

'Temples' in the Neolithic and Copper Age in Southeast Europe? *

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ABSTRACT – Several buildings dated to the Neolithic period and Copper Age in Southeast Europe have been designated as 'temple', 'sanctuary', 'cultic structure' or 'place of cult' in scholarly works. The present contribution discusses the problems of identifying religious architecture; it elucidates some of these archaeological records and evaluates arguments with which the designation 'temple' or 'cultic structure' is justified. Thereby, the author concludes that no structure has been found among the houses excavated in Southeast Europe that can be classified as a 'sanctuary'. Instead, there are many indications that ritual activities took place in every dwelling and that these were specially decorated for such occasions. The author also considers so-called 'special buildings' of the Neolithic period in the Near East and discusses their absence in Southeast Europe.

IZVLEČEK – Številne neolitske in bakrenodobne zgradbe v Jugovzhodni Evropi so v strokovnih delih opredeljene kot 'templji', 'svetišča', 'kultne zgradbe' ali 'kultni prostori'. V prispevku razpravljamo o problemih prepoznavanja verske arhitekture; pojasnujemo nekatere od tovrstnih arheoloških zapisov in ovrednotimo utemeljitve, ki upravičujejo opredelitve, kot so 'tempelj' ali 'kultna zgradba'. Ugotovili smo, da med izkopanimi zgradbami iz Jugovzhodne Evrope ni nobenega objekta, v katerem bi lahko prepoznali 'svetišče'. Nasprotno, obstajajo številni znaki, da so ritualne aktivnosti potekale v vsakdanjih bivališčih, in da so bila le-ta posebej okrašena za ta namen. Obravnavamo tudi t. i. 'posebne zgradbe' iz obdobja neolitika na Bližnjem Vzhodu in razpravljamo o njihovi odsotnosti v Jugovzhodni Evropi.

KEY WORDS – Neolithic; Chalcolithic; religion; cult buildings; sanctuary; Anatolia; Southeastern Europe

Introduction

In the beginnings of scientific studies on prehistory, first material (stone) and later technology (production of stone artefacts, pottery production) were propounded as defining criteria for the Neolithic period. Vere Gordon Childe's works drew socio-economic criteria into the centre of interest, describing the Neolithic as an epoch of food production and a sedentary way of life, criteria that are still definitive today. Alongside material and economic criteria,

sociological aspects have also been regarded as useful in dividing prehistory and thereby defining the Neolithic period (*Morgan 1878*). In the past decades, ideological criteria have appeared increasingly, that is, more consideration has been given to spiritual culture and deliberations made about religion and cultic practices in prehistoric archaeology (e.g., *Biehl et al. 2001; Bradley 2005; Hansen 2003; Insoll 2004; Renfrew, Zubrow 1994; Rowan 2012*).

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One example of this change in paradigm is illustrated by the interpretation of Bronze Age hoards: well into the 1970s and 1980s, they were conventionally viewed as depositions buried by bronze smiths or traders, or as intentionally hidden goods, implying uncertain, economically difficult or contentious times. In recent years, however, this category of finds has been predominantly interpreted as votive offerings or dedications: the formerly ‘mundane’ interpretation has given way to a religious one.

Another example is the significance of cult and religion in the emergence of the Neolithic in the Near East (*Cauvin 1994; Gebel et al. 2002*) and the role of ideology in the dissemination of the Neolithic way of life (*Lüning 2007*).

Initially, nothing can be said against the assumption that traces of religious activities in the archaeological record are just as frequent as their place in the daily life of people at that time. The difficulty, however, lies in recognising these traces. Archaeological finds and contexts are not self-explanatory; their meaning and interpretation are based on conclusive analogies. Thus, finding evidence for religious practices in non-literate civilisations is a difficult task.

Are Neolithic clay figurines cultic figures, representations of ancestors, or children’s toys? Were Neolithic ditched enclosures fortified complexes or cult sites? These inquiries go beyond our cultural comprehension and background. We distinguish between the religious and the mundane, which is a concept that cannot be applied to prehistory. In prehistoric times, religious practices were probably not phenomena that can be viewed as detached from other practices; rather, they were components of all practices (*Brück 1999*). Therefore, according to our understanding, mundane activities could also have been motivated by religion. Prehistoric stone and copper axes could have served as weapons or tools; but as symbols of power they also fulfilled a social or even religious function.

Groups of supposed ‘ritual’ Neolithic objects have always been of interest, as can be seen in the multitude of publications (*e.g., Hansen 2007; Becker 2011; Nikolov 2007; Schwarzberg 2005; 2011*). The designations customarily used for some of these find categories – ‘idol’, ‘cult vessel’, ‘cult table’ – emerged without knowledge of their functions, and are a sign of the common practice of assigning unusual or rationally inexplicable objects to the religious sphere.

Due to the aforementioned problem of substantiation, it is also difficult to designate buildings as ‘religious architecture’. Ultimately, remains can be approached only through thorough analysis. This applies to objects utilised in supposed ritual activities just as much as structures, whether they are pits or dwellings. Here, the archaeological record is of special significance. A precise analysis of the finds and find contexts with regard to their surroundings as well as their relation to one another is the basic prerequisite for approaching this issue.

The development of a category of criteria for a ‘cult building’, with the aim of establishing the physical characteristics of corresponding cult practices has, in Mycenaean Greece for example, a longstanding tradition. Robin Hägg (*1968*) followed this aim by viewing material remains in order to identify cult practices and thereby also cult sites. For him, the essential classificatory criteria seemed to be specific devices, such as altars, ‘offertory stones’ or benches upon which liquids or other forms of offerings without fire were placed and which could also be used for incense offerings. Further criteria included, for example, the interior furnishing of structures with wall paintings, as well as the presence of objects of cultic character, such as figurines or anthropomorphic vessels. Since then, Hägg’s catalogue of criteria has had further additions and nuances (summarised in *Albers 1994*), but its basic features are still valid. Needless to say, the criteria that pertain to Mycenaean Greece cannot be transferred to the Neolithic or Copper Age in Southeast Europe, several thousands of years earlier. General formulations about signs of the existence of religious activities as found in archaeological remains are still vague (*Renfrew, Bahn 1991.359–360; Renfrew 1994.51–52*).

A further possible approach to religious architecture in prehistory is the (presupposed) handing down of religious practices, which allows conclusions to be drawn from existing knowledge about the distant past. Examples for this are provided, for instance, by the stratigraphies of temples in Mesopotamia: starting with temple architecture known from the Uruk period, the function of the underlying sequence of buildings can be determined, so that the cult architecture in many sites can be traced back well into the 6th millennium BC (*e.g., the building sequence beneath the Ur-Nammu ziggurat in Eridu: Safar et al. 1981.86–114*). This argument is based on an almost continuous sequence of occupation and an assumed constancy in location of the corresponding structures. With the argument of continuity, Iron Age san-

ctuaries sited on those of the Late Bronze Age in Greece could be identified (*van Leuven 1978*). By contrast, examples of discontinuity in the development of cult architecture are especially notable in the post-Mycenaean, Protogeometric and Geometric periods between the 11th and 8th centuries BC. There is little evidence of cult architecture, which in addition would differ markedly from that of Mycenaean times (*Mazarakis Ainian 1997*). During these periods, religious activities were probably performed once again inside individual households. There is hardly any distinction between cult buildings and the houses of the social elite. The attempt in the Aegean sphere to discern structures that overlap in time and in this way to link them firmly with the Neolithic cult buildings did not produce any reliable results. Thus, the derivation of Neolithic cult architecture in view of later forms is unsuccessful due to the enormous time span. For the same reason, the use of the catalogue of criteria pertaining to the Bronze and Iron Age is limited when discussing Neolithic cult objects and architecture (*Rutkowski 1986*).

Finally, it cannot be assumed *a priori* that the superimposed, religious structure of the Bronze or Iron Age resembled that of the Stone Age.

The terms and their use

The term 'temple' derives from the Latin word *templum*, a ritually specified area. In colloquial speech, it is understood as a non-Christian cult building. Ritual acts in temples were carried out by cult personnel (priests, priestesses), who in addition made use of sacred objects, such as artefacts for offering. In Mesopotamia, a temple was a building sheltering a deity represented by a depiction. The temple was considered the 'house' or 'residence' of the deity (*Sallaberger 2013.519*). Therefore, ancient oriental temples display a similarity with coeval domestic architecture. An important point here is the concept of

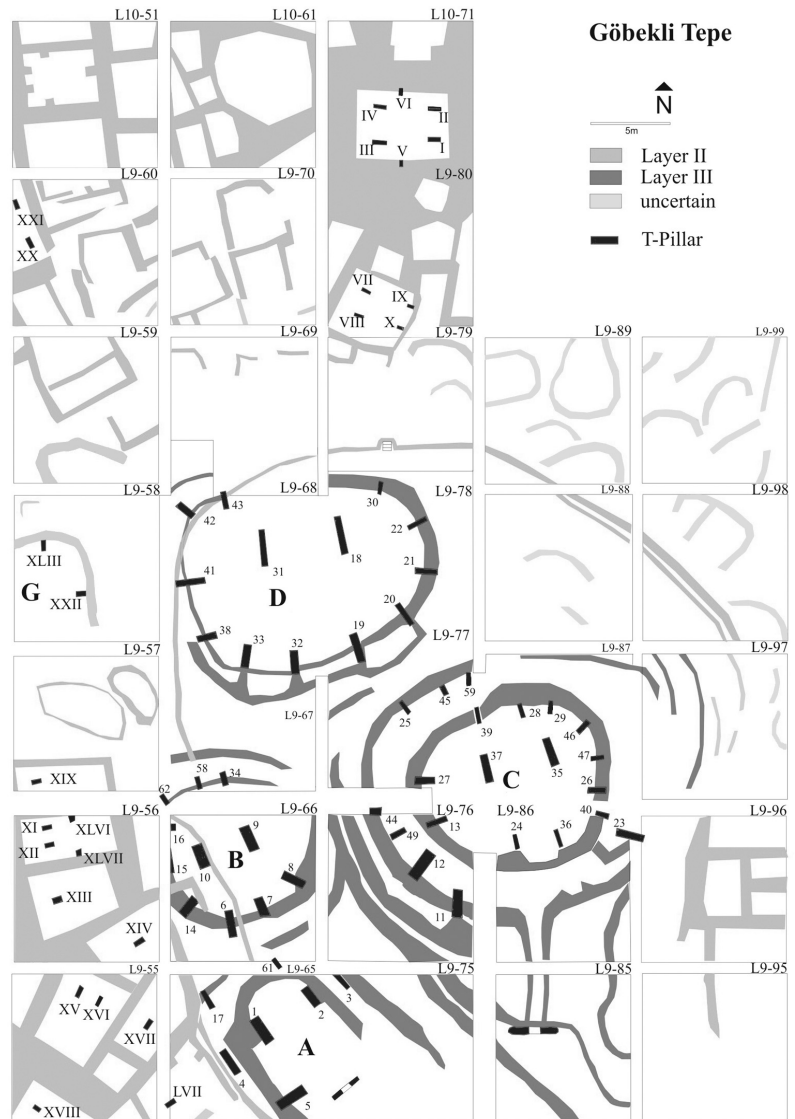


Fig. 1. Göbekli Tepe: Schematic plan of enclosures A–D (after Schmidt 2011.Fig. 2).

the existence of anthropomorphic gods. Oriental temples are characterised by, for example, altars, cult pedestals and also foundation gifts, building inscriptions, and votive inscriptions, as well as objects normally not present in domestic dwellings (summarised in *Miglus 2013.530–531*). The basic features of Mesopotamian sacred architecture were compiled and described by Ernst Heinrich (1982). With the indistinct designation 'cult house' (ger. Kulthaus) Heinrich documents buildings (*Heinrich 1983.319*) that possess certain peculiarities of temples, as well as dwellings whose arrangement served sacred purposes to a great extent. Heinrich himself writes that the term for cult house remains dubious and is not limited to any types.

Compared to the terminology applied in classifications such as 'vessel', 'building' or 'axe', the use of

terms such as ‘cult vessel’, ‘cult building’ and ‘ceremonial’ or ‘ritual axe’ necessitates an interpretation on the basis of further evidence. However, because the religious superstructure of corresponding activities and the artefacts utilised or residual contexts are unknown, most of the results of these interpretations are ambiguous. The basic prerequisite for using terms such as ‘cult building’ or ‘cult axe’ should be that the ‘cult object’ should have been repeatedly used for this purpose and that the ‘cult building’ should have mainly (if, indeed, not exclusively) served religious purposes. Buildings of the Neolithic period in the Near East which, in view of their size, ground plan, construction and interior furnishing, clearly differ from dwellings, are designated ‘special buildings’. This term allows an impartial approach to the corresponding architecture, regardless of its actual function.

Special buildings of the Neolithic Near East

Excavations in recent decades have revealed a very heterogeneous picture for the end of the 10th to 8th millennia BC in the area where the Neolithic emerged: the ‘hilly flanks’ of the Fertile Crescent, particularly in the so-called ‘Golden Triangle’ (Aurenche 2007).

As early as the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA, c. 9600–8500 BC), several ‘special buildings’ with round or oval ground plans were already present, for example, in Göbekli Tepe near Şanlıurfa (Schmidt 2006; 2007; 2011) and Jerf el Ahmar in Northern Syria (Stordeur et al. 2000) (Figs 1–2). Comparable complexes with somewhat smaller dimensions were also present at the site of Gusir (Karul 2011). Departing from this nomenclature, Klaus Schmidt (2006) uses the term ‘temple’ for the complexes in Göbekli Tepe (cf. critical commentaries by Banning 2011; Bernbeck 2013).

The circular structures in Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt 2011) measure as much as 15m in diameter. Characteristic installations include benches located at the walls, and T-shaped pillars reaching up to 5m in

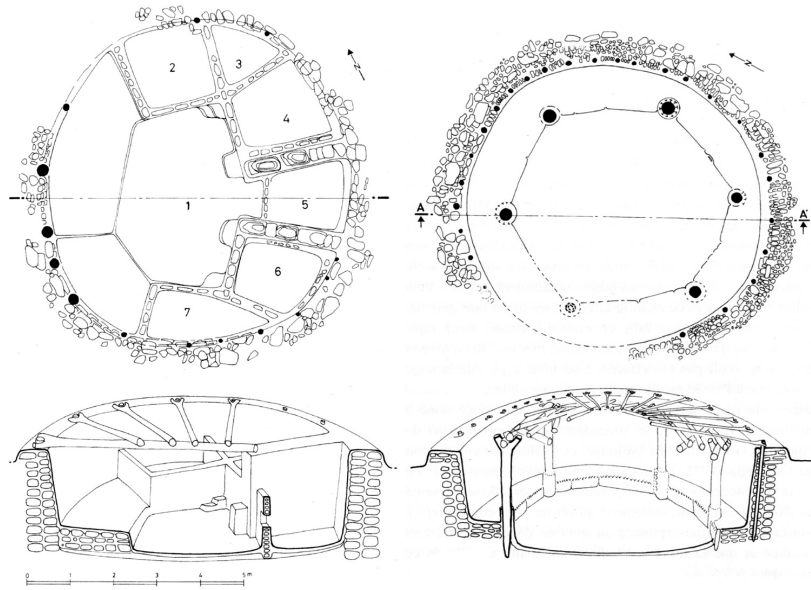


Fig. 2. Jerf el Ahmar: special building EA 30 and EA 53, plan and reconstruction (after Stordeur et al. 2000.Figs. 5 and 9).

height and grouped in concentric rows around a central pair of pillars. The surface of the pillars is decorated in flat relief displaying animals or abstract symbols. Stylised arms and hands render some pillars as anthropomorphic beings. Totem-like, round stone images complete the imagery. Dwellings at sites like Nemrik (Kozłowski 2002) and Quemez Dere (Watkins 1990) display similar features, with two rectangular pillars, erected in pisé technique and plastered, standing in the centre of the building.

In the course of development, at the latest as of the mid Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB, c. 8500–7300 BC), the ground plans of buildings became rectangular, a change that is also seen in domestic buildings. Corresponding to this development are later buildings in Göbekli Tepe (e.g., the ‘lion pillar building’; Schmidt 2007.84), the so-called ‘cult building’ in Nevalı Çori (Hauptmann 1993) and several special buildings in Çayönü (Schirmer 1983; Özdoğan 1999; Erim-Özdoğan 2011). In the PPNB, three special buildings are known in Çayönü alone: the ‘terrazzo building’, the ‘skull building’ and the ‘flagstone building’. They differ distinctly from the domestic storage buildings (Sicker-Akman 2007; Biçakçı 2001) with regard to their size, ground plans, monumentality, construction and technology (i.e. terrazzo floor) as well as inventory. They were evidently not utilised for storage, or as dwellings or working places. Wulf Schirmer (1983) already presumed a ritualistic or representative function of these buildings. The walls of the oldest phase of the ‘skull building’ in Çayönü have an oval to circular course and, thus relate to older building forms of the PPNA. Consider-

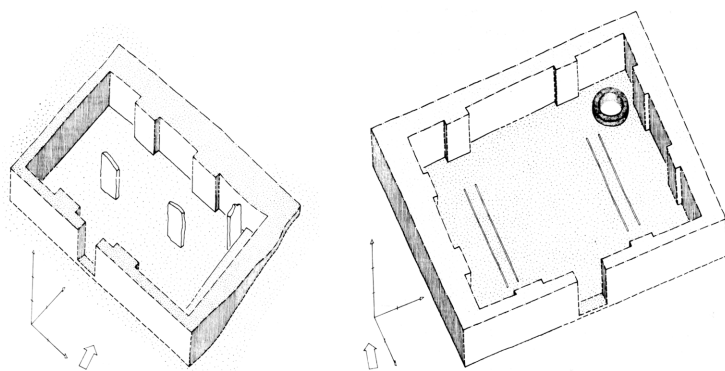


Fig. 3. Çayönü: isometric reconstruction of the 'flagstone building' (left) and the 'terrazzo building' (right) (after Schirmer 1990, Figs. 11 and 13).

ing the skulls and bones of more than 450 individuals that were brought there over a longer time span, the 'skull building' was presumably a site for the preparation and repository of the dead. The function of the 'terrazzo' and the 'flagstone building' has still not been clarified. Two stone stelae stand in the centre of the 'flagstone building' in Çayönü. In Nevalı Çori, also in the PPNB, is a corresponding building that differs from the other buildings in the settlement in having an almost square ground plan (Hauptmann 1993; 1999). Two monumental T-shaped pillars stand in its centre, while smaller T-shaped pillars are aligned along the interior wall (Figs. 3-4).

A tradition of such 'special buildings' can be traced back to the 10th millennium BC. Hence, in the area of the origins of the Neolithic in Upper Mesopotamia, special buildings had been in existence since the beginning of the PPN, buildings that differed in almost all respects from domestic architecture and which in no case were constructed as dwellings or places of work. Namely, until now, no domestic objects or hearths have been found in these peculiar structures. Instead, their special furnishings include sculpture, reliefs or painting.

Recently Edward B. Banning (2011) concluded that complexes A-F in Göbekli Tepe were not special buildings, arguing that the site consists almost exclusively of such structures. However, Banning did not take into consideration that 'special buildings', whose appearance resemble those in Göbekli Tepe, have been found alongside domestic architecture at several other sites. The 'skull building' in Çayönü surely was not used for domestic purposes, and the 'flagstone building' in Çayönü and the so-called 'cult building' in Nevalı Çori display features that differ distinctly from those of domestic architecture and, thus, as far as architecture is concerned, they stand

in the tradition of the complexes in Göbekli Tepe (Figs. 5-6).

Many of the 'special buildings' were rebuilt several times, a feature that points to their long-term use. Various clues, such as the superimposition of one building upon another, the undamaged ground plan, the blocked doors and the addition of mud bricks, as well as the remains of certain, indicative objects in the buildings, allow the assumption of an 'interment' of the building itself (Özdoğan, Özdoğan 1998). In the end,

the complexes at Göbekli Tepe were filled up (Schmidt 2006). Furthermore, no later structures were erected on these sites quite deliberately, which is probably the main reason for their good state of preservation. Viewed all together, building these complexes involved an enormous expenditure of labour. Estimates of this vary greatly: Banning (2011: 633) considers that pillars were created and erected by a few tens of individuals, whereas Schmidt (2006) believes larger groups were involved, who were needed to produce and transport the T-pillars. Whether or not the building activities were controlled by an 'elite', this supposition has not yet been verified by the building process itself (Kurapkat 2009). Through the collaborative erection of 'special buildings' - without doubt a basic characteristic of the process - their dimensions and interior equipment could have been achieved. After the end of the PPN, no continued construction of special buildings is recognisable. Evidently, the rituals of foragers and hunters lost significance with the establishment of Neolithic life, and thus their symbols and practices gradually disappeared.

Central Anatolia

The Neolithic in central Anatolian Çatal Höyük presents a completely different image as far as settlement type, architectural traditions, artefact assemblages etc. are concerned (Mellaart 1967; Hodder 2006; 2012). Compared to Upper Mesopotamia, the differences are found in both the material culture as well as in cult practices (Hauptmann 2002). Contrary to the many buildings designated 'shrine' or 'sanctuary' by the first excavator, James Mellaart (1967), no special buildings like those found in Upper Mesopotamia can be distinguished in Çatal Höyük (Hodder 2005; 2006). This negative context could of course be due to the choice of the excavation area,

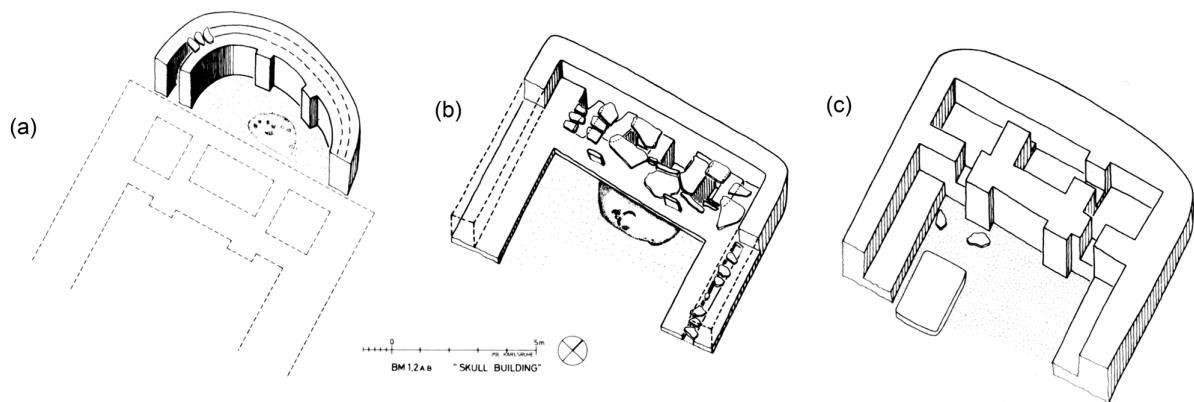


Fig. 4. Çayönü: isometric reconstruction of the 'skull building' with earlier (a) and later (b, c) phases (after Schirmer 1990.Fig. 12).

in which no special buildings were located, or for chronological reasons, since the Çatal Höyük site dates mainly to the 7th millennium BC (Fig. 7).

Evidence that such special structures were built in Central Anatolia was supplied by building 'T' in Aşıklı Höyük, a quadrangular structure (Esin, Harmanakaya 1999; Özbaşaran 2012). In view of the building's furnishings, the floor – a mixture of the local native tuff with water and an overlying layer of red clay – is reminiscent of the 'terrazzo building' in Çayönü and the 'cult building' in Nevalı Çori. But this is the only thing that can be considered to be of a symbolic nature (Özbaşaran 2012.140), whereas a canal within building 'T' resembles features known from the site at Musular, some 350m west of Aşıklı (Özbaşaran et al. 2012.160). Building 'A' at Musular and building 'T' from Aşıklı seem to be related to economic activities, *i.e.* the butchering of game animals.

The buildings in Çatal Höyük which Mellaart designated as 'shrines', contain wall paintings, bucrania and other decorative plastic figures, and also functioned as dwellings or work areas (Hodder 2006; 2012; Hodder, Cessford 2004). The individual structures appear as independent economic units, with spaces for preparing food, for storage and for producing artefacts such as stone tools, and even for storing raw materials. Furthermore, the dimensions of mud bricks used for the buildings differ from house to house, which leads to the conclusion that every house had its own moulds for making mud bricks and that bricks were produced individually for each building project; so self-reliance as compared to other households is also illustrated by the use of mud bricks.

Based on various factors, Ian Hodder interprets the wall paintings, relief decoration and figurines in the

rooms as short-term ornamentation of the rooms undertaken on the occasion of specific rituals that were of importance to the household. Namely, numerous superimposed layers of painting and plaster were detected in some buildings, which show that the interior walls were frequently plastered anew, and that the wall paintings were visible for only a relatively short time of a few weeks or months before being painted over (Hodder 2006). These activities could have related to initiation rites for young men, in which a hunt was undertaken and then portrayed in images. 'Dangerous parts' of the animals, for example, the bull's skull, were attached for a short time to the wall in commemoration. One important indication that these hunts were primarily of ritual or social significance is the fact that the wild animals depicted were not essential to the community's subsistence, or played only a secondary role as a source of food. Thus far, there is no evidence in Çatal Höyük for the ritual cremation of buildings, a topic often debated in research (Twiss et al. 2008).

Possible differences or even features for categorising construction forms as in the Upper Mesopotamian PPN cannot be determined in Central Anatolia. An institutionalised cult that was practised in a distinctive building, as evidenced by special buildings in Upper Mesopotamia, is not present in Anatolia.

'Cult buildings' and 'temples' in Southeast Europe

Considering criteria and arguments presented to justify the designations 'temple', 'cult building' or 'sanctuary' for the sites of Căscioarele (Dumitreşcu 1970), Kormadin (Jovanović 1991), Madžari (Sanev 1988), Mramor (Jovčevska 1993), Nea Nikomedeia (Rutkowski 1986), Parța (Lazarovici et al. 2001), Vésztő-Mágor (Hegedűs, Makkay 1990), Vrbjanska

Čuka (*Kitanovski et al. 1990*), Zelenikovo (*Garašanin, Bilbija 1988*), Zorlenču Mare (*Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006*) and Zuniver (*Jovčevska 2006*), several common aspects become evident. The arguments proffered are: the dimensions of the feature, its central position within the settlement, wall decorations, interior furnishings and the inventory, in association with burials or the use of fire during the 'burial' of the building. At the Dolnoslav site near Plovdiv (*Radunčeva 1991; 2003*) almost every dwelling has been described and classified as a sanctuary.

The type and manner of argumentation occasionally eludes scientific discourse entirely: Ljubinka Babović (*2006.3*), for example, writes that all the buildings at Lepenski Vir should be designated as sanctuaries, solely because stone was utilised as building material, a durable material that would also be a symbol for eternity.

In a critical valuation of buildings from the Southeast European Neolithic and Chalcolithic designated as sanctuaries, the human component – the striving towards discovering and presenting something extraordinary – must not be neglected. Finally, it is noteworthy that in some areas, 'sanctuaries' appear with particular frequency (*e.g.*, in Macedonia: Madžari, Mramor, Vrbjanska Čuka, Zelenikovo, Zuniver), or they are always discovered by certain scholars or

their students; whereas in other areas, by contrast, 'sanctuaries' seem to be absent. Such a bias stands in the way of a neutral analysis of find contexts.

In addition, it has to be pointed out that almost every author dealing with the assumed 'sanctuaries' or 'cult buildings' at the southeast European sites mentioned above quote Mellaart's publication on Çatal Höyük (*Mellaart 1967*). Mellaart's ideas about 'shrines' in Çatal Höyük exerted a wide influence. Meanwhile, the aforementioned re-evaluation of Mellaart's 'shrines' puts all these considerations into question.

Position in settlements

Borislav Jovanović (*1991*) argues that sanctuaries were consistently erected in the centre of settlements. This would then explain why no sanctuaries have been found hitherto in settlements like Vinča or Gomolava, despite large-scale excavation areas there: namely, the excavated surfaces lay outside the settlement's centre. According to the excavators, the sanctuaries at Parța were located in the centre of the settlement (*Lazarovici et al. 2001.204*). Nicolae Ursulescu (*2001*) also positions sanctuaries in the centre of the settlement. Similar statements have been made about the site of Gălățui Movila Berzei (*Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006.533*) and Cucuteni settlements (*Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2007.228; 2008*).

Thus, not all the authors define what and where the centre of a settlement actually was. Is it the centre of the built area of the settlement, the most densely constructed area, or the highest point of the built area, as in tell settlements?

Concluding the centre of a settlement at the place of the supposed sanctuary's location is circular reasoning that should be avoided. As has already been demonstrated, many special buildings of the PPNB stood on the periphery of settlements, that is, at a distance from dwellings and work areas.

Dimensions of buildings

That a dwelling has a larger ground plan does not necessarily mean it has a different function; its greater dimensions could have had other reasons, such as more occupants. The ascription of two buildings in Parța

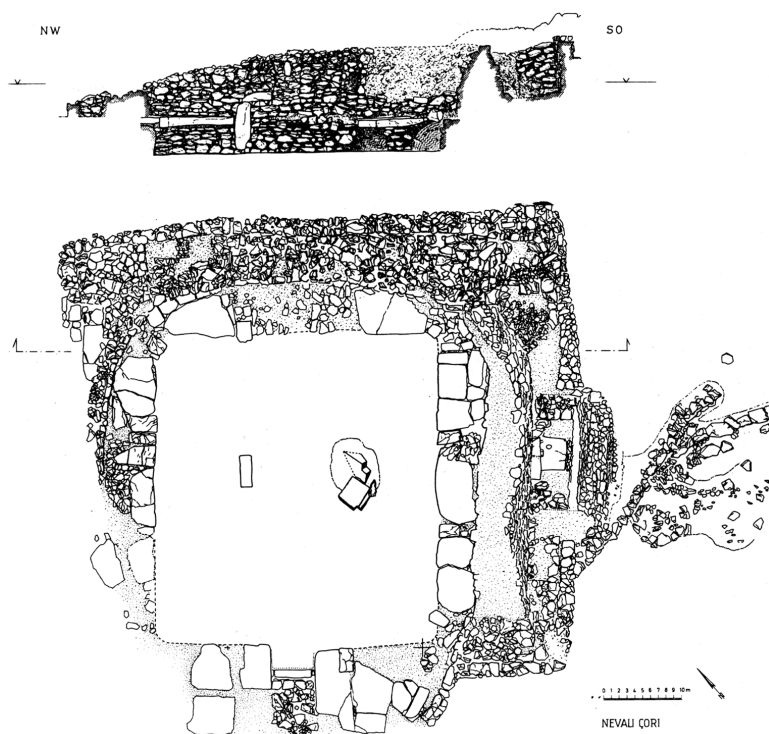


Fig. 5. Nevalı Çori: 'cult building', phase III (after Hauptmann 1993.49, Fig. 9).

as sanctuaries is supposedly proven by their dimensions ('Sanctuary 1': 12.6 x 7m; 'Sanctuary 2': 11.6 x 6m) and architecture (*Lazarovici 1989.149; Lazarovici et al. 2001.204*). However, other buildings in Parța are identical in construction (*Lazarovici et al. 2001; Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006.217*). A similar argument was made for the 'shrine' in Nea Nikomedia (*Rutkowski 1986.155–157*). With dimensions of 11.8 x 13.6m, this structure was relatively larger than the surrounding buildings ('structure 1+2'; *Pyke 1996.45, Tab. 3.1*); it stood out among the other houses mainly because of its fully revealed ground plan. However, the context of the ground plans of 'structure 1+2' (*Pyke 1996.22*) was rather unclear. The construction and layout of the 12 x 12m dwelling at Vrbjanska Čuka (*Kitanovski et al. 1990*) still awaits publication.

Hence, if another, different purpose is assumed for the building, religious use would become merely one possibility among others. For instance, a building with a bigger surface area could also have served as an assembly hall or chief's house.

The classification of a building as a cult structure on the basis of its dimensions is hardly acceptable as a criterion. The supposed 'temple' in Madžari (*Sanev 1988.29*) does not differ in size from other structures; the same applies to house 4 designated as sanctuary in Zorlențu Mare (*Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006.155*). In Kormadin, Jovanović (*1991.120*) confirms that there is no evidence for any special construction or a larger size of the 'sanctuary'.

Interior furnishings and inventory

In most cases, these buildings could not be distinguished from other houses in the settlement on the basis of their architecture. Their identification as a 'sanctuary' is based exclusively upon the finds (Fig. 8).

Various aspects of the interior furnishings or the inventory were interpreted by the excavators as indicative of cult practices inside the building:

- clay boxes with incised decoration have been interpreted as 'cult' or 'libation' tables (House 1 in Kormadin; 'Sanctuary 2' in Parța);
- the finds of several figurines (the 'shrine' in Nea Nikomedia). The Precucuteni 'sanctuaries' from Isaiia, Poduri and Sabatinovka (*Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006.561–566*). This kind of argument has been produced equally for the 'shrine' of Höyücek/SW-Turkey (*Duru, Umurtak 2005*);
- models of a house found within the building (e.g., in Căscioarele; Madžari; Vésztő-Mágor);

- the existence of bull-skulls and -horns (e.g., in Kormadin; Parța). In Parța, raised applications of a stylised human face and a bull skull as well as a sickle-shaped clay application around a hole in the wall led the excavator to assume that this building served as a temple (*Lazarovici 1998; Lazarovici et al. 2001.204–241*). The head of a large figurine is mentioned from Zorlențu Mare house 4 (*Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006.153*).

The examples listed above elucidate the problems of identifying cult buildings through the inventory. In this regard, the terminology employed is worth noting: pedestals are termed 'altars' or 'offering tables' (Parța), and hearths are reinterpreted as 'offering tables' (Madžari). The 'offering table' found in Zelenikovo was later changed into a 'hearth', when the 'sanctuary' was rebuilt into a dwelling. A quadrangular basin (2 x 2m) in 'cult building' in Vrbjanska Čuka (*Kitanovski et al. 1990*) has been declared an 'altar'.

'Cult objects' found upon a table or bench in a corner of the (cult)room in Nea Nikomedia are submitted as evidence of a sanctuary (*Rutkowski 1986*).

The decoration of the walls through painting or plastic applications, likewise a frequent criterion indicative of a 'cult building', is a general element of buildings in the Southeast European Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods (*Lichter 1993.48–49*). Çatal Höyük has clearly demonstrated that wall paintings or plastic applications are quite common features. One should keep in mind that the archaeological record rests mainly on the conditions of preservation and that wall paintings are documented at many sites in Europe (*Fries-Knobloch 2009*).

Burials, single human bones in buildings or graves which are associated with the erection or use of a building have also been proposed as evidence of a particular structure's cultic purpose. Yet, burials in settlements or within houses are a phenomenon attested in many prehistoric cultures and are not evidence of the special function of a building (cf. in general *Veit 1992*; for Southeast Europe cf. *Lichter 2001*; for Macedonia *Naumov 2007; 2013.81–86*).

The burnt building H2b-11 in the late Neolithic layers (c. 4900–4800 BC) at Uivar display several peculiarities which, compared to other buildings at the site, suggest that this structure had a special function (*Schier 2006; Drașovean, Schier 2010.176*). Aside from compartments separated by approx. 0.5m high

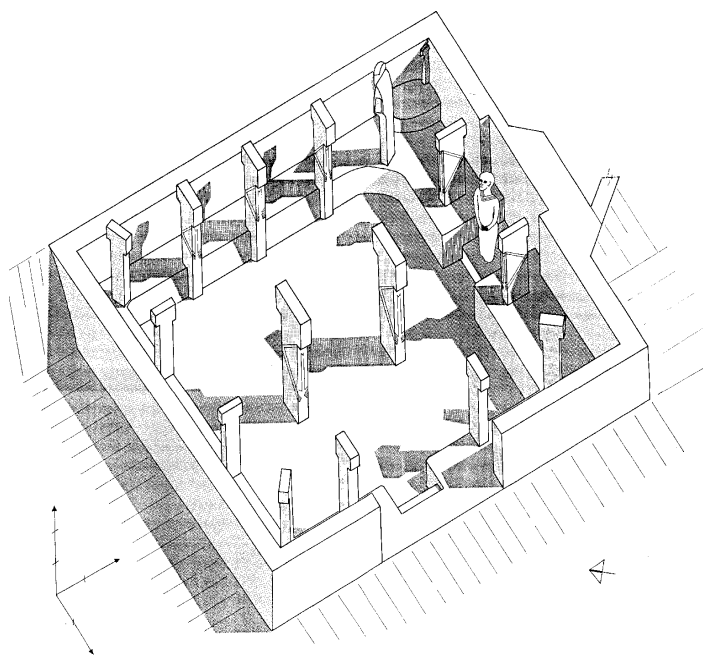


Fig. 6. Nevalı Çori: isometric reconstruction of the 'cult building' (Badisches Landesmuseum 2007.32).

mud walls on the eastern wall, there are several hearths/oven complexes that left little space for household activities. Peculiarities in the interior furnishings (a non-functional footed vessel, a tortoise shell, a bucranium made of clay) also distinguish this building from the others. The structure is further distinguished by a large empty space on the south side. A better evaluation of the find contexts must await the final publication on this building, which has been published hitherto only in one preliminary report. The excavator intentionally avoids addressing the building as a 'sanctuary'. As it is a two-storey structure, the confined space caused by the compartments and hearths (which might belong to different phases of use) need not be surprising, for other activities could have taken place in the upper storey.

These few examples suffice to demonstrate the difficulties at hand when argumentation is based on interior furnishings and inventory. In view of the 'cult objects' found inside them, structures have been interpreted as a 'temple' or 'cult building'. In reverse, some objects have been declared 'sacred' because they were discovered in 'cult buildings': a classic example of circular reasoning. Finally, the use of these objects in cult practices should first be investigated and attested for every culture before the question is pursued as to whether or not a building was actually a place for cult practises (Fig. 9).

Referring to some examples from the Carpathian Basin, Eszter Bánffy (2001) could show that so-called

cult objects displayed traces of use. These were not (passive) ornaments, but objects whose use lay outside food production or other aspects of daily life. It can be discerned from the countless fragments that these objects were produced in great numbers, used and then discarded. Although knowledge about Neolithic cult practices remains nonetheless relatively limited, one observation should be underscored: many of the 'cult objects' are attested in settlements, in houses, partition walls inside houses, but mostly in waste pits. This would indicate – according to Bánffy – that Neolithic cults were enacted in domestic surroundings and were not communal activities in a sanctuary (Bánffy 2001. 209–217). This context accords largely with the finds of clay figurines in Nevalı Çori (Hauptmann 1993; Morsch 2002), where almost all of the figurine frag-

ments were found near storage structures in the spaces between houses or in the houses themselves, but always in the context of discarded material. By contrast, clay figurines are absent in the area of the cult building in Nevalı Çori, with its large-sized stone sculpture and anthropomorphic T-pillars (Hauptmann, Schmidt 2007). From this observation, a different function and meaning can be inferred for figurines, on one hand, and for large sculpture on the other, at least in Nevalı Çori (Hansen 2001; 2007). Whereas the latter was limited to so-called special buildings, obviously erected for cultic purposes, clay figurines are found in domestic settings. Similarly, numerous figurines and fragments of figurines were found in buildings in Çatal Höyük, further confirming that rituals and cult were practised solely in the domestic sphere. Special buildings meant for religious practices have not been attested there thus far. Hence, the presence of figurines is not evidence of a special building; in fact, quite the opposite.

This also applies to figural vessels which appear in a domestic context (Schwarzberg 2011).

The situation is similar with regard to house models. Janos Makkay (1971) denoted some examples as models of sanctuaries, which he considered in turn were proof of the existence of these sacred structures. Makkay's line of reasoning is still followed (Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2008; 2010). But according to the archaeological record, this opinion can no longer be upheld (Trenner 2010). Goce Naumov (2013.86)

has suggested, that anthropomorphic house models should be seen as representative of individuals buried inside or near a house.

Grind stones, storage vessels, loom weights, sling stones and ovens found in supposed 'sanctuaries' in Southeast Europe document the fact that these can hardly be differentiated from other structures. Commentaries about cultic grinding or symbolic looms cannot be followed (*Lazarovici 1989.150–151; Lazarovici, Lazarovici 2006.540–541*). 'Cult tables', figurines and bucrania found in house 2 in Kormadin imply that not only practical and economic dealings (residing, food preparation, grain storage, production of implements and textiles *etc.*), but also religious acts were performed in the domestic sphere. Some other houses of the Vinča culture sustain this interpretation (*Chapman 1981.66; Stevanović, Tringham 1997.198*) and the site at Crkvine (*Crnobrnja, Simić and Janković 2009; Crnobrnja 2010*) demonstrates once more quite clearly, that figurines and bucrania form part of the standard inventory of Vinča culture houses. Naumov stated recently (*2013.78*) that the existence of sanctuaries cannot be confirmed for the settlements in Macedonia, since unequivocal traces of ritual activity are absent.

Burnt house remains

The severely burnt house remains often observed in tell settlements have been viewed by various authors as resulting from deliberate destruction (*Chapman 1999; Stevanović 1997; Stevanović, Tringham 1997; Tringham 2005*). According to their view, the construction, habitation and destruction of a house should be part of a constantly repeated process. Houses can catch fire for many reasons: aside from unfortunate accidents, the cause could be violent conflict or measures taken to destroy pests or fungi, among others. An interpretation that sees a deliberate symbolic act behind the burnt buildings of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic is not necessarily correct.

As evidence for this, experiments were evaluated (*e.g., Gheorghiu 2007; 2010*) in which a conflagration accidentally started in a Neolithic or Copper Age building and continued without any intensifying measures (*e.g., adding more combustible or flammable material, making holes in the walls or roof*). The fire did not reach high temperatures nor have the disastrous effects that have often been observed in find contexts. There is some doubt about the con-

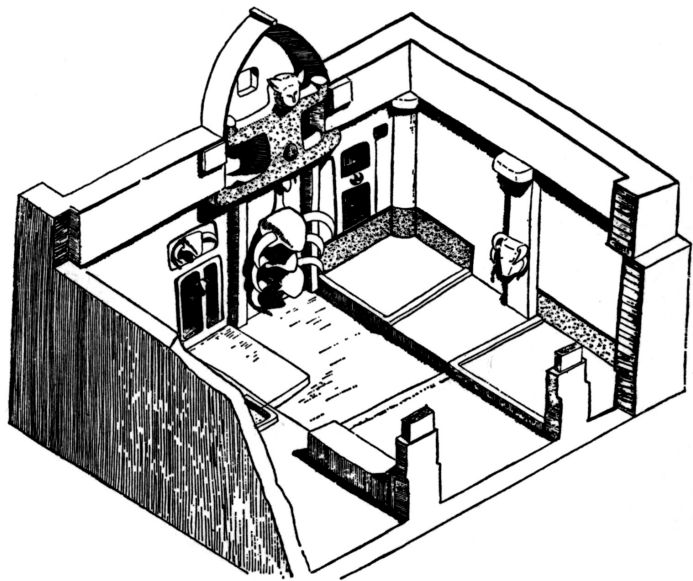


Fig. 7. Çatal Höyük: reconstruction of 'shrine' VIB 10 (after Mellaart 1967.150, Abb. 38).

clusions reached through these experiments. Namely, the flammable properties of experimentally erected buildings with a relatively short duration doubtlessly differed from buildings which fell to flames only after several years or even decades. A counter-example was the documented conflagration of an Iron Age building in Lejre, Denmark (*Rasmussen 2007*), where, after approximately one hour, temperatures were measured that exceeded 1200°C. As shown by the documentation, the conflagration progressed with no additional propellants and no fuel. Furthermore, the chaff present in the building material of many Chalcolithic houses in the Balkans has not been taken into account as fuel for the fire (*Hansen, Toderas 2010.101*).

For Okolište, it has to be considered that, in some cases after houses have been burnt a different spatial arrangement of dwellings has been recognised, but in other cases, house areas were abandoned. However, not every new spatial arrangement or abandonment can be linked to a preceding burning horizon, which strengthens the case against ritualistic razing at the end of their lifecycle (*Hofmann 2013.375*).

Furthermore, it has to be considered that identifying dwellings that are not burnt is much more difficult than identifying burnt dwellings. Therefore, dwellings that were not burnt are underrepresented in the archaeological record.

Only 5% of the buildings in Uivar were destroyed by fire, indicating that the supposed ritual of house

burning was a very selective practice at most (*Schier 2006.330*). Numerous burnt houses were found in all of the layers at the tell settlement of Polgár-Csőszhalom on the remains of which new houses had been constructed. In contrast, among the 79 buildings in the flat settlement, which did not differ in size or ground plan from those on the tell site, not a single burnt house was discovered (*Raczky, Anders 2010.149*). The examples mentioned clearly demonstrate that the concept of the 'burned house horizon' (*Stevanović 1997; Tringham 2005*) does not concur with the archaeological record.

With regard to the finds, the furnishings of buildings on the tell site at Polgár-Csőszhalom were only slightly better (grind stone with hematite, miniature vessel, figurine, fragment of Spondylus), a situation that could also have been due to conflagration. Burnt mud and wood architecture can remain in an excellent state of preservation and, thus, can provide special contextual conditions, such as conserved wall decorations or a preserved house inventory. A particular feature of the 'sanctuaries' in Parța, Madžari and Kormadin is their extraordinary preservation due to fire. Yet the attribution of a special function to these buildings does not seem justified.

Special buildings which stand out in appearance among the dwellings in Southeast Europe through their dimensions, furnishings or inventory alone and, therefore, would warrant the designation 'sanctuary', 'cult building' or 'temple', have not been observed. Instead, it has a lot to prove that within the dwellings, aside from their use as habitation and for economic purposes, cult activities were practised there as well.

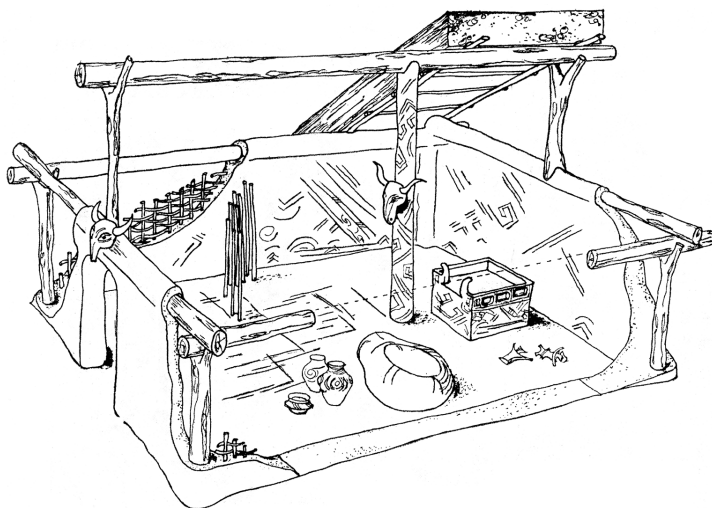


Fig. 8. Kormadin: reconstruction drawing of the 'cult building' (after Jovanović 1991.121, Fig. 1).

Some records from Central Europe can be explained in a similar way, such as the house wall decorated with painting and reliefs in Ludwigshafen-Seehalde (Southern Germany), dated to the 39th century BC (*Schlichtherle 2006*). With no preliminary sketching, the painting was executed in white lime in one course of the interior walls of a house dated to the 39th century BC; integrated into this were four to five pairs of breasts modelled in relief. The decorative repertoire consists of lines, dots and spaces filled with circles or semi-circular motifs, M-motifs, triangles and cross-hatching. A similar wall decoration is known, for instance, from the settlement site of Sipplingen-Osthafen. Corresponding reliefs of clay breasts are known at other sites dating from the second half of the 5th and first half of the 4th millennium BC in south-western Germany and Switzerland (*Schlichtherle 2010.273*). The brief application of the painting in Ludwigshafen-Seehalde contradicts any permanence and, therefore, should be seen instead as a sign of a temporally limited action. Preserved by a disastrous conflagration, the wall covering does not supply any arguments in favour of the building's exclusive use for religious practices.

A house of the Cortaillod culture (c. 3500 BC) discovered in Marin-Les-Piécettes (Lac de Neuchâtel, Switzerland) stood in the centre of the settlement on an earth platform approx. 1m high. The structure cannot be linked to any religious function, as suggested by the excavator (*Honegger 2007*).

Based on a few indications, Jens Lüning (2009) interprets the north-western part of the Linear Pottery Culture (LPC) houses of Central Europe (5500–4950 BC) as a space in which domestic ancestors were worshipped. The archaeological record of a house found in Nieder-Mörlen (Hessen) seems to reveal that the north-west part of the building opens onto a palisade circle (diameter 30m), which according to Lüning supposedly enclosed an earth mound in the LPC period; several thousand years later, this mound was allegedly still visible, a circumstance that led to the installation of a burial in the centre of the LPC mound during the Iron Age. This hitherto singular find context, as well as other contexts of LPC houses connected with concentric or rectangular rows of posts, were interpreted by Lüning as LPC cult structures. He further assumes – based on the rarity of such contexts – that the structure serv-

ed the entire settlement and even beyond. Finally, the cultic use of the complex in Nieder-Mörlen, whose contemporaneity with the long house is hard to confirm reliably, remains conjectural, like the structure's 'responsibility' for the entire settlement.

Conclusion and outlook

Buildings that were dedicated exclusively to religious practices and which differ from the other buildings through their ground plan, construction and furnishings have not been evidenced for the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods in Southeast Europe. Instead, there are many indications that religious ceremonies, among others, were performed in normal dwellings, which might have been decorated and arranged on certain occasions.

With the dissemination of the Neolithic in the 7th millennium BC, institutionalised cultic activities practiced in the Neolithic core area – and with them, special buildings constructed for this purpose – lost their significance. Therefore, no 'special buildings' are known yet outside the Neolithic core area; with the end of the PPN at the close of the 8th millennium BC and at the start of the 7th millennium BC, their traces even disappeared in the heartland. Evidently, the significance of clan structure for social unity had declined, and with it, the communal construction of special buildings and rituals practiced in them. In their place appeared small family units or families, for whom, as independent and separate economic units, other forms of solidarity were important. Theneforward, not only economic, but also religious activities were practiced at the level of individual households.

Considered further, consequently, the existence or absence of special buildings reflect the different social orders and social structures of the societies in-

side and outside the Neolithic core area: within the core area large units existed, presumably organised in clans, whereas in areas neolithised later (*i.e.* during the 7th millennium BC), there existed small families who were economically independent of one another.

In view of questions pertaining to the process of Neolithisation, the differences that were noted in cult practices between the origins of the Neolithic and further areas of its dissemination are of unquestionable importance. Namely, they contradict the notion of a massive immigration of Neolithic settlers from the original heartland, and can instead indicate the passing down of Neolithic traditions through exchange networks and cultural spheres. The 'rhythmic distribution model' (*Guilaine 2007*) is much more suited to these observations and can better explain the common features discernible over vast distribution areas, rather than the 'wave-of-advance' model (*Ammermann, Cavalli-Sforza 1984*).

With regard to special buildings, the somewhat evolutionist idea according to which sanctuaries are a sign of a culture of higher standing at the end of a development, and basically of a later date, should be discarded. In early times in the Near East, the core area of the Neolithic, the 'land of plenty' (*Gebauer, Price 1992.8*), it was possible for a larger community to sustain itself over a longer period of time at one location, a situation that favoured and fostered the emergence of large settlements. The cohesiveness of these large settlements was secured through, among other things, the erection and use of special buildings. Outside the Neolithic heartland, environmental conditions favouring such large settlements were not present, which consequently required other social solutions for the success of the Neolithic mode of production. Therefore, institutionalised cults in the form of communally constructed, special buildings in settlements are not attested outside the Neolithic core area. With regard to some Copper Age contexts in Southeast Europe, it appears that a few houses stood in an elevated position, but there is no evidence that these were cult buildings; perhaps these houses can be attributed to the rise of elites.

Considering developments, for instance, in the Near East as of the 5th millennium BC, then at first glance astonishing associations become perceptible. The institution of the 'temple' – institutionalised

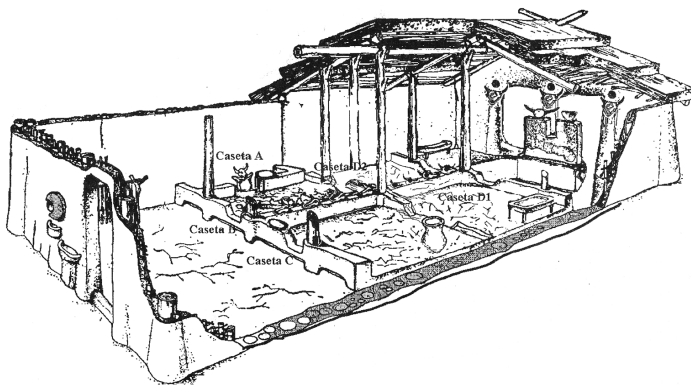


Fig. 9. Parța: reconstruction of 'sanctuary 2' (after Lazarovici et al. 2001.220, Fig. 180).

cult – forms the core of civilisation, and with that the starting point of urban cultures in Mesopotamia or also the formation of states (Roaf 2013). Comparable developments took place in other areas much later. In view of these observations, one is tempted to seek the causes for this development in the differences in cultic practices that were already present in the Early Neolithic, and to view cult buildings of the Near Eastern aceramic Neolithic as forerunners of later monumental temple complexes in the Syro-Mesopotamian sphere (Özdoğan, Özdoğan 1998).

Special buildings of the PPN might be the archaeological record for a mentality comparable with the conceptual mindscape which separates the religious from the profane (cf. critical remarks in Bernbeck 2013). This division, however, did not exist beyond the Neolithic core area at that time. In order to confirm this assumption, the gap in the contexts of special buildings that still persists between the 7th and 5th millennium BC must be filled. Also to be considered is the fact that the social structures in the background differed greatly, but that is another story.



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