmidt 1999).
17. Of course, domestic activities may have been carried out in ritual buildings, just as ritual activities were carried out in domestic buildings (e.g. sub-floor burials).

18. The focus on the eyes in many PPNB ritual symbols, e.g. the arresting eyes of the 'Ain Ghazal statues (Fig. 2), the large eyes of the Nahal Hemar mask (Fig. 7), the shells in the eye sockets of plastered skulls (Fig. 8), is remarkable (see e.g. Goren *et al.* 2001, 673–7).
19. See Hodder 2001 for criticism of Cauvin's ideas about Neolithic religion. With regard to Neolithic male and female symbolism, Hodder in the same contribution suggests that both male and female sexuality were important metaphors, and that they may both have been regarded as productive and domesticating.
20. *Rites of passage* are 'life-crisis' rituals which accompany a person's transition from one stage of social life to another (e.g. marriage or death). *Calendrical rites* indicate periodically and predictably occurring rituals accompanying seasonal changes in light, weather, agricultural work, and other social activities. *Rites of exchange and communion* represent offerings to a god or gods with the expectation of receiving something (material or immaterial) in return (e.g. human sacrifice). *Rites of affliction* are rituals which seek to mitigate the influence of spirits thought to be afflicting humans with misfortune (e.g. healing rituals). *Feasting, fasting and festivals* represent rituals in which people are concerned to publicly express their commitment and adherence to basic (religious) values (e.g. the potlatch). *Political rites*, finally, are rituals that construct, display and promote the power of political institutions or the political interests of distinct constituents and subgroups (e.g. coronation).
21. It has been estimated that a person would occupy 2 square metres of floor area. This is a relatively large amount of space, which has been chosen in order to account for 'the loss of floorspace' caused by the presence of interior features. The numbers of people in the ritual buildings at Nevalı Çori, however, have been estimated on the basis of the sitting space on the benches (the central area thus being the focus of the performance of rituals).

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