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*Animal and human representations in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of the Near East*. 2021.

PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool.

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This thesis submits a study of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (hereafter PPN) transition in different regions of the Near East, including areas where research focus has been less prominent. The main objective of this research is to test and revisit previous scholarly contributions on symbolic and ritual practices in the Neolithic in relation to figurative forms, proposing a new analysis and further contribution to the current debate about the developments in early farming life and social cognition during the PPN period (~9700-6600 cal BCE). Drawing on the large body of previous contributions on symbolic practices in the Neolithic (e.g., Kuijt 2000; Verhoeven 2002; Schmidt 2012; Schmandt-Besserat 2013) this work focuses on the use of figural representation in relation to crucial social transformations in prehistory, such as the emergence of first large villages, social stratification/ differentiation and the construction of richly and highly-costing decorated architectural installations that suggest the employment of structured and extended cooperative units (Sterelny and Watkins 2015). Acknowledging the importance of sociality and networking in the development of cognition in prehistory (Coward and Dunbar 2014) and life histories and affordances of symbolic artifacts, the agentive aspects of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations are analysed in relation to the social cognition of Neolithic populations, particularly the target audience, time/ effort, perceptual affordances, and lifespans of the objects.

By collecting a conspicuous number of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic artifacts (n= 1402 database records) from 64 regionally varied PPN sites (Fig. 1), relationships between characters of the objects, such as artifact type, symbolic representation and material, and their contextual provenance are observed. The items recorded in the database are retrieved from published materials with the aim to collect many different types of objects showing anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms and excluding some cases that were not useful for the research objectives because of their state of preservation or lack of relevant information. Moreover, in order to study the relations between these figurative forms and their potential users, a micro-level demographic study from selected 12 PPN sites presenting a large/ small site extension and/ or abundant/ meagre number of animal and human representations. Population estimates at the household and settlement level are produced by applying a revised version of the storage provisions formulae (and other demographic parameters) developed by Birch-Chapman (2017) to better documented PPN phases of occupations. Considering a series of methodological issues in estimating

co-resident inhabitants in prehistoric settlements, ranges of population estimates are calculated. Results of this demographic analysis do not indicate a positive correlation between the size of household groups and the total settlement population (27 demographic measurements), unless cases with significantly higher than average figures are exempt from analysis. In addition, a non-correlation between the total number of inhabitants at site level and the occurrences of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representational forms was tested and demonstrated. Although these trends could be influenced by conservation and contextual problems in archaeological deposits and the lack of published materials, it appears that larger populations do not necessarily produce more animal and human figurative artefacts. This has also been observed at sites that have been extensively investigated (e.g., Aşıklı Höyük L.2 and Beidha). The distribution and context in which figural depictions were found in these case studies suggest instead a much varied and culturally driven production and management of symbols that are often related to domestic audience. Objects are created with the intention of proposing a distant/ visual (e.g. pillars) as well as a near/ tactile (e.g., small figurines) perceptual impact, and recognising that certain artefacts required a considerable amount of work and had a much longer lifespan, it becomes clear that animal and human representations had more significant value for some groups than for others.

A series of bivariate and multivariate analysis is performed between objects categories, their contextual and geographical location and time period in order to observe differences/ similarities and trends in the deployment of animal and human representations. Results of these analyses confirmed (and also refuted) previous scholarly observations regarding symbolism in the Neolithic. Firstly, the present study also argues what has been said about the decrease in representations of predatory wild animals in the PPNB-C period in most Near Eastern regions (Stordeur 2010). On the other hand, some proposed narratives around the concepts of maleness and monstrosity (cf. Hodder and Meskell 2011; Wengrow 2011) are much less meaningful argumentations for the PPN transition as a whole in light of the vast and diverse forms of figural representations that can be observed in the archaeological records. Although based on archaeological evidence (Fig. 2), such narratives could perhaps only be sustained for specific regions/ sites and time periods. Similar observations on these diachronic and regional limitations could be made for some symbolic forms and ritual practices that some scholars have considered as religious (cf. Hodder 2014). While some archaeological contexts might suggest the presence of religious behaviour, shamanism, or beliefs in an otherworldly world at specific sites, applying certain labels such as temple in Neolithic narratives might not be appropriate (cf. Banning 2011), although some key features of religious behaviour may have emerged slowly during this prehistoric phase.

Another important result of this research is the delineation of regional traditions and chronological

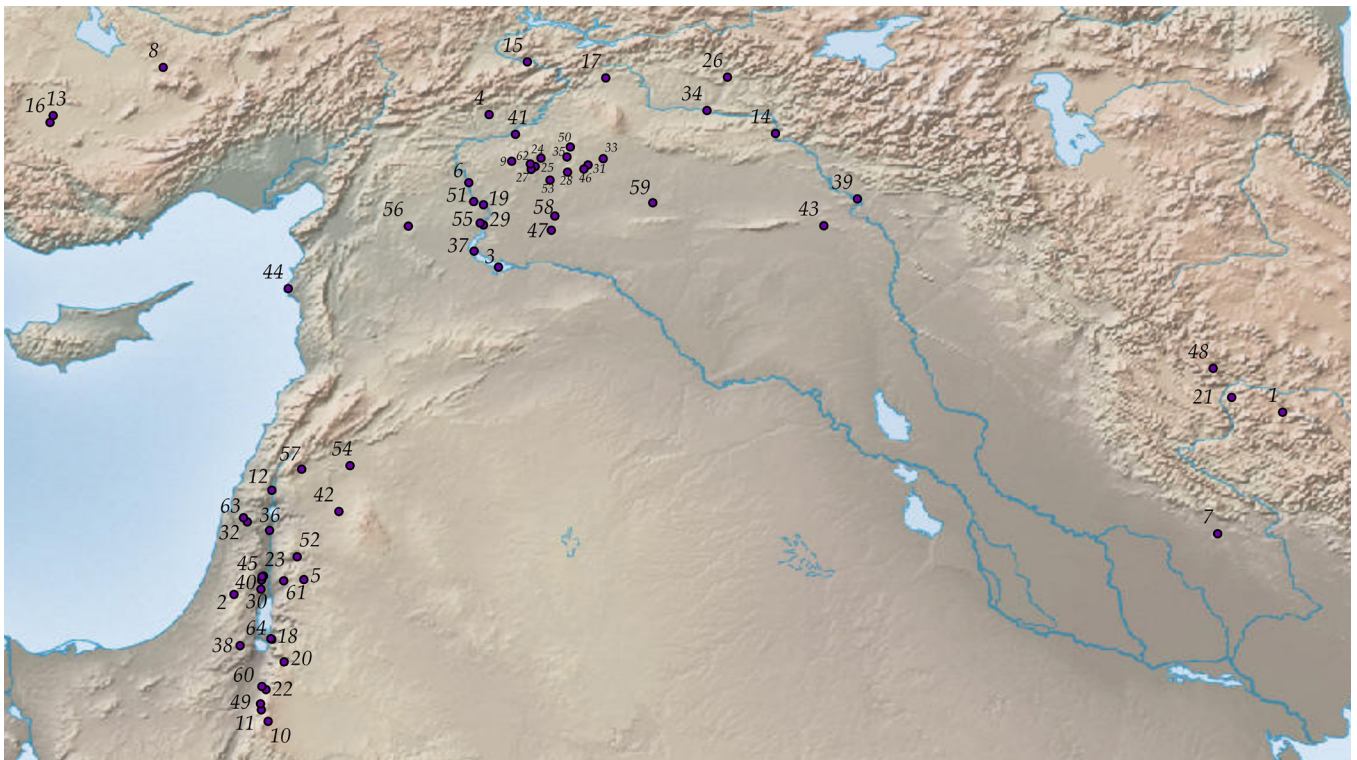


Fig. 1 The 64 PPN sites selected in this project analysis, ArcMap program. Sites shown in the map: 1. Abdul Hosein; 2. Abu Gosh; 3. Abu Hureyra; 4. Adıyaman; 5. 'Ain Ghazal; 6. Akarçay Tepe; 7. Ali Kosh; 8. Aşıklı Höyük; 9. Ayanlar Höyük; 10. Basta; 11. Beidha; 12. Beisamoun; 13. Boncuklu Höyük; 14. Boncuklu Tarla; 15. Cafer Höyük; 16. Çatalhöyük East; 17. Çayönü; 18. Dhra'; 19. Dja'de; 20. el-Hemmeh; 21. Ganj Dareh; 22. Ghuwayr I; 23. Gilgal I; 24. Göbekli Tepe; 25. Gürcütepe; 26. Hallan Çemi; 27. Hamzan Tepe; 28. Harbetsuvan Tepesi; 29. Jerf el Ahmar; 30. Jericho; 31. Karahan Tepe; 32. Kfar Ha-Horesh; 33. Kocanizam Tepe; 34. Körtik Tepe; 35. Kurt Tepesi; 36. Munhata; 37. Mureybet; 38. Nahal Hemar; 39. Nemrik 9; 40. Netiv Hagdud; 41. Nevalı Çori; 42. Qarassa, North; 43. Qermez Dere; 44. Ras Shamra; 45. Salibiya IX; 46. Sefer Tepe; 47. Sheikh Hassan; 48. Sheikh-e Abad; 49. Shkarat Msaied; 50. Taşlı Tepe; 51. Tell 'Abr 3; 52. Tell Abu Suwwan; 53. Tell Assouad; 54. Tell Aswad; 55. Tell Halula; 56. Tell Qaramel; 57. Tell Ramad; 58. Tell Sabi Abyad II; 59. Tell Seker al-Aheimar; 60. Wadi Faynan 16; 61. Wadi Shu'eib; 62. Yeni Mahalle; 63. Yiftahel; 64. Zahrat adh-Dhra' 2. (Map: M. Cartolano)

developments in the deployment of animal and human symbols, assuming that all figurative artifacts under examination can be interpreted as symbolic forms in the sense they help the user and producers to externalise thoughts and communicative statements. Marked divergences in the production, use and disposal of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurative forms can be seen between some areas of the Near East, particularly between southern Levant and the northern territories of the Fertile Crescent confirming the diverse evolutionary trajectories that previous scholars have argued (*e.g.*, Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2014). Indeed, while in the south there seems to be an emphasis on concealing portable figurative artifacts that on many occasions are related to mortuary practices, in south-eastern Anatolian and in some northern Levantine settlements there seems to be an emphasis on displaying images in relation to large monuments and building installations. In other regions, other developments seem to be emerging, but the lack of publications and archaeological investigations do not allow a systematic analysis of these developments. Nevertheless, it is clear that these geographical differences are the result of distinct cultural relationships between individuals and their natural/ built environments, which change from one region to another. From a chronological point of view, the

most relevant aspect is the increasing standardisation of figurative forms and the reduced variety of artifact type in the PPNA-PPNB transition. Furthermore, while in the early Neolithic phases an emphasis on showing figurative depictions in special buildings that we might consider as public or multi-functional is perceived, this accent seems to diminish in the PPNB-C period. Changes in the production of figurative art are seen in most regions following a non-linear and non-homogenous development.

Acknowledging that figural representation can influence the psychology and behaviour of Neolithic populations (Cauvin 2000; Benz and Bauer 2013), it can be argued that animal and human representations had a moderate impact in the social cognition of Neolithic individuals, particularly in certain areas and time periods, along with the use of other types of representations (*e.g.*, geometric). With regard to the question of whether figurative art played a role in the emergence of social stratification and hierarchy in the PPN, the present study endorses the use of mimetic theory as a hermeneutic tool to identify these social phenomena (*cf.* Hodder 2019). In a growing and changing social environment such as that of the PPN, it can be argued that figurative forms in conjunction with violent (perhaps ritualised) practices were employed in order to sustain a high degree of social commitment, cooperation, and





Fig. 2 Maleness and monstrosity? Stone Pillar 43 with figurative relief (Enclosure D), Göbekli Tepe. (Photo: K. Schmidt, German Archaeological Institute)

differentiation, which can be observed in the representations of predatory animals, headless human bodies, and burial customs. On the other hand, the current state of research does not seem to suggest that Neolithic communities possessed a fully developed level of awareness of mimetic influences that might support forms of structured hierarchy and inequality through a constant maintenance of violent performances, which would otherwise be more frequently visible in the archaeological records in, for example, depiction of violent acts operated by humans, evidence of conflict escalation, fabrication of weapons and unequal administration of resources.

Further work is needed to investigate the potential relationships between socio-economic and symbolic developments in the Neolithic transition by collating together different data sets, including faunal remains, spatial distribution of artifacts and burial practices, that can shed light on our understanding of community organisation and symbolic practices developing during this key prehistoric phase.

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