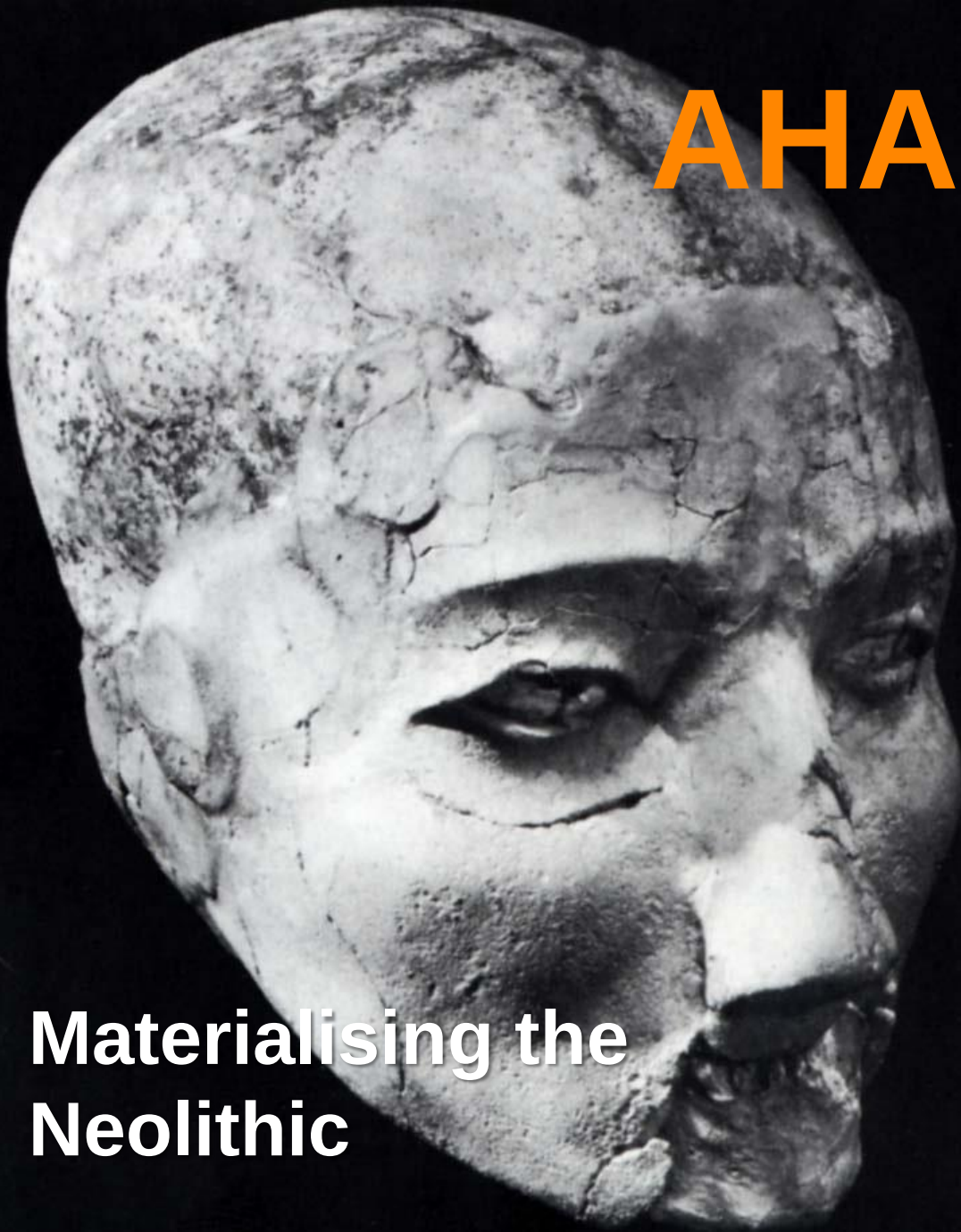


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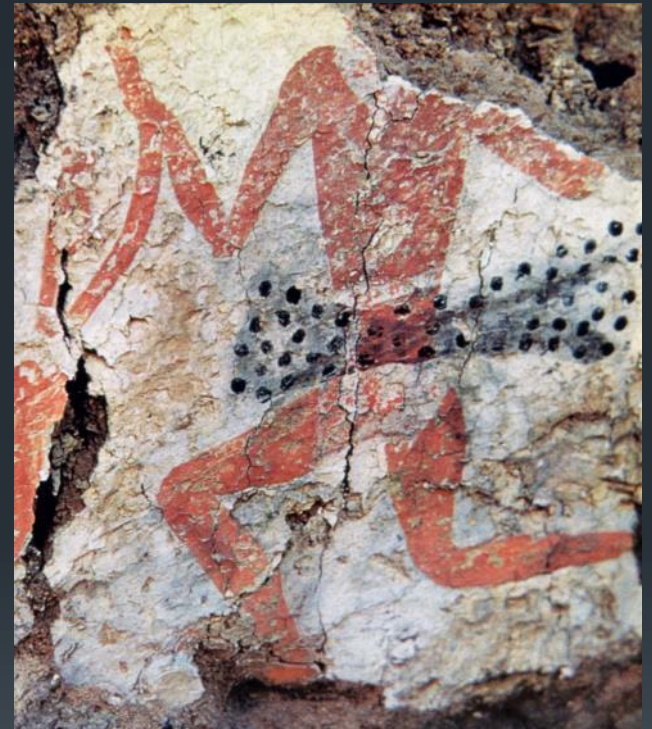


**Materialising the
Neolithic**



Materialising the Neolithic

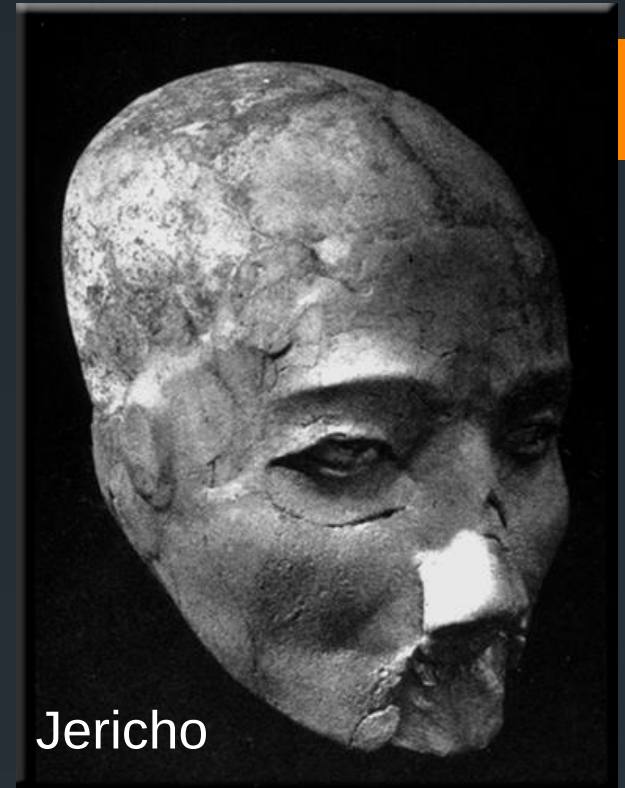
- Neolithic communities manipulated a number of natural substances to materialise their symbolic worlds:
 - Stone
 - Plaster
 - Clay
 - Pigments: charcoal, bitumen, ochre, cinnabar
 - Obsidian
 - Speleothems
 - And the human body



Wall painting from Çatalhöyük

Plastered Skulls

- Skulls removed after decomposition
- Signs of wear between retrieval & reburial:
 - Period of use, curation & display
- Remodelled in lime plaster, with shell eyes
- Cached after period of use on site:
 - Carefully staged event



Miniature Masks

- Göbekli Tepe: 1 clay & 4 stone miniature masks, PPNA
- Nevalı Çori: 1 limestone mask PPNB
- Purpose?
 - Personal, portable mnemonic devices used in ritual performances?
 - Apotropaic & only supposed to be seen by owner except at special ritual occasions



Göbekli Tepe mask

Masks

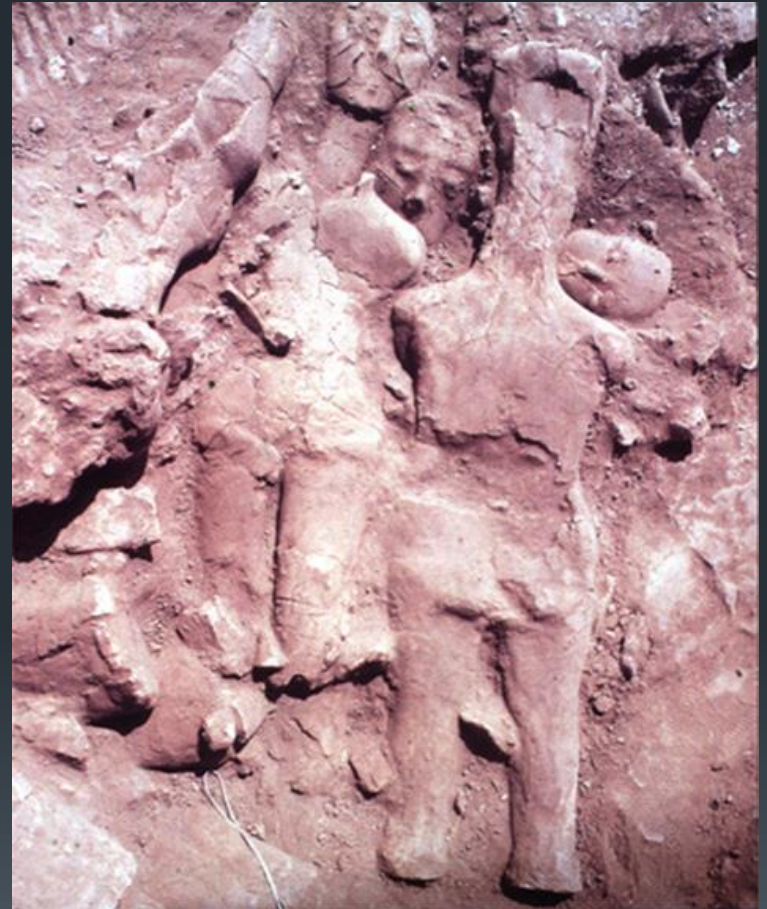
- Around 15 PPNB stone masks:
 - Adult sized & following dimensions of human head
 - Holes around edges for attachments
- 2 from Nahal Hemar (found with skull & assorted objects):
 - Painted decoration & strands of hair (moustache & beard)
- Purpose of masks?:
 - Regalia
 - To hide/assume identity
 - Link to the ancestors?



Nahal Hemar mask

‘Ain Ghazal (PPNB)

- 32 figures/statuettes found buried in 2 caches
- Buried beneath floors of long abandoned houses
 - Deliberate deposition – closure ceremony?
 - Carefully placed in East-West orientation
 - In good state of preservation



‘Ain Ghazal figures in situ

‘Ain Ghazal

- Made from bundles of reeds covered with plaster
- Freestanding (unsupported), measuring between 35cm & 1m tall
- Some double headed
- Ungendered: no primary sexual organs
- Emphasis on head & face:
 - Striking facial features with disproportionately large eyes – shell & bitumen
 - Face treated with ochre
 - Markings on body (Ochre)



Plaster statuettes

Interpretation

- Large size, stylized features & bright add on garments:
 - Intended for entire community to view in a public ceremony
- Size indicates their public/communal aspect:
 - Intended to bond a large population supported by agriculture
 - Foster a common ideology...



Restoration

Interpretation

- Venerated ancestors
- Schuster 1995: ghosts
 - Later cuneiform literature: rituals to expel ghosts
 - Substitute figures buried in a waste area or destroyed after use
- Schmandt Besserat: deities?
 - Figures holding breasts stressing nurturing qualities of women
 - 2-headed figures fits into Near Eastern Pantheon



“The Eyes Have It”

- Principal focus of statues is head
- Recalls emphasis on eyes for plastered skulls
- Skull caches typically facing same direction
 - Looking in same direction & seeing in death, but with greater percipience
- Lewis-Williams: evidence for shamanistic religion
 - Emphasis on the eyes in accounts of ASC
 - Power & brightness of shaman's eyes recorded in numerous ethnographies
 - Even emphasised in death

Detail of head
from 'Ain Ghazal



Yiftah'el skull cache

Miniature People

- Manufacture of miniature clay figures (zoomorphic & anthropomorphic) characterises Neolithic
- Sha'ar Hagolan: 6th millennium BC, southern Levant (Pottery Neolithic)
- Largest assemblage of prehistoric “art” objects in the Levant
- Interpreted by excavators as a means of symbolic communication



Figurines from Sha'ar Hagolan

Sha'ar Hagolan

- Standardised range of representations reflecting complex symbolism:
- Seated cowrie eyed figures
 - Are these female fertility figures?
 - Human or divine/supernatural?
- Limestone pebble figures are typical, some with red coloration:
 - Tactile engagement — evidence for handling?



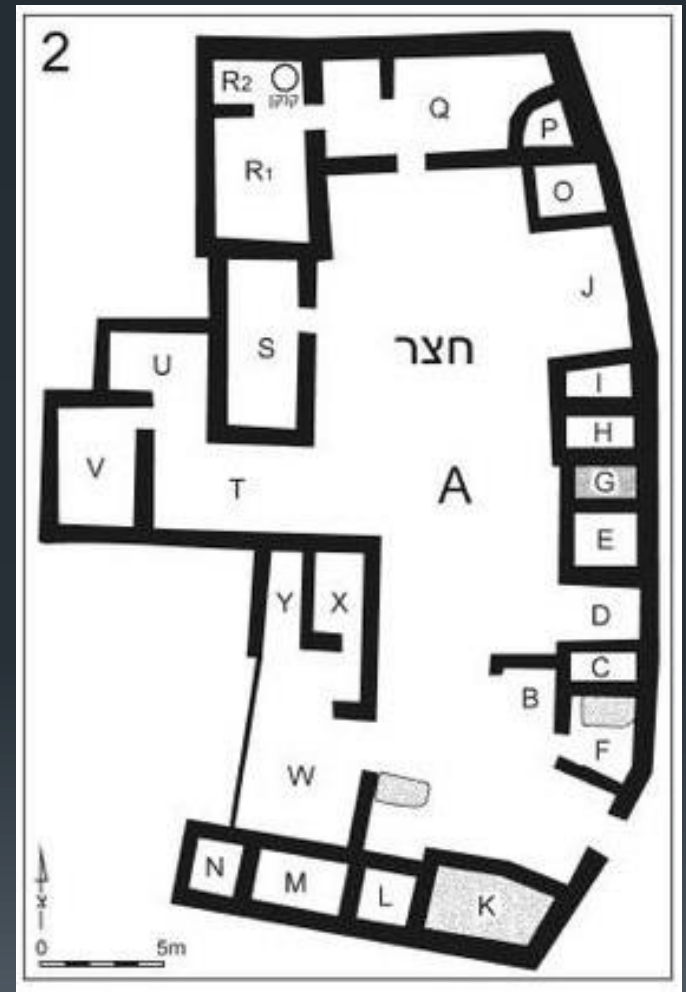
Cowrie-eyed figure



Pebble figures

Sha'ar Hagolan

- Concentration of figurines in Building Complex II: (75%)
 - Secondary discard context, in debris accumulated on floor
 - Lithics, animal bones, seashells, pottery sherds, obsidian (broken, worn out & intentionally discarded objects)
- Building: normal household, with objects of daily life: perhaps, dwelling of a special individual?



Building Complex II

Çatalhöyük

- Canonical image of Neolithic Çatalhöyük
- Baked clay
- Primary features:
 - Seated on chair
 - Flanked by felines (leopards)
 - Corpulent body
- Ignored in the literature!
Why?



Seated “mother goddess”

Çatalhöyük

- Figurines made from baked or sun-dried clay & stone
- Human (predominantly female?) & zoomorphic animal representations.
- Huge literature surrounding their manufacture, meaning & function
- Beware of “mother goddess” debate



Figurines



Çatalhöyük

- Many damaged when deposited
 - Hamilton: when they are damaged & no longer to be used they are carefully deposited
 - Biography of figurines: moved about during their use lives & were not static
- Original use lives are not necessarily evident from context
- Deposited with domestic waste



Broken figurine

Çatalhöyük

- Relatively easy & quick to make & quickly discarded: commonly found in exterior middens
- Figurines made primarily for discard?
 - Process of making more important than the figurine
- Ubiquity in dumps: highly disposable & brief use life
- Perhaps used in narrative, play & performance
- Original manufacture & decoration, might have taken place outside



Figurine fragment

Function of Çatalhöyük Figurines?

- Do these figurines encode symbolic meaning?
- Meskell: figurines are a “process rather than an object or end product”
 - Used in activities such as story telling to mediate memory & identity (nemonics)
 - Toys: dolls, gaming pieces or counters?
 - Votives?
 - Fertility symbols: but phallic imagery is rare, & Hamilton notes a lack of attributes associated with fertility?



Figurine

Aceramic Neolithic Cyprus

- Mostly sculpting in stone (one clay head)
- Sculpting hard volcanic rock
- Human form – very schematic
 - Not gendered
 - Block body – purposefully shaped
- Head: slightly phallic form
- No clear evidence of handling (but face quite worn)
- Function & meaning?



Summary

- Neolithic in Near East is characterised by development of rich symbolic art
 - Not just portable but also associated with fixed monuments, such as Göbekli Tepe & wall paintings at Çatalhöyük
- Does this represent the materialisation of cult practices / religious beliefs?
- How otherwise can we interpret the production & use of this material?
- Would the application of some of the materiality theory help us to better understand how this material was perceived, handled & incorporated into social action?