



Archaeology of Death

9 Burial rites as the source for reconstruction of prehistoric society

Jan Turek

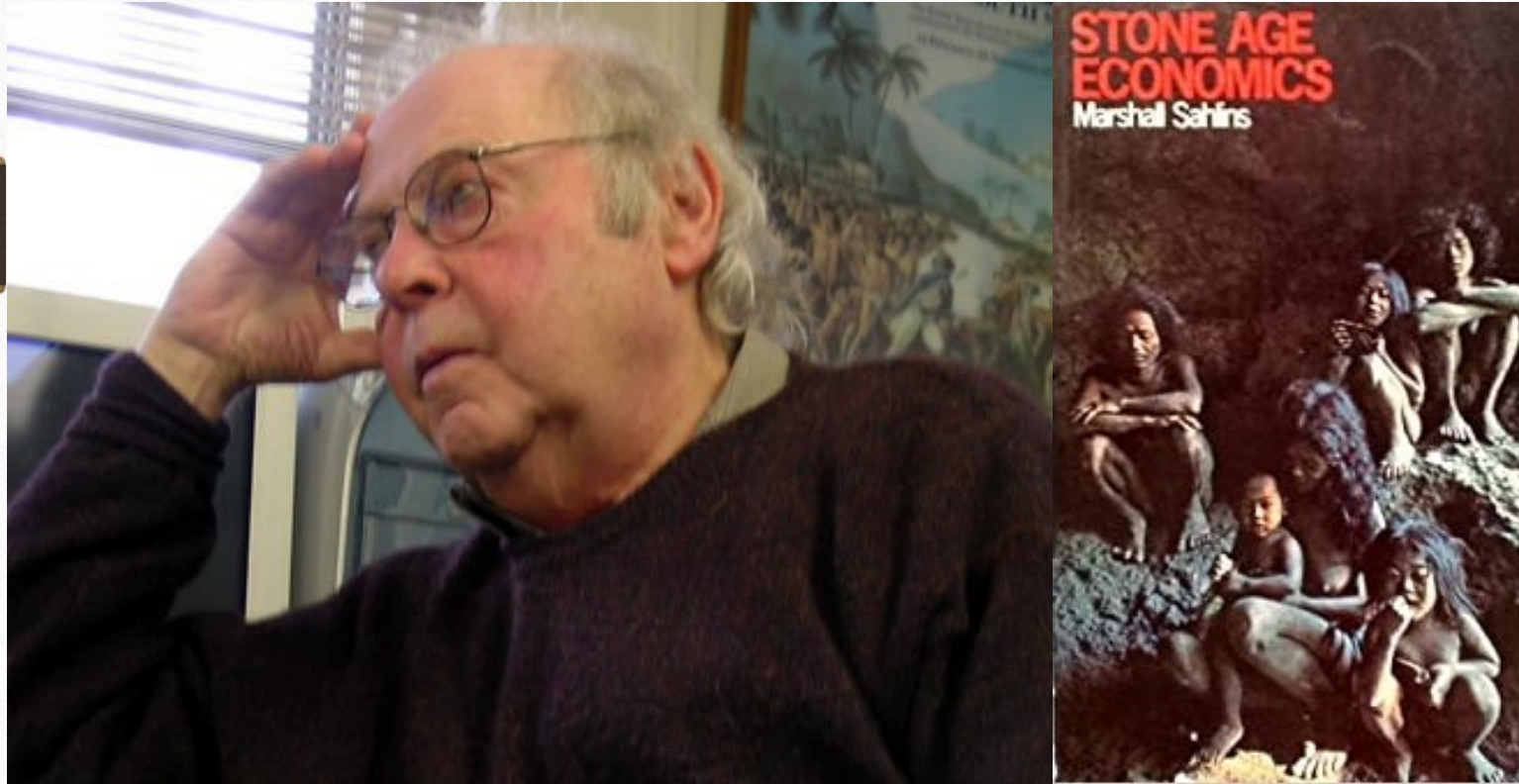
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c _ t _ _ s _ _ _ _

Foundations of social differentiation

Marshall Sahlins 1972: “Affluent society”



- Hunter-gatherer societies are not poor.
- Poverty is relative deprivation.
- People are poor when they have access to only a fraction of what they need.
- Hunter-gatherers' needs are minimal.
- There is always enough to satisfy the needs.



Many social scientists still hold that economy was a *struggle for survival*, in the best case the production of the *necessities* of life. Prehistoric people are assumed to have *fought with nature* for their survival. The last decades, however, have persuaded many archaeologists that prehistoric life was more or less easy, although not always comfortable, as people obtained their living without much effort; they lived in so-called affluent society... (Neustupný 1998, 15).

SPACE IN PREHISTORIC BOHEMIA



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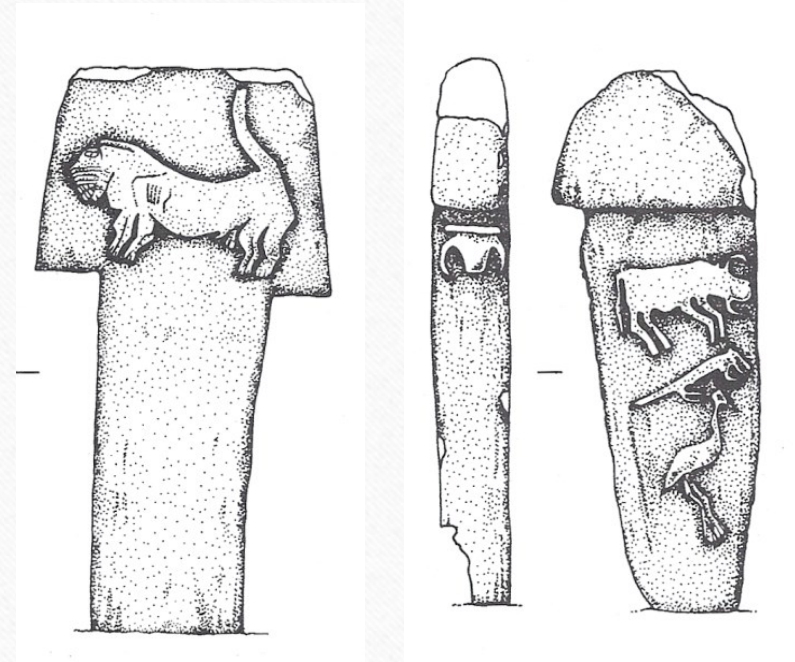
Edited by
Evžen Neustupný

1998

Near Eastern Neolithisation Centers



Beginning of monumentality agriculture & cult of death at Göbekli Tepe, SE Anatolia (9600 cal. BC)



Tell and a shrine complex at Göbekli Tepe

Tell is an Arabic name for a settlement hill (تَلّ - tall,) caused by purely anthropogenic activity, a long-term sequence of repeated settlement phases. The earliest known sanctuary in the history of humankind was discovered on a hill of 15 meters high and a diameter of approximately 300 m, at an altitude of 760 m a.s.l. (Schmidt 2006). The remarkable stratigraphy of Göbekli Tepe testifies to many centuries of human activity from Epipaleolithic to Pre-pottery Neolithic A (PPNA), when a stone shrine was built in the 10th millennium BC, followed by later residential area (PPNB).

Göbekli Tepe Chronology

Sample No.	Date BP*	Date Cal BC**	Context
Ua-19561	8430 ± 80	7560–7370	structure C
Ua-19562	8960 ± 85	8280–7970	structure B
Hd-20025	9452 ± 73	9110–8620	layer III
Hd-20036	9559 ± 53	9130–8800	layer III

Circular Shrines

In the early phase - layer III, stone circular structures with 10–30 meters in diameter appear. Their most distinctive feature are the T-shaped limestone columns of the quadratic flat cross-section. The columns, almost two and a half meters high, were evenly anchored to the circle in a massive inner wall of rough stone, and in the middle of the circle were two more columns. So far, four such circular structures have been uncovered. However, geophysical research suggests the presence of an additional 16 structures.





Klaus Schmidt (2006) believed that Göbekli Tepe was the central shrine of the cult of death. There are more similar sites in the region, which was most likely the area of the first domestication of eincorn wheat. The findings from the Karaca Dağ mountain, only 32 km from Göbekli Tepe, are considered by DNA analysis as evidence of the first breeding of domesticated eincorn wheat where its wild predecessor naturally occurred (Heun et al 1997). It is therefore possible that the domestication of cereals has indeed occurred on a large scale and in connection with the large population accumulation, shared ideology and the construction of the central shrine (cf. Mithen 2003).

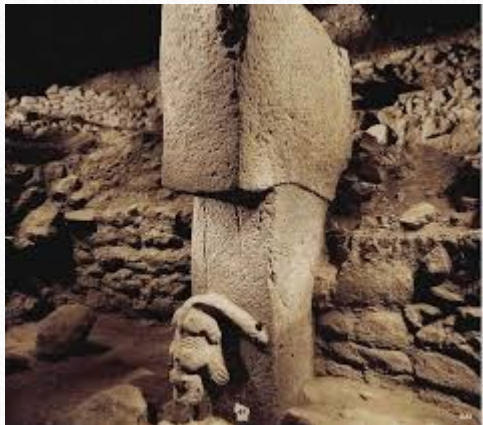


Monolithic pillars and animal motives

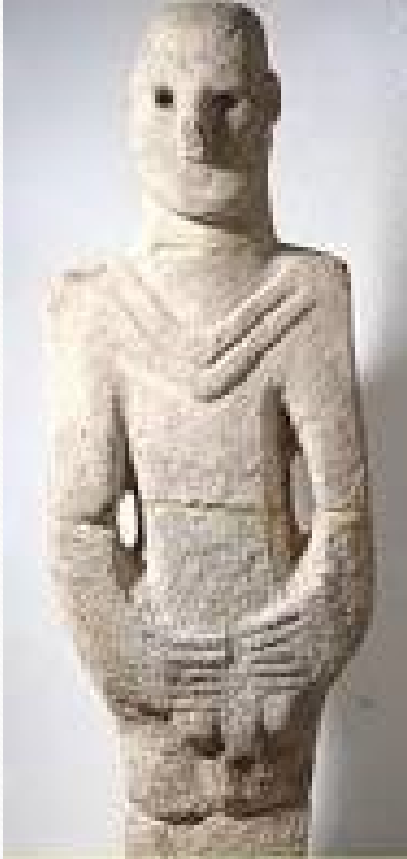
The two higher pillars in the middle of the circles seemed to support the roof structure, along the walls were massive stone benches. On some pillars there are still unknown abstract pictograms of probably sacred meaning. The carved reliefs of animals depict lions, bulls, boars, foxes, gazelles, donkeys, snakes and lizards, crocodiles, even insects and spiders. The birds are mainly vultures (connected to death symbolism even in later Anatolian site of Çatal Höyük). At the time of construction of the monument, the surrounding landscape was much richer in vegetation and wildlife. The selection of depicted animals clearly indicates that the locals have not yet domesticated any animals (Peters - Schmidt 2004).



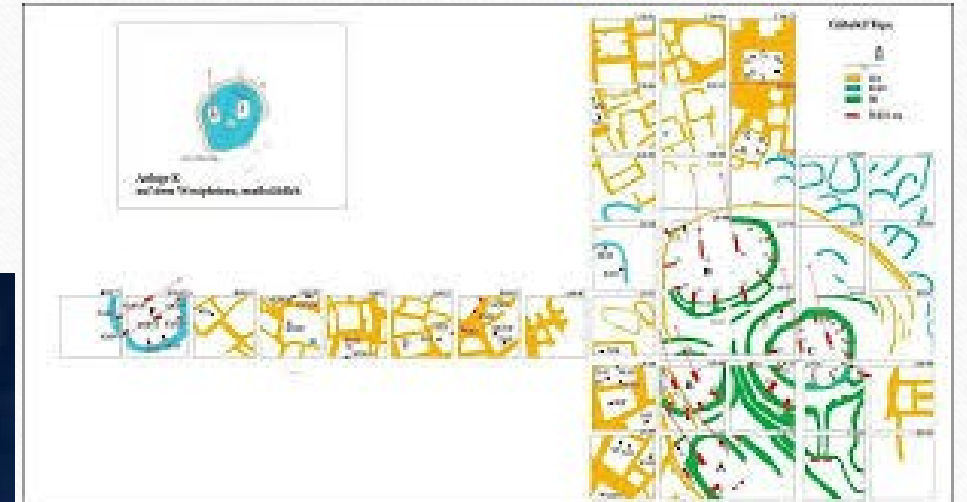
Wild animals



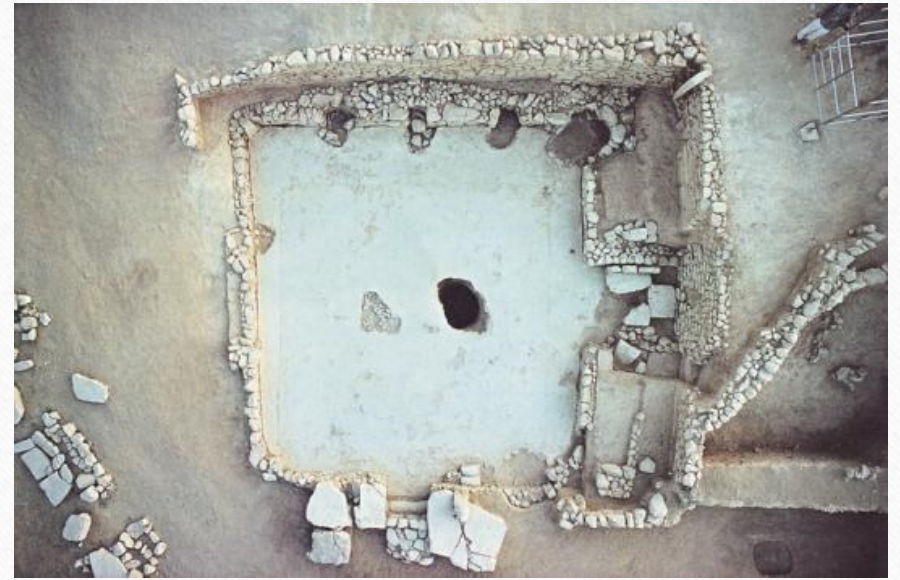
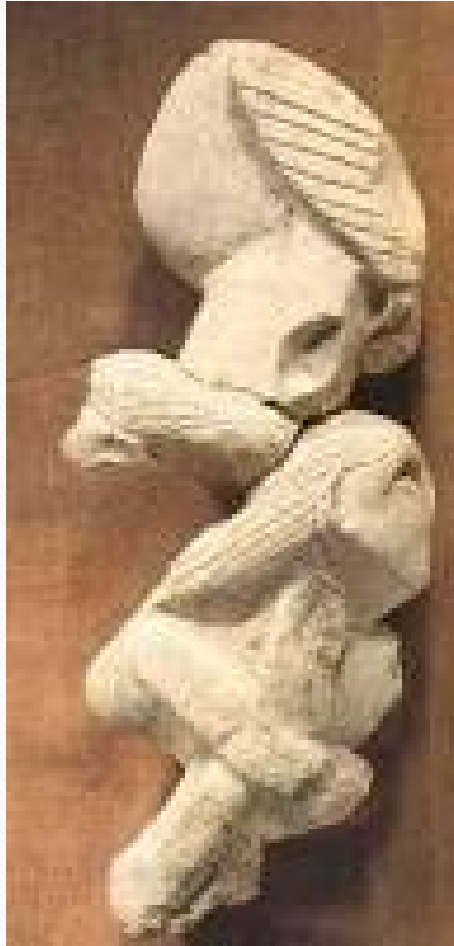
Humans



Prospection, recording and conservation



Sanctuary at Nevali Çori – Vultures & Death Cult



Jericho, Jordan River Valley

Around 7000 BC in Jericho (Palestine), a large settlement with massive walls and a round tower was established. It could hold up to two thousand inhabitants. Repeated settlements created tell.



Natufien / PPNA

The first permanent settlement was built near the source of Ein as-Sultan sometime between 10,000 and 9,000 BC. This settlement was a continuation of the late Palaeolithic activity of the Natufian culture. The PPNA settlement was characterized by small circular dwellings, the burying of the dead under the floors in the interiors of houses, the dependence on hunting wildlife and the gathering of wild seeds and cereals, and later also cultivation of domesticated cereals. The houses in Jericho were circular, built of clay bricks, which were plastered with screed. Each house was about 5 meters in diameter.

PPNB

Around 9400 BC the city has grown to more than 70 household units. Earlier estimates of the then Jericho population were around two to three thousand, but today it seems that the local population counted in hundreds. The most striking feature of this early city was the massive stone wall 3.6 m high and 1.8 m thick at the foundations. Inside this wall was a 3.6 m high cylindrical tower containing an internal staircase of 22 stone steps. Rather than a fortification, it is probably about protecting the site from flooding and the tower was probably a symbolic ritual structure.

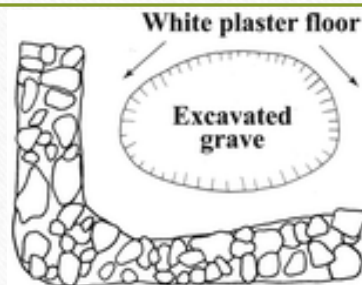
After several centuries of hiatus, the site was around 6800 BC (PPNB) urbanized again. From this period comes the already mentioned modeled skulls, which can be considered as the oldest evidence of common portraits in human history.

Modelled skulls of ancestors

Kathleen Kenyon (British School of Archeology in Jerusalem; Kenyon 1957), discovered in Jericho several human skulls modelled with plaster. Modelled skulls represents one of the earliest burial practices in the Southern Levant region at the time of the PPNB. The deceased were buried there under the floors of their houses. The skull was sometimes separated from the buried bodies, its cavities and missing soft tissue were filled with gypsum and painted. To reconstruct and revitalize the face, the eyes were replaced with kauri shells and other facial features such as hair and moustaches were painted with colour. Other similar finds come from Aïn Ghazal & Amman in Jordan and from Tell Ramad in Syria.



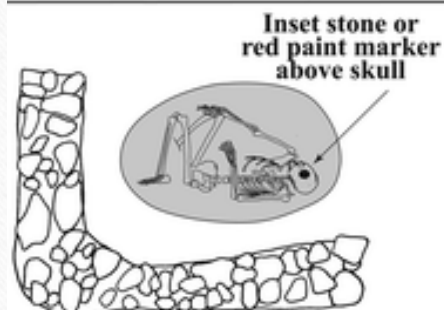
Jericho skulls Manipulation & re-deposition



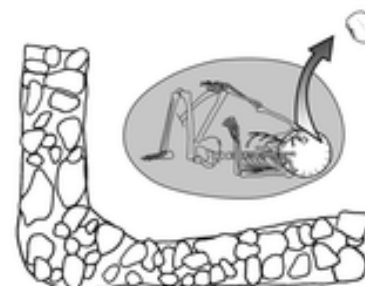
(Stage 1) Excavation of grave inside of structure



(Stage 2) Burial of deceased, filling of grave, covering of grave with a new white plaster floor, and marking of skull location



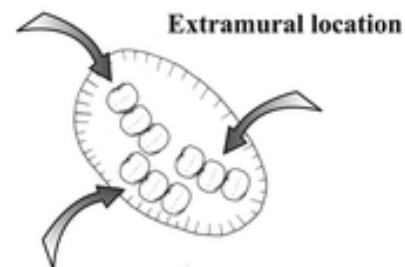
(Stage 3) Defleshing over months or years



(Stage 4) Reexcavation of area around skull and removal of skull

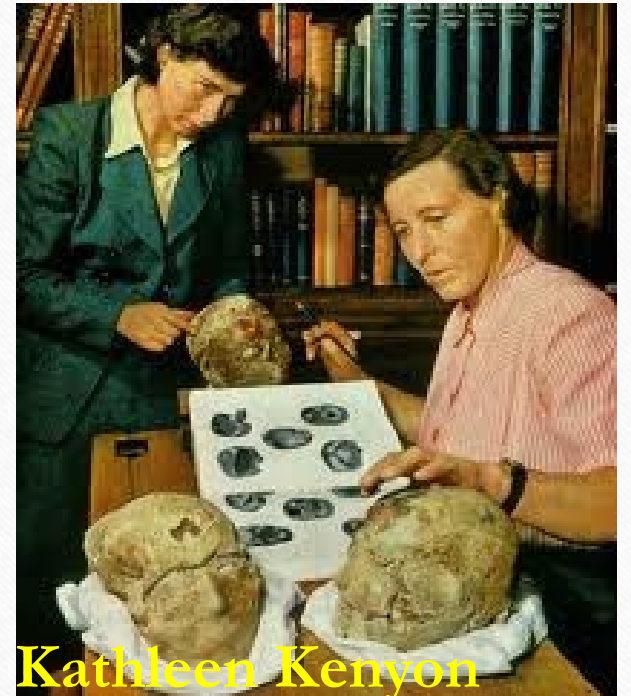


(Stage 5) Filling of skull area excavation and replastering of floor

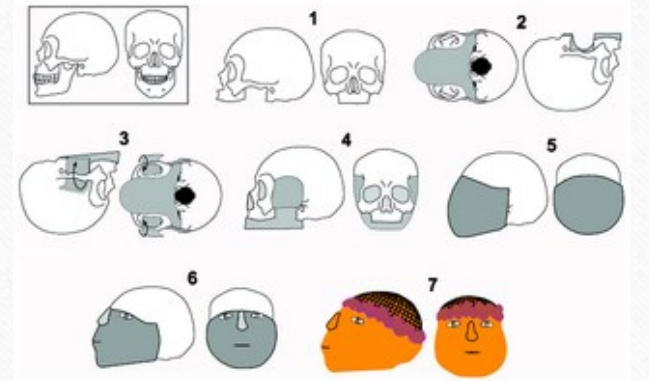
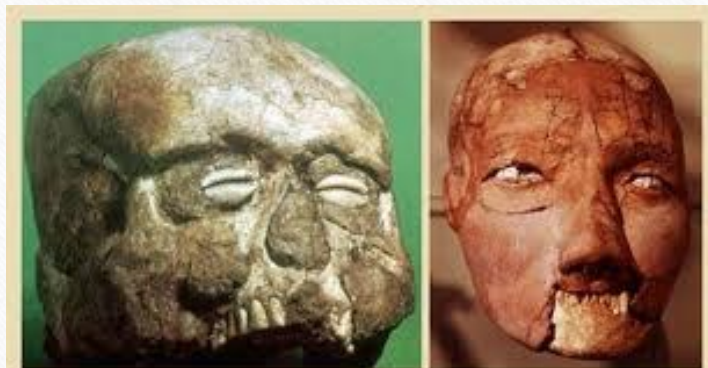


(Stage 6) Ritual use and eventual secondary burial of skulls individually or in groups outside of structure

Jericho (Palestine) Modelled skulls, 7th Millennium BC



Kathleen Kenyon





Viviane Slon et al 2014:
The Plastered Skulls from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B Site of Yiftahel (Israel) – A Computed Tomography-Based Analysis, PLoS ONE 9(2): e89242.

• <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0089242>

Three plastered skulls, dating to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, were found at the site of Yiftahel, in the Lower Galilee (Israel). The skulls underwent refitting and restoration processes, details of which are described herein. All three belong to adults, of which two appear to be males and one appears to be a female. Virtual cross-sections were studied and a density analysis of the plaster was performed using computed tomography scans. These were utilized to yield information regarding the modeling process. Similarities and differences between the Yiftahel and other plastered skulls from the Levant are examined. The possible role of skull plastering within a society undergoing a shift from a hunting-gathering way of life to a food producing strategy is discussed.





Ain Ghazal, Jordan

Human skull & clay modelled
body. 7th Millennium BC.

(Musée de Louvre, Paris & Jordan Museum,
Aman)





Papua New Guinea, Mummies of ancestors, Ulla Lohman's photostory

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/proof/2016/10/mummy-photography-ulla-lohmann/>

The Modern Mummies of Papua New Guinea.
A rare look at life and death in a remote village
in the West Pacific.

By [Daniel Stone](#)

Photographs by [Ulla Lohmann](#)



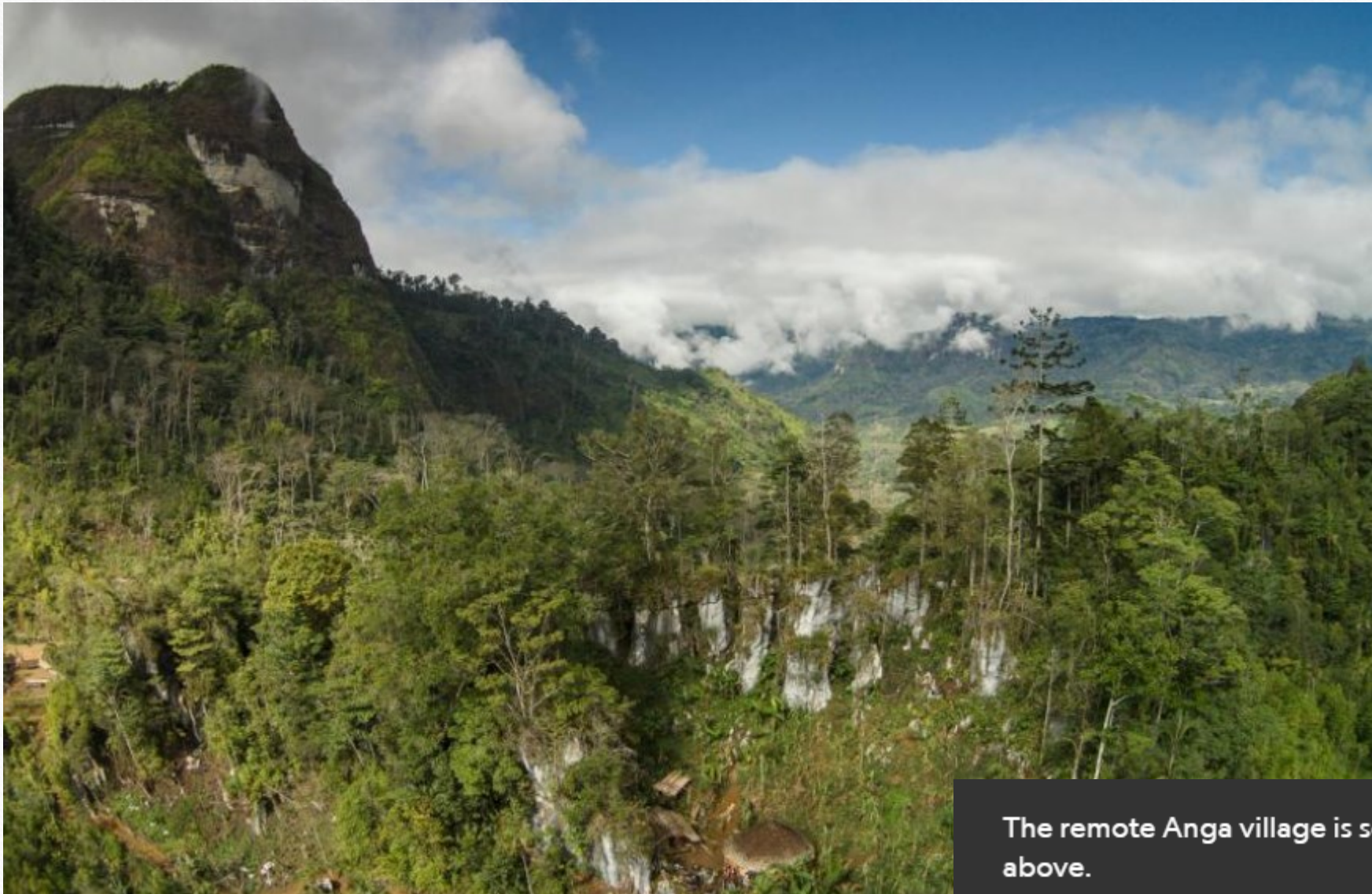
**NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC**

The mummification method follows a strict structure. The body is suspended over a fire, and as it bloats, it is poked with wooden sticks to drain its fluids, and later, a stick is used to gently widen the anus to allow the organs to fall out. From start to finish, the mummifiers must remain with the body at all times, and no part of the dead—his fluids, his intestines, or even his body—is allowed to touch the ground, a taboo invitation for bad luck.

The most important part is to keep the face intact. In a culture without photography, the only way to preserve the image of the departed is to physically see their immortal faces. "We have pictures, they have mummies," Lohmann says. "The Anga believe that the spirits roam free during the day and return to their mummified bodies at night. Without seeing the face, the spirits cannot find their own body and would wander eternally."

Anga village Papua New Guinea





The remote Anga village is seen from above.



Maintenance and restoration of Moymango's mummy is an annual ritual.



After undergoing restoration in the village, the mummified body of Moymango, Gemtasu's father, is carried by family members back to the cliff above the village.



In 2008, Gemtasu announced to his son and extended family that he wished to be mummified and seated next to his father after his own death.



Gemtasu tries out his mummification chair.



Wanting to ensure everything was ready for his last wish, Gemtasu built his own smoking house a year before his death.



Gemtasu's son baptised his child shortly before Gemtasu passed away.



Seven men in Gemtasu's family look after him during the mummification process. Here, his body is repositioned over the fire. No one taking part in the ceremony is allowed to leave the area or wash.







Every night, Gemtasu's family sits together at the warm fire to tell stories and Gemtasu's favorite jokes. Sometimes everybody goes quiet because they think they can hear Gemtasu laugh.



Gemtasu in 2009, before mummification.



Gemtasu after mummification, 2015.



<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/proof/2016/10/mummy-photography-ulla-lohmann/#/72-Ulla-Lohman-Mummy.jpg>

Genealogy

In Neolithic Period people created their cultural space, which they structured and adapted to their needs. This space also became the property of the community and individual families. As result of these new ownership rights demonstration of genealogy began to gain in importance. For the first time, people felt a greater need to refer to generations of their ancestors and to demonstrate their right to use land and occupy space, even in the event of more frequent local movements of houses and the entire settlement. The modelled skulls of ancestors were used as *portable legitimization of genealogy* and *property ownership rights*. This practise is also related to the original habit of the first Neolithic farmers not to create specialized burial grounds and to bury their ancestors in the settlements or directly under the floor of residential buildings.

This ancestral symbolism continued in the Anatolian Neolithic and it was documented in the Çatal Höyük site.

Çatal Höyük

Anatolian site excavated since 1950s

To date excavated 166 houses = only 5 % of the eastern hill site

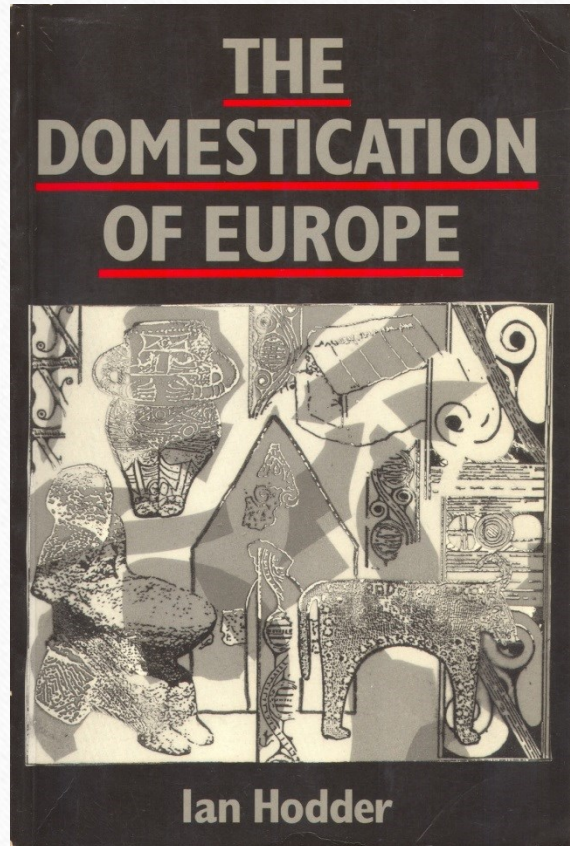
James Mellaart



Ian Hodder



Ian Hodder 1990: “domus & agrios”



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In the life of the first farmers, there were two main spheres that could be understood as higher concepts shaping human spatial division of the outside world *Domus* and *Agrios* (in Latin). *Domus* represents a home environment, inside (household or settlement) safe place, where the wild is domesticated. It is therefore the very interior of a Neolithic village with dwellings and farm buildings, which could even be formally delimited by a shallow ditch. This area also included fields that were also lightly enclosed by farmers and protected against domestic species and wildlife. It was the fields that had been plucked from the wild and cultured (agri-culture). It was a space that people had fully possessed, where the spirits of their ancestors and the good powers that protected them were located. *Agrios*, on the other hand, was an outer space, alien, wild, with “the others” people. Evžen Neustupný (*Archeology of Otherness* 1998) also elaborated on these concepts of the inner world, the known world and the world of otherness, which prehistoric people knew and perceived its cultural diversity.

In the Neolithic Period, a completely new concept of home entered into human mind. While hunters and gatherers lived in very close ties with nature, depending on the movements of the wild animals they frequently moved their place of residence and the whole nature was home to them, the Neolithic farmers excluded their world from nature and since that moment at home they felt safe only in the living space of their own village and its immediate surroundings. Beyond fully controlled and domesticated space, farmers were lurking in wild animals, feared by the supernatural powers of demons or alien, hostile human beings.

The growing population and complexity of Neolithic society induced creation of large settlement agglomerations of proto-urban character, such as Çatal Höyük in Anatolia. This extensive settlement site existed from approximately 7100 BC to 5700 BC.

During first excavations by James Mellaart in 1958 and between 1961 and 1965, almost 200 houses were uncovered. Mellaart was puzzled why most of the structures contain cultic objects and elaborate wall decorations with *bucraiae* (bulls heads) and other wild animals and doubted they were dwellings. Only later, after 1993 Ian Hodder suggested that the living houses combined profane and cultic functions including the funerary purpose. Many ancestors were buried under benches and floors of houses and their skulls (plastered and painted) were often held in the interiors of houses.

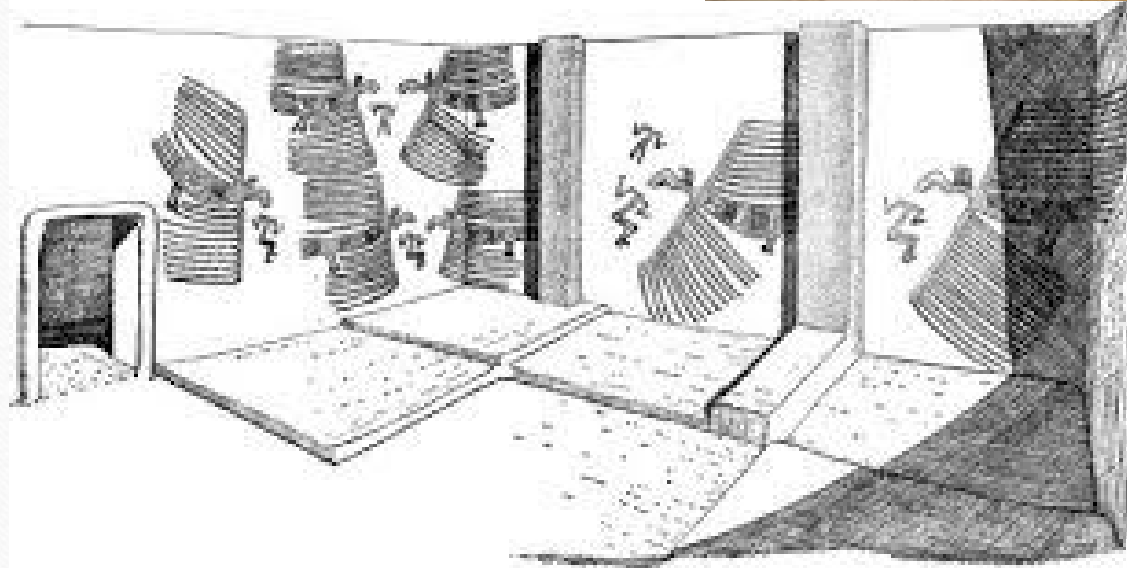
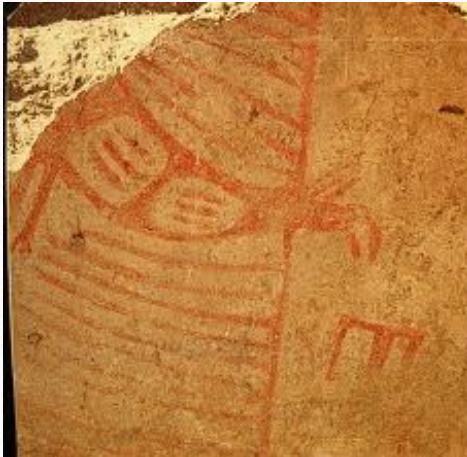
The motives of death, headless corpses vultures and 'priests' dressed in birds costume and perhaps collecting heads were also depicted on the walls. For interiors and decoration motives at Çatal Höyük see the pictures below:







Wall paintings – cult of death, vultures, bird-priests & skulls



Çatal Höyük: skulls removed from graves – painted & re-deposited

Scott D. Haddow: Çatalhöyük 2012: Skull retrieval, curation and redeposition

<https://scotthaddow.wordpress.com/2012/08/24/catalhoyuk-2012-skull-retrieval-curation-redeposition/>



The retrieval, curation and re-deposition of human heads – either the entire skull (i.e. cranium and mandible), or simply the cranium (without the mandible) – is a common feature of Near Eastern Neolithic mortuary practices. In some cases, the facial features were modelled in plaster or mud, and bivalve or cowrie shells were set into the eye sockets to provide a life-like appearance. Some of the most well-known examples of plastered skulls/crania are from [Jericho](#) in Palestine and '[Ain Ghazal](#)' in Jordan. Modified skulls have also been found at other sites such as Beisamoun, Kfar-HaHoresh and Tell Ramad in the Levant, as well as at Köşk Höyük in central Anatolia. While some have argued that this practice is a form of trophy collection, likely from dead enemies, the traditional view holds that skull collecting in the Neolithic represents a form of ancestor veneration, possibly linked to emerging sedentism and the control of local resources. More recently, however, researchers have begun to question the interpretation of ancestor worship as evidence mounts from other sites that skull collection and modification was not reserved strictly for older adults, i.e. elder members of society

Secondary deposits of unmodified skulls and crania are also commonly found at these and other Near Eastern sites, including Çatal Höyük. These may be found in open spaces, house floors and other non-burial contexts, or re-deposited in pits individually or in caches. At Çatal Höyük, loose crania and other skeletal elements are often encountered within the grave fill of primary burials, although in some cases they represent the disturbance of earlier burials in the same location. In the above photo, however, the cut for the primary skeleton has not disturbed any earlier burials; thus, the two disarticulated crania and infra-cranial remains visible in the grave fill must have been intentionally placed with the primary burial. A correlate of these secondary depositions, of course, is the occurrence of headless primary burials, the skulls of which have presumably been removed for the purpose of curation and eventual re-deposition. In most cases it appears that the skulls have been removed at some point after interment when the body has either partially or completely skeletonized. This interpretation is based on the lack of cut marks found on the cervical vertebrae or cranial bases. In 2004 at Çatal Höyük, a plastered skull (cranium and mandible) was discovered cradled in the arms of an old adult female (see picture below). The eyes and nose were carefully modelled and the plaster was painted with red ochre. Unfortunately, the poor state of preservation prevents us from making a definitive sex assessment, but the observable skull morphology indicates a possible female.

To most observers, the seemingly tender manner in which the plastered skull is held in the arms of the older female – face to face – makes it easy to imagine some form of emotional attachment involved – perhaps familial? The skull has been repainted on several occasions and bears other indications of long term curation before it was re-buried with the primary skeleton. Is this plastered skull directly related to the older female, or is it a sort of heirloom, collected at some point in the unremembered past and handed down over generations without any familial relationship necessary? How long was this skull in circulation, and why was it reburied with this particular individual? DNA analysis may tell us about the genetic relationship between the two individuals, and the current application of Bayesian statistics to the radiocarbon dating program at Çatal could provide an indication of the age of the bones. If the plastered skull is much older than the primary skeleton we would have direct evidence for the amount of time it was curated. Ideally, such analyses will be conducted in the future on many of the unmodified crania found on site as well, although there is no guarantee that ancient DNA can be successfully extracted from the skeletal material at Çatal Höyük.

At the time, this discovery was the first evidence at Çatal Höyük for the plastering of human skulls. Red-painted crania have been found by Mellaart in the 1960s and also during the current excavations, but none had been plastered. Identification of the red pigments applied to the crania has been conducted using pXRF technology and demonstrates that red ochre is most commonly used, followed by cinnabar (mercury sulfide). One such cranium was found by Mellaart in the 1960s in grave fill underneath a house floor. Cinnabar had been painted directly onto the cranium in thick, broad bands.

In 2012 a new evidence occurred of the second painted and plastered skull at Çatalhöyük. It comes in the form of a disarticulated mandible found in a post-retrieval pit in Building 89. Based on its morphology, the mandible appears to belong to a female (see below). The *antemortem* (prior to death) loss of the posterior dentition and subsequent resorption of the tooth sockets indicate an adult of advanced age – also note the severe bilateral temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disease on the articular condyles. When the soil was carefully removed from the bone, red pigment (probably ochre) was clearly visible on the body and rami of the mandible (it is less visible in the pictures below). Even more interesting, however, is the thick band of plaster which covers the anterior dentition. It's clearly been applied intentionally. It's possible that this mandible was originally attached to a similarly modified cranium, not unlike the one found in 2004. If so, it's unclear how it became separated from the cranium, or why it seems to have ended up as part of a building closure deposit and not re-interred in the grave fill of a primary burial. Certainly, though, this discovery provides new evidence and – at the same time – raises more questions about the secondary mortuary treatment of skulls at Çatal Höyük.

Dolmen del Collet de Su, Solsonès a Pinós, Catalonia

The dolmen was excavated in 1915 by Pere Bosch Gimpera. Between 2,700 and 2,200 BC, eighteen skulls were deposited inside the dolmen. Two skulls with signs of Trepanation. The skulls were carefully arranged at the bottom of the chambre some other bones were found next to them: Femur, humerus, tibia, a fragment of the maxilla, and various other objects such as Bell Beaker pottery, an arrowhead of a copper alloy stuck in a female skull, flint blades and necklace pieces. It was probably used as a secondary burial shrine.





Further reading:

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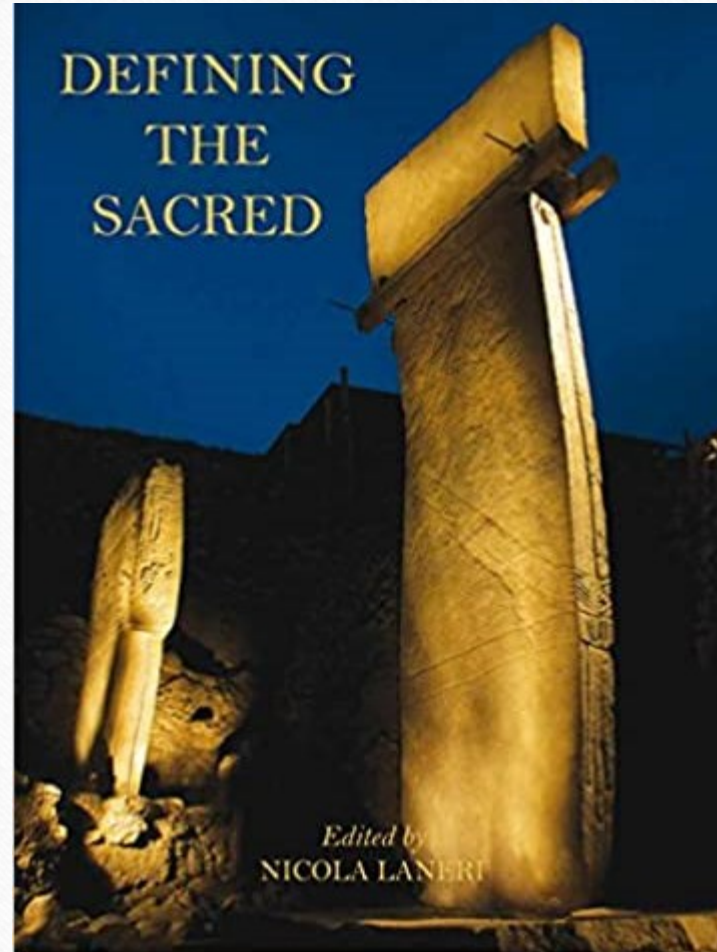
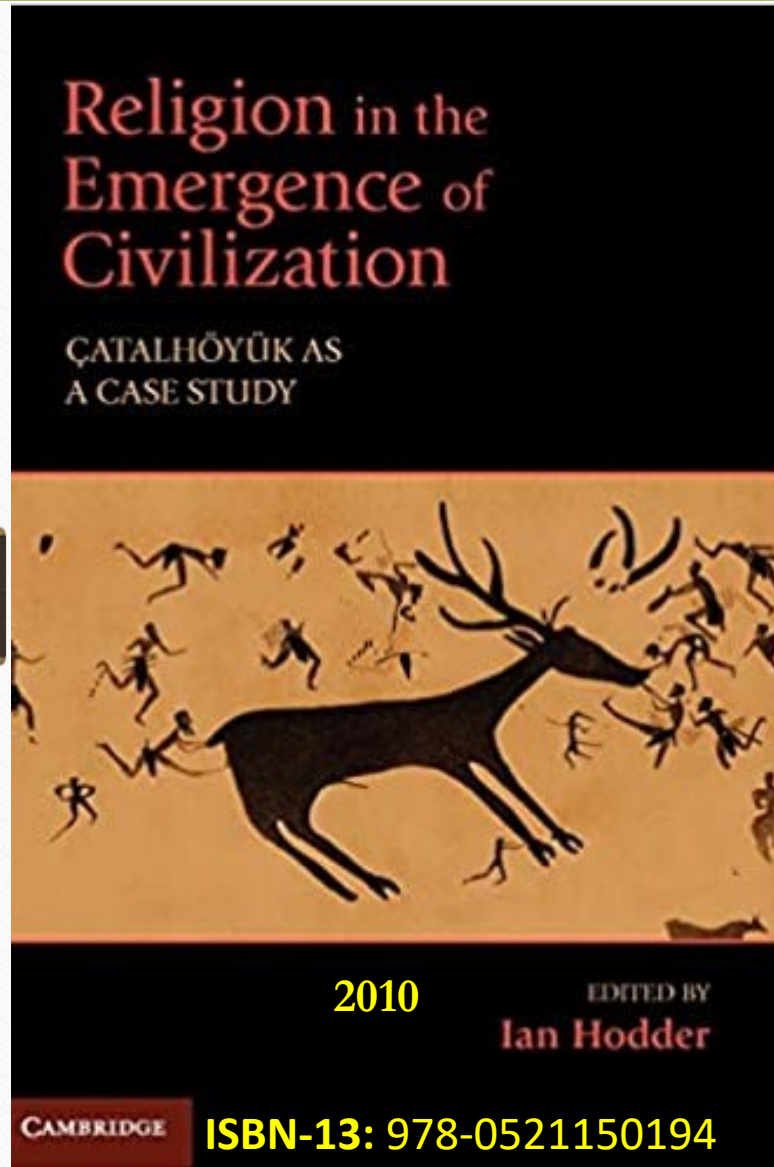
Bonogofsky, M. (2005). A bioarchaeological study of plastered skulls from Anatolia: new discoveries and interpretations *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 15(2):124-135 DOI: [10.1002/oa.749](https://doi.org/10.1002/oa.749)

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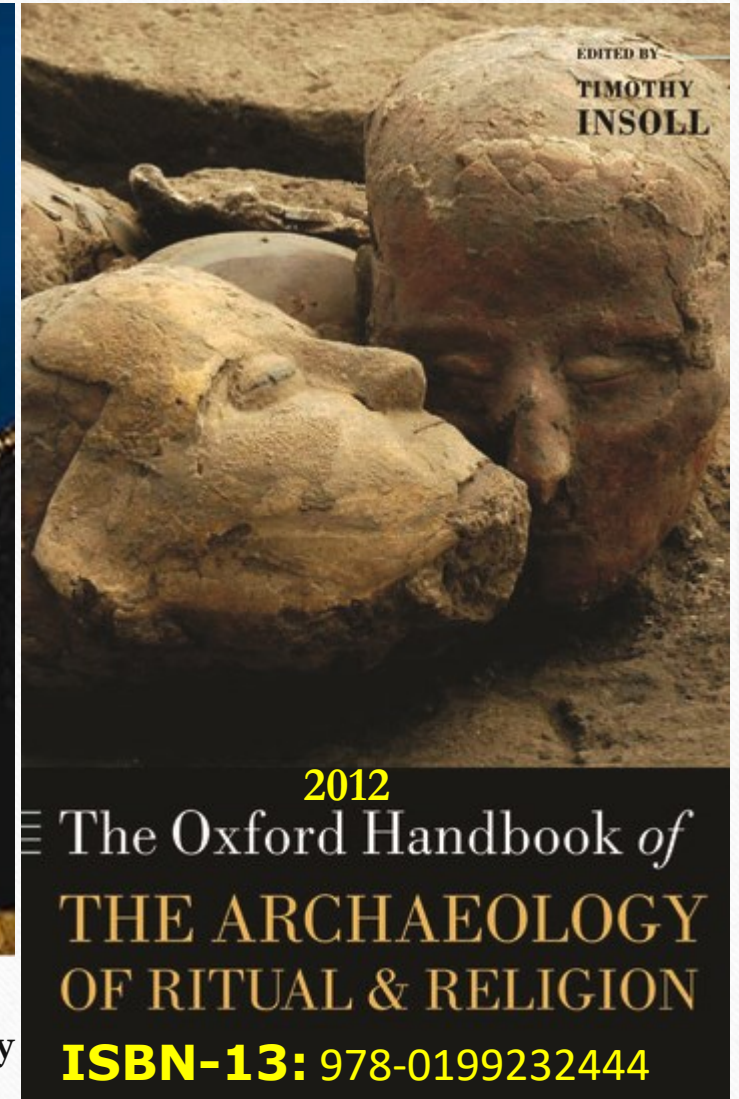
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Nicola Laneri (ed.) 2015: *Defining the Sacred: Approaches to the Archaeology of Religion in the Near East*, Oxbow books, Oxford, ISBN-13: 978-1782976790





Beer, Feasting & Ancestors

The beer production was relatively complex and time consuming activity and the final product had to be consumed quickly as the drink did not last fresh for long and therefore it is quite natural that the beer was consumed collectively and relatives and neighbours were taking turns in organising such feasts.

The increased granary production during the Neolithic Period, namely that of barley, offered opportunity for, more or less, common brewing of beer. It was also very effective way to transform excess barley into commodity of higher economic value. This does not mean any commercial beer production, this certainly was not the case of the Chalcolithic Period, but as suggested by ethnographic observations the invitation for a beer feast may be way how to obtain reciprocal work power that had certain economic effect.

Egyptian beer jars: value; currency & offering



Beer, Feasts & social communication in European Neolithic&Copper Age

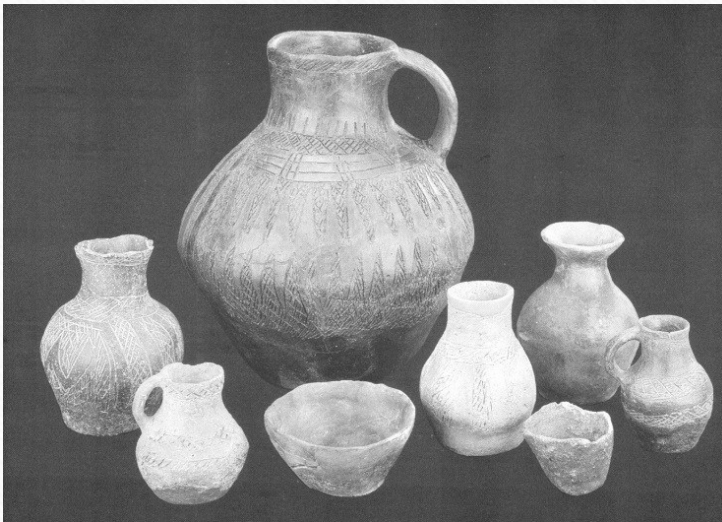


Tišice (Mělník District), after P. J. Foster

The festivals connected to drinking of alcoholic beverages entered the social life of Europeans in the Chalcolithic period as a new cultural element and remained in our social behaviour till the present day. The ceremonial way of drinking is well documented by specialised drinking vessels accompanying some burials and appearing as votive offerings in hoard depositions.

Drinking vessels

Specific new drinking types of pottery were introduced during the Chalcolithic period, designed for production, storage, mixing and consumption of alcoholic beverages. These were completely new types of vessels not known in the earlier Neolithic period. They are mainly jugs, handled cups, beakers and amphorae. Some vessels were, however, not suitable for direct drinking, such as the Tulip-like beakers of the Michelsberg Culture or Funnel Beakers (TRB) and Bell Beakers. It may be well possible that the vessels with wide opened rims were made for drinking with straw, such as it was in Ancient Egypt with thick cloudy beer full of barley residues.



Scheussenried Culture 4300-3900 BC



Corded Ware 2900-2500 BC

Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group: Occasional Paper 5

Prehistoric Pottery: Some Recent Research

Edited by
Alex Gibson



BAR International Series 1509
2006

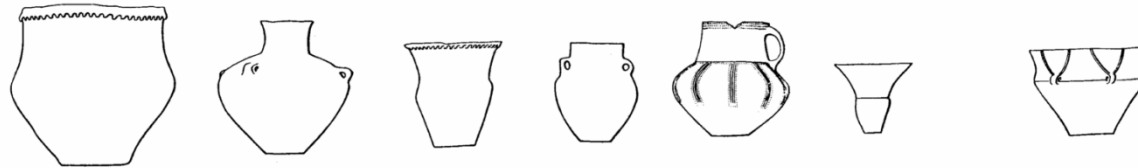
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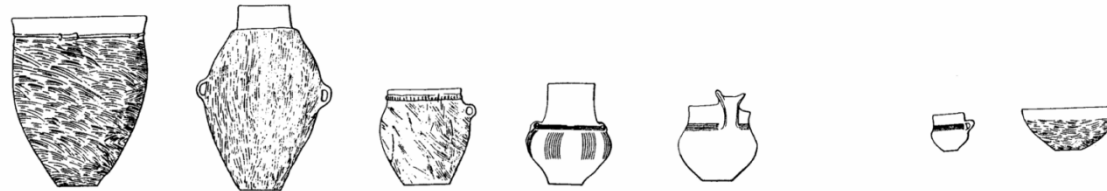
In this paper I would like to contribute towards the reconstruction of symbolic and social representation of gender at the end of Eneolithic period in central Europe. I suppose that some of so-called Bell Beaker associated pottery (*die Begleitkeramik*) is decorated by plastic ornaments of possible gender significance. These gendered pots are decorated with male associated symbols, moustache decorations protruding down the root of the handle of cups, or phallic up side down inverted “Y” shapes distributed over the vessel body. Their female opposition seems to be a nipple-like protrusions on both sides of the handle’s root and/or over the vessels body. The male and female symbols never appear on the same pot and they seem to be accordingly divided into male or female burial assemblages. It is well possible that these pots represent the gender role not only in the funerary context but they also played a symbolic role in everyday gendered social activities.

Eneolithic/Bronze Age pottery complex (Neustupný 1995) consist of: large storage jars, amphorae, pots, handled pots, jugs, beakers, cups and bowls. Some of these new types of vessels were introduced due to beer brewing & consumption

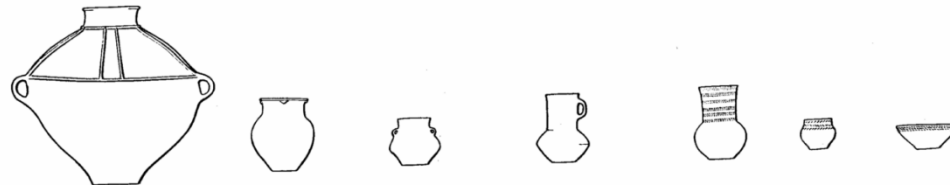
4000-3800 cal. BC



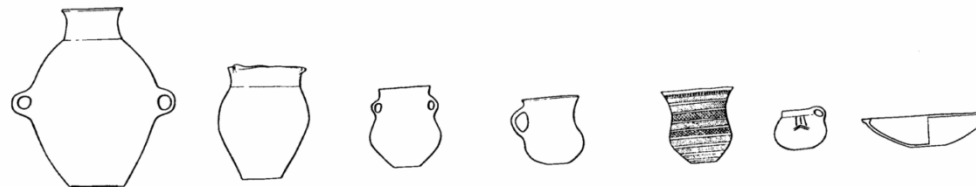
3300-2900 cal. BC



2900-2500 cal. BC



2500-2300 cal. BC



The pottery complex is an artefactual symbolic system that was dominating the pottery production in central Europe since 4500 BC till at least 700 BC. Evžen Neustupný presented this concept as Central European Eneolithic-Bronze Age pottery complex (cf. Neustupný 1995).

Such complex consist of: large storage jars, amphorae, pots, handled pots, jugs, beakers, one handled cups and bowls. These types of pottery were created for specific purposes, but at the same time they became a distinctive cultural phenomenon. People in the earlier Neolithic period, as well as later in the Iron Age, Roman period and early Middle Ages did not use such composition of pottery types, especially jugs, amphorae and beakers were unknown. Also looking through the Copper Age/Bronze Age pottery assemblages of Western or Eastern Europe we would hardly find a matching set of pottery types. This makes the pottery complex specifically Central European phenomenon.

The evidence of drinking rituals and feasts may be seen already in the pottery drinking sets of the Proto-Eneolithic (after 4500 cal. BC). Such events played an important role in creation and reinforcement of the collective identity within communities, as well as, in communication with other neighbouring communities. Already in the Jordansmühl Culture were used the first jugs in Central Europe and later the very specific tulip-beakers of the Michelsberg Culture. The higher production of wheat and barley, which was caused by more effective Eneolithic system of agriculture, established more or less common opportunity for beer making. This was very effective way to turn excess barley into commodity of a higher value. People invited for such beer feast might on reward offered their work power or/and the host highlighted its social and economic superiority. The drinking ceremonial feasts had a great potential in the social communication within prehistoric communities, including strengthening social ties within the community, as well as, emphasising its collective identity.

Considering the pottery production of Bell Beaker period, there are certain types of pots suitable for direct drinking, such as one handled cups and small jugs, but the shape of bell beakers does not seem to be suitable for consumption of liquids. Bell beakers, as well as, for example earlier Michelsberg tulip-beakers have sometimes extremely everted rims, that make direct drinking almost impossible. Such pots may have been used as containers or vessels for manipulation of liquids prior to their consumption, or they were designed for drinking using a straw, such as it is known from beer drinking scenes of ancient Mesopotamia or Egypt.

Michelsberg tulip-like beaker



Michelsberg Culture 4100-3800 BC

Funnel Beaker Culture (TRB) Salzmünde jugs



Funnel Beaker Culture 3800-3500 BC

Baden and Řivnáč Culture jugs



Baden Culture 3500-3300 BC



Řivnáč Culture 3300-2900 BC

Bell Beakers 2500-2200 BC



Corded Ware in red; Bell Beakers in green



Ceremonial drinking sets and rituals of drinking and deposition



The alcoholic feasts probably played an important role in variety of social events and ceremonies. Such feasts reinforced the social binds within a community and its collective identity. Invitation for beer sharing was also confirming wealth and social superiority of some individuals over others in terms of gift and debt system. Drinking of beer often accompanied certain social ceremonial events such as ceremonial exchange, bridewealth, peace deals etc.

Baden Culture ritual drinking set from Dřevčice in Central Bohemia



Beer in Ambrona Valley (Central Spain)



Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society 72, 2006, pp. 243–265

Beer and Bell Beakers: Drinking Rituals in Copper Age Inner Iberia

By MANUEL ÁNGEL ROJO-GUERRA¹, RAFAEL GARRIDO-PENA², ÍÑIGO GARCÍA-MARTÍNEZ-DE-LAGRÁN²,
JORDI JUAN-TRESERRAS³ and JUAN CARLOS MATAMALA⁴

This article provides a summary of the archaeological context of Bell Beaker pottery from two Ambrona Valley (Soria, Spain) tombs whose chemical analysis identifies the existence of a primitive wheat beer. This is compared with other new analyses in Iberia, from both Neolithic and Copper Age sites, which also demonstrate the use of alcoholic beverages. The two Ambrona examples are Copper Age Bell Beaker intrusions into earlier Middle Neolithic Monumental graves. The archaeological features of both discoveries are described, and an interpretation is offered concerning the social and symbolic context in which these Bell Beaker inhumations were deposited, and the role that alcoholic beverages such as beer might have played in this social context.

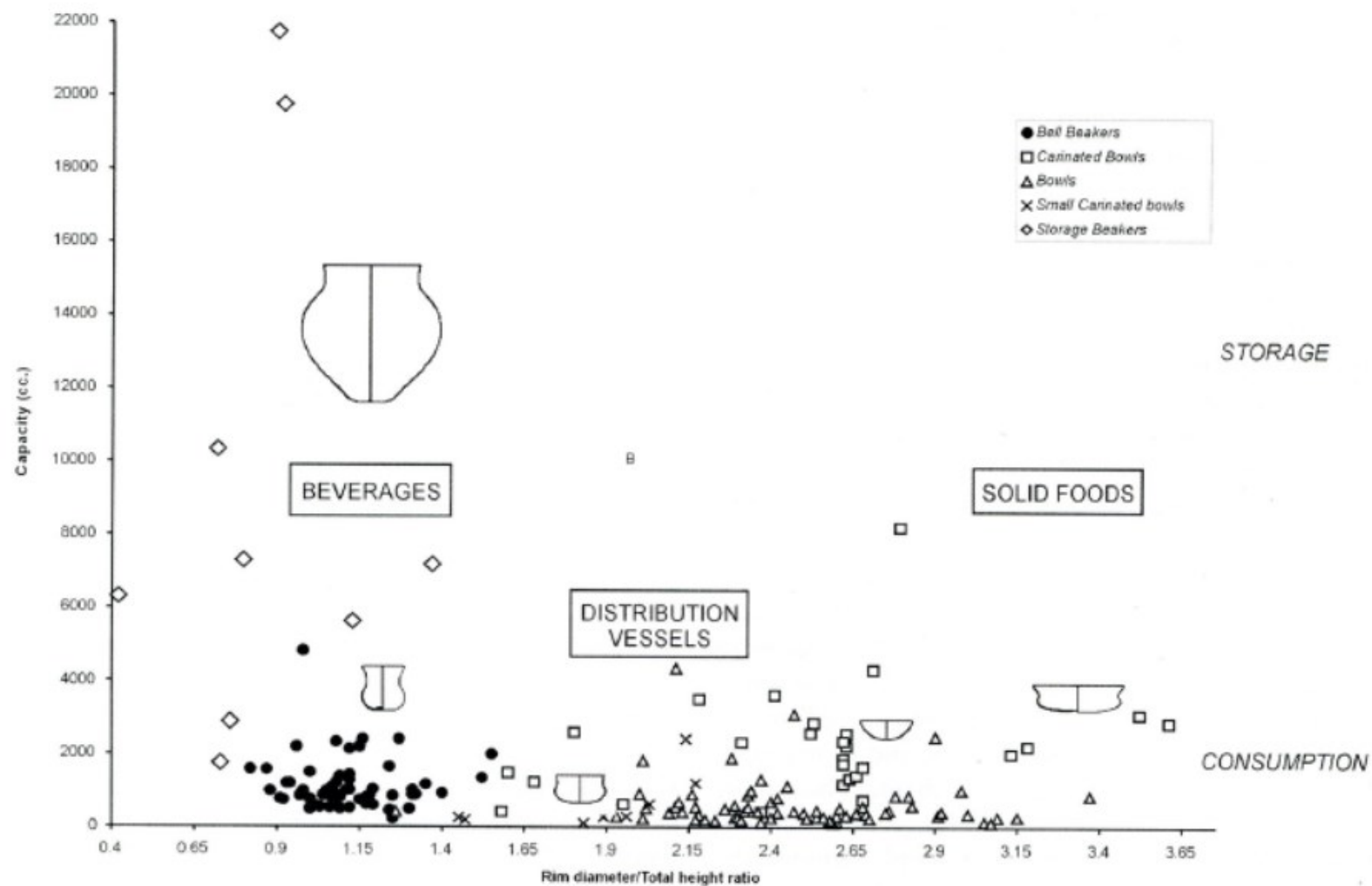


Fig. 9.

Inner Iberia *Meseta* Bell Beaker complete vessels graphic, showing proportion between rim diameter/total height ratio and capacity (cc), with their possible functions in drinking rituals (after Garrido 2000).

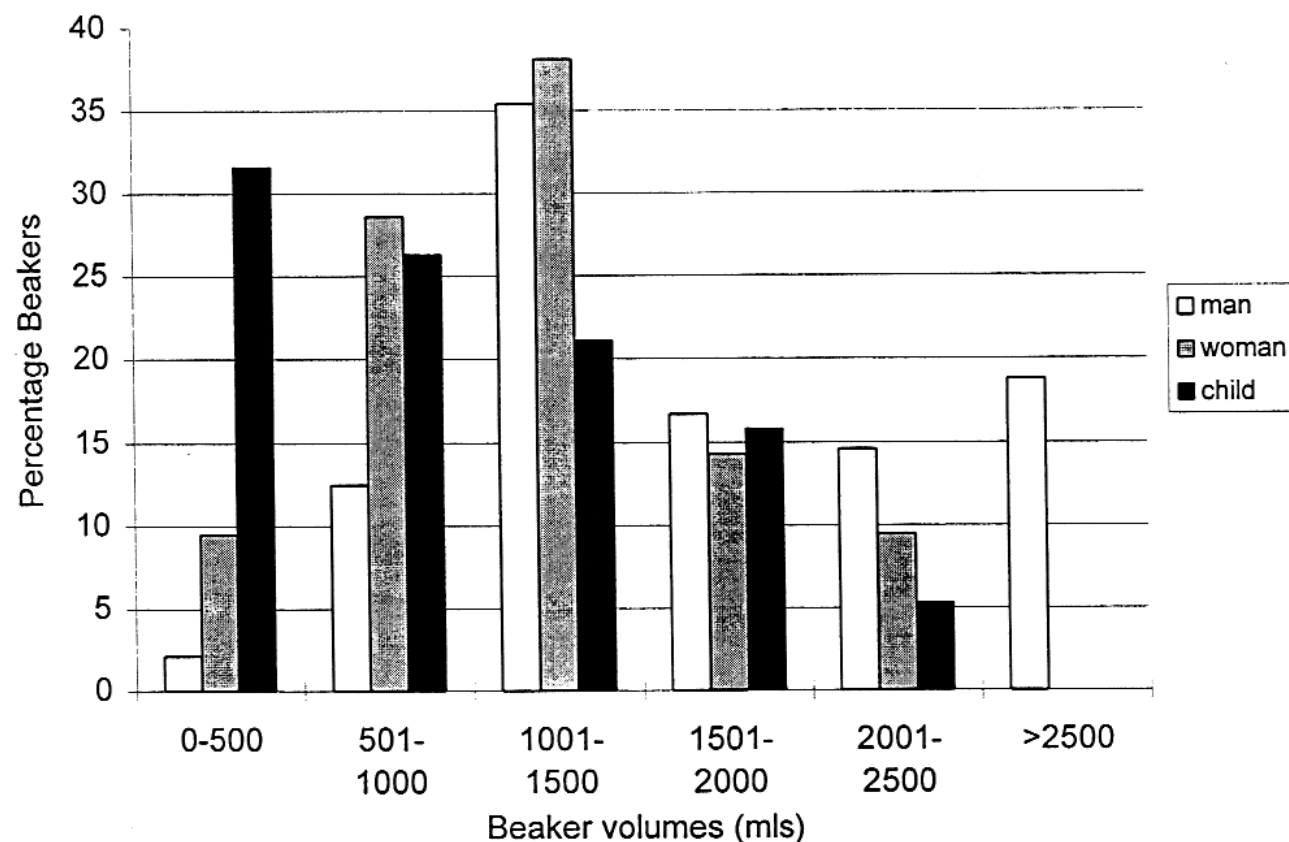


The Valladolid Team



Bell Beaker cups in Bohemia, Germany, Britain and Ireland

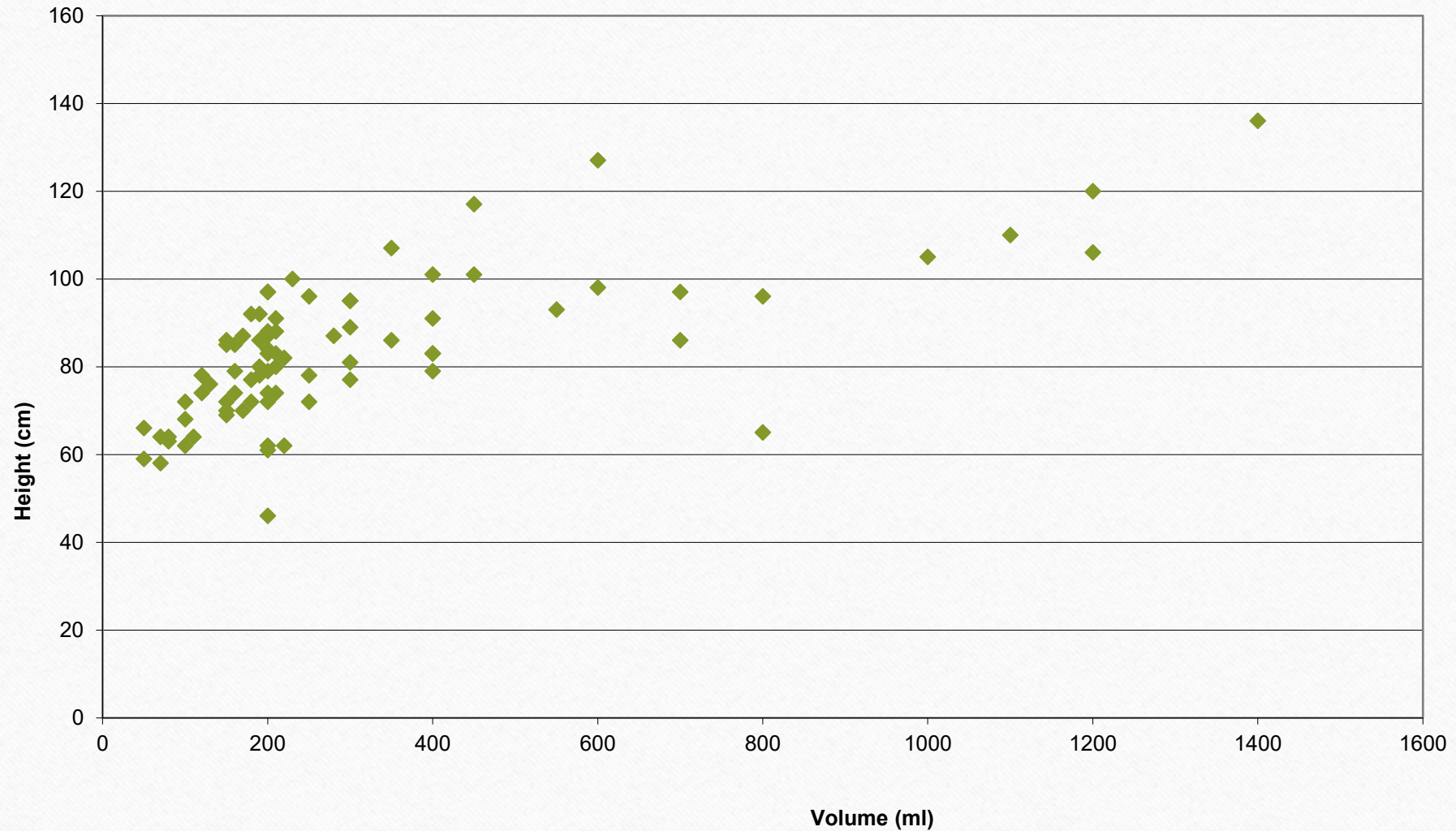
Volume of 80 cups and jugs from Prague were measured. Most cases are of volume up to 300 ml. with majority ranging between 100 and 250 ml. Metric analysis of 122 one handled cups and jugs in north-west Bohemia (Turek 1995) produced an evidence of division of cups into three volume groups (100–200 ml., 300 ml. and 600–800 ml.).



Such distribution may reflect function of the vessel, as well as, type of the beverage it contained (cf. German Beakers - Sangmeister 1989: *Und noch einmal Glockenbecher*). The volume of pots might have also reflected the gender and social category.

Brodie & Case Humprey Case (1995) and Neil Brodie (1998) demonstrated how volumes of British and Irish beakers differ in context of male (largest volume), female (medium volume) and child burials (smaller volume). The gender specifics may, however, be found not only in volumes of vessels, but also in their forms and decoration.

Bell Beaker pottery volumetrics - Prague cups



IRON AGE Drinking symbolism

The Hallstatt Period aristocratic tombs

The Iron Age European Society was deeply stratified and in close relationship with the Mediterranean Civilization (Greek, Etruscan, Roman). One of the keystones of Iron Age social differentiation was feasting and drinking ceremonies. Such ceremonies were practised in the living community, but they were also performed as a presentation to the ancestors. So, the elite members of Hallstatt society were buried with rich feast consisting of rich meals and excessive amounts of alcoholic beverages (beer, mead, wine?) and drinking vessels to host the souls of ancestors, when entering the underworld. The richest 'kings' from Vix or Hochdorf were buried with exceptionally large bronze containers that emphasize the symbolism of collective funerary feasting.

The grave of the *Lady of Vix*, (Burgundy, France) dating to ca 500 BC, had never been disturbed and thus contained remarkably rich grave offerings, these included a great deal of jewellery and the "*Vix krater*", the largest known metal vessel from Western classical antiquity, being 1.63 m in height.



The Hochdorf Chieftain's Grave

Burial chamber under massive barrow was excavated in 1978/79 near Hochdorf an der Enz (municipality of Eberdingen) in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, dating from 530 BC in the Hallstatt culture period.

At the foot of the couch was a large cauldron decorated with three lions around the brim. This cauldron was originally filled with about 400 liters of summer mead. The east side of the tomb contained an iron-plated wooden four-wheeled wagon holding a set of bronze dishes—along with the drinking horns found on the walls enough to serve nine people.



Drinking in the New World



First Thanksgiving 1559-1619

Aboriginal drinking habits



Social concept of drinking

Since the beginning of agriculture in Europe and Near East the consumption of alcoholic beverages became an important phenomenon in human culture. The ancient Europeans became used to alcohol drinking on both physical and social level. Since then consumption of alcohol became an important social activity structuring social life of farming communities, maintaining social interaction and emphasizing the collective identity of early European farmers.



Thank you
for your attention!

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