

When Do Human Representations Become Superhuman Agents?

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Abstract: Is it possible to go beyond Jacques Cauvin's attractive idea that the Neolithic saw 'the birth of the gods' and Klaus Schmidt's suggestion that the great enclosures at Göbekli Tepe were built as temples to house the gods? Are the pairs of central monoliths in the early aceramic Neolithic circular enclosures at Göbekli Tepe representations of supernatural agents? Given that most large-scale, historic and contemporary polities and societies are associated with religions focused on moralising gods, while the ethnographic record of small-scale forager and horticulturalist societies offers examples of religions with no god or gods at their centre, it has been reasoned that religious ideas have evolved in parallel with the evolution of the scale of societies. Neolithic societies are in the middle of this evolutionary theory. By contrast with the preceding Palaeolithic mobile forager band societies, Neolithic societies, consisting of extensive networks of large, permanently co-resident communities, were the first large-scale societies. On the other hand, unlike later, larger-scale societies, there is no sign of the existence of institutionalised or hereditary hierarchies of power. Following Bellah's (2011) analysis, chiefs with varying levels of power and authority are associated with corresponding sizes of large-scale societies that are smaller than states; and there seems to be a parallel between the extent of the power of chiefs and the authority and power attributed to the god or gods in these societies. The discussion here concludes that, while the T-shaped monoliths at Göbekli Tepe may represent supernatural beings, perhaps something like ancestor-gods, there is no reason to suppose that they were supernatural agents, that is, that they were believed to be able to act in the everyday human world.

Keywords: Göbekli Tepe; anthropomorphic sculpture; supernatural beings; supernatural agents; Neolithic; PPN; evolution of religion; social evolution; cultural evolution

Jacques Cauvin wrote powerfully of 'la naissance des divinités' in the early aceramic Neolithic of the Levant.² His arguments were very much in the mind of the late Klaus Schmidt, when he wrote that the builders and sculptors of Göbekli Tepe 'built the first temples', with the implication that the monolithic figures in the large enclosures represented the gods for whom those temples were built.³ Those arguments may be plausible, and to many they are attractive, but they are essentially speculative. I want to ask if we can go further and make an evidence-based and reasonable case for some of the early aceramic Neolithic anthropomorphic sculptures as material representations of supernatural gods. Can we situate these early Neolithic representations at a particular point in the cultural evolution of religion, when communities first began to imagine a cosmos in which there were supernatural agents that were in some senses human or human-like?

The first examples of the monolithic, schematic representations of human-like form were found at Nevalı Çori, dating to the middle and late 9th millennium BC, technically the early to middle of the PPNB period. The sculptured monoliths were built into a unique, semi-subterranean building that was quite different from the houses of the settlement.⁴ There was a pair of monoliths in the middle of the floor of the building, and more monoliths were embedded in the stone bench around the base of the walls. Most of the monoliths had been broken at the end of the life of the building; of the peripheral stones, only the stumps in the stone bench were found. One of the central pair was represented only by the cavity in the floor from which it had been removed. The only monolith to survive is rectangular in cross-section and resembles a T-shape, about 3m tall. The figure has human characteristics: it has arms, hands and fingers, and it wears some kind of collar at its neck. The arms, hands, and the collar around the neck tell us that the narrow face is the front of the figure. It is at once human and non-human: while it has rudimentary hands and arms, it has no other features of a human figure, no indication of sex, and, most significantly, no facial features.

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² Cauvin 1994; Cauvin 2000.

³ Schmidt 2006; Schmidt 2012.

⁴ Hauptmann 1993; Hauptmann 2011.

Nevalı Çori has also given us a number of other puzzling human sculptures. It is important to put the massive, impressive anthropomorphic monoliths into some kind of material symbolic context; in terms of their scale and their pre-eminent positioning, the T-shaped monoliths are a central element in a complex suite of strange representations. There are several three-dimensional, realistic representations of the human head but set in non-realistic situations. These representations of human heads in the round emphasise the contrast with the strict, rectangular, smooth-surfaced block shapes of the 'heads' of the T-monolith. There is a head that has a large raptor perched above it and gripping it. Like most of the sculptures at Nevalı Çori, this example was found broken; indeed, it was effectively smashed. Another, more complicated situation is portrayed in a fragmentary sculpture in which there are two human figures, one somewhat above the other, standing or sitting back to back, with interlocking arms; again, a very large raptor grasps the upper head. Another human head is represented very schematically; it has a snake, carved in raised relief, on the back of the head. The way that the snake is represented, incidentally, with its body in rippling movement and its head as a solid triangle, is a form of stylised motif that we encounter frequently elsewhere, and in different contexts.

Göbekli Tepe is the site where the form of the T-shaped anthropomorphic monolith is explored over and over again in a series of massive circular enclosures. The arrangement of monoliths within the enclosure is standardised. As in the slightly later building at Nevalı Çori, a pair of taller monoliths stands in the centre and ten or twelve more, less tall, but still massive monoliths stand around the perimeter of the enclosure. Some of the enclosures have a stone 'bench' around the base of the perimeter wall, as at Nevalı Çori, and the peripheral monoliths are embedded within the bench.

Only a few of the monoliths have overtly human features. The pair at the centre of Enclosure D, like the surviving monolith from Nevalı Çori, have bent arms, hands and fingers in flat, low relief. This pair are unusual in having ornate belts, from which fox skins are suspended to cover their genital area. Like the Nevalı Çori monolith and a number of other Göbekli Tepe monoliths, they have a shallow groove on the narrow front side of the stone. And again, like the Nevalı Çori monolith, this pair have some sort of a collar at the neck. Each of these two monoliths has a different symbolic object suspended on the collar. At 5.5m tall, these are the tallest monoliths so far discovered at Göbekli Tepe, and they tower over anyone standing on the floor of the enclosure. One cannot see their faces or look into their eyes. In any case, they do not have any facial features on their highly schematised heads. Psychologists are very clear on the importance of the face, and especially the eyes. Human infants fix their eyes on their mother's face within days or a few weeks of birth and are especially responsive to the mother's eyes. When we look at the newsreader on the TV news programme, we relate to their face, and the newsreader appears to be looking directly at us. When we watch a politician being interviewed, we assess our acceptance of what they are saying as much by the posture of their head, their eye movements and the subtle changes of facial expression as by their verbal rhetoric. When we encounter someone who does not want to meet our eyes or who will not look at us when we speak to them, we are disconcerted and worried, and unwilling to trust them. But we cannot look into the eyes of these figures, and they have no faces that allow us to assess whether they are looking at us. In general, they tower over us, so that their unseen eyes do not seem to be concerned with us. They are certainly un-natural, but are they supernatural?

Most attention has been given to the monoliths, but, as at Nevalı Çori, there are many other sculptured stones at Göbekli Tepe, many of them representing very strange and sometimes frightening imaginary creatures or scenes. Many of the monoliths have quite recognisable representations of natural wild animals, birds, snakes, scorpions, and so on, carved in raised relief. In addition, some of the individual sculptures are fantastic creations. Some of the smaller, three-dimensional sculptures represent individual creatures or a human head. As at Nevalı Çori, other sculptures depict a combination of a human head and a large bird, a raptor, which is clutching the top of the human head in its claws. The most complex sculpture takes the form of a smaller stone pillar, carved in the round. It would be possible to look into the faces of the humans and creatures,

but the faces were deliberately broken away before the pillar was finally concealed within a stone wall. It is a work of imagination in which the figure at the top, which has a massive, bear-like head, grasps with human-like arms and hands the head of the figure below; in turn the second figure grasps the small head of a third character. What did this pillar say to the early Neolithic viewer? It is certainly a quite complicated reference and it would have taken many words to explain what it signified.

There are two classes of sculpture both at Nevalı Çori and at Göbekli Tepe: the smaller semi-realistic representations of human heads, animals, and combinations of birds and human heads are rather different from the T-shaped monoliths, which, although they are anthropomorphic, have featureless, rectangular blocks for heads and never have facial features. Together with all the anthropomorphic, T-shaped monoliths and the creatures carved on their bodies, and all the other sculptures, there is a very complex mythology or series of mythologies that made them comprehensible and meaningful to those who designed and carved them and to those who encountered them. The parallel that comes to my mind is that of a Byzantine church full of mosaics or frescos; the many figures would each be identified to a contemporary Christian by means of various attributes but also by means of their placing, both in relation to one another and in relation to the overall design and structure of the building. We are faced with a difficulty: while the information that enables us to comprehend the rich iconography of a Byzantine church is accessible to us (though most of us would require expert guidance), we have no means of decoding the similarly complex iconography of the early Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe. However, there are many researchers from different disciplines interested in the phenomenon of religion and there is a rapidly growing interest in the cultural and cognitive evolution of religion; see, for example, the list of recent book-length treatments of the subject with which Harvey Whitehouse illustrates this point.⁵ Inevitably, my reading as an archaeologist in the field of the evolution of religion has been introductory, and I am no doubt naively selective.

First, it is useful to remind ourselves that religions do not necessarily involve beliefs in superhuman deities. Indeed, the classic definitions of religion offered by sociologists and anthropologists make no mention of superhuman deities as essential elements in the phenomenon. In his foundational book *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*,⁶ Emil Durkheim had a working definition that was both succinct and simple: ‘Une religion est un système solidaire de croyances et de pratiques relatives à des choses sacrées, c’est-à-dire séparées, interdites, croyances et pratiques qui unissent en une même communauté morale, appelée Église, tous ceux qui y adherent’. The eminent American anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote in an essay on ‘Religion as a cultural system’⁷ that a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. More recently, the American sociologist Robert Bellah paraphrased Geertz’s definition as follows: religion is a system of symbols that, when enacted by human beings, establishes powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations that make sense in terms of an idea of a general order of existence.⁸

Religious beliefs and practices are culturally constructed and culturally transmitted within the overall package of cultural knowledge, skills, practices and beliefs. Pascal Boyer observes that all societies possess culturally shared concepts of gods, spirits, ancestors or humans with some supernatural abilities or powers.⁹ It has also been observed that there is a general correlation between the kind of religious package of practices and beliefs and the scale of social organisation:

⁵ Whitehouse 2008, 35.

⁶ Durkheim 1912.

⁷ Geertz 1966, 2; reprinted in Geertz 1973.

⁸ Bellah 2011, 2.

⁹ Boyer 1994; Boyer 2001.

very large-scale human societies tend to possess complex bodies of religious beliefs that include deities that are at least in some ways anthropomorphic. Within the span of ancient history, not only did the scale of socio-political organisations grow – larger kingdoms, greater and greater empires – but new developments in philosophy and religion emerged in different parts of the world around the middle of the 1st millennium BC. Karl Jaspers drew attention to what he called an ‘*Achsenzeit*’,¹⁰ an idea that the American sociologist Robert Bellah has done much to develop as the ‘Axial Age’.¹¹ This was the time when new ideas emerged about the nature of the individual and the individual’s responsibilities and morality, accompanied, in some civilisations, by new ideas about the god’s moral authority and the individual’s personal relations with the god.

A multi-disciplinary group of researchers refer to this Axial Age as the time when ‘moralizing gods’, or ‘big gods’, emerged.¹² Gods must be the following: (1) counterintuitive (that is, while human-like, and therefore comprehensible in some ways, they are out-of-the-ordinary in other ways; for example, they are invisible and they exist outside of time); (2) an intentional agent (that is, like us humans, they are capable of forming intentions and of understanding the intentions of others); (3) they should possess strategic information (put simply, they are omniscient and can detect and comprehend your actions and motives); (4) they are able to act in the human world in detectable ways (they can, for example, speak to humans, advising, informing, warning them); (5) typically, they are capable of motivating behaviours, such as rituals, prayers, that reinforce belief.¹³ ‘Moralizing gods’ are further capable of motivating ultra-social behaviour and they may punish misbehaviour and failure to live up to moral standards.

Before the Axial Age, for example in 3rd and 2nd millennium BC Mesopotamia, there were anthropomorphic deities, which were represented in human form, and which in some ways behaved in ways familiar to humans. They were able to act in the human world, and they required human service, including worship, which, it might be hoped, could bring about benign action on behalf of humans or divert divine anger from retributive acts. But there is no evidence that early Mesopotamian gods were thought to be omniscient, or capable of motivating ultra-social behaviour; they were supernatural agents, according to the terms defined by Justin Barrett,¹⁴ but they were not ‘moralizing gods’. There is, thus, evidence that the Axial Age represents an evolutionary development in religious concepts. Before the mid-1st millennium BC, there were powerful, anthropomorphic deities; their anthropomorphic representations, their temple-houses, and the ritual service that was owed can be seen to have been already in existence in the proto-literate and proto-historic period. The question becomes, therefore, can we extrapolate backwards into the earlier, pre-literate and pre-historic millennia of the Holocene period? We can go so far – a few more centuries, or perhaps a millennium – by noting that sanctuaries of the proto-literate period in southern Mesopotamia which can be clearly identified as temples that were the houses of specific historically documented deities have been traced back in the stratigraphy, as a succession of re-buildings of essentially the same building constructed on the exact same site. But that tells us only that similar temples that served as the houses of gods were in existence for some time before cuneiform texts begin to give us their names and sometimes something of their actions and role in this world, such as having chosen X to be king and to govern in their name.

Turning to the theories of the cultural evolutionists of religion, the ethnographic evidence shows that there is a general correlation between the scale of societies and the kind of religious beliefs and practices that they espouse. Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery present a rare archaeological example derived from their work at sites in the Oaxaca Valley in Mexico.¹⁵ Over a quite

¹⁰ Jaspers 1949.

¹¹ Bellah – Joas 2012.

¹² Atran 2002; Shariff et al. 2011; Bulbulia et al. 2013; Atkinson et al. 2015; Norenzayan 2015; Slingerland 2015; Purzycki et al. 2016.

¹³ Barrett 2008, 150–155.

¹⁴ Barrett 2008.

¹⁵ Marcus – Flannery 2004.

short period, small hunter-gatherer bands were replaced by settled populations living in permanent villages and cultivating maize which in turn were overtaken by the emergence of a hierarchically organised society, from which the archaic Zapotec state developed. Marcus and Flannery note the parallel changes in and increasing complexity of rituals and the scale of special buildings, through small temples, to full-blown pyramids and the portrayal of extreme ritual practices. Unfortunately, their perspective on the expansion of religious demands does not extend to the nature of any supernatural beings or agents earlier than the times of state-level societies.

The first step for us is to note that population density and the size of population units in parts of south-west Asia increased exponentially from the Upper Palaeolithic, through the Epipalaeolithic and especially through the early Neolithic. Nigel Goring-Morris and Anna Belfer-Cohen have graphed the increase in the number of sites per millennium (as a proxy for population numbers).¹⁶ The growth over this period for the southern Levant, for which we have the best information, is dramatic. For the Neolithic period in the southern Levant, Ian Kuijt has graphed the exponential growth in the mean size of settlement sites and the equally dramatic rise in the density of buildings within settlements.¹⁷ In the Upper Palaeolithic, there were groups of a few hundred or a thousand or so, made up of several mobile forager bands each numbering a few tens of people; from the Neolithic period there were networks of densely populated and long-lived, permanent settlements, where communities numbering many hundreds of people and sometimes several thousand lived together. These were the first large-scale, permanent communities, functioning as autonomous units within networked super-communities.¹⁸ These networked super-communities were held together by powerful, intensive and sophisticated practices of sharing and symbolic exchange (so much so that archaeologists, following Gordon Childe,¹⁹ used to call them ‘cultures’ or ‘cultural groups’). They exchanged things and materials, such as obsidian and marine shells, and they emulated each other in practices such as the specific design and ways of making things, such as intricate projectile points, or the strongly emotive practices concerning intramural burial, skull retrieval and curation. I have argued that these networks of communities were the Neolithic pre-cursors of what Colin Renfrew described as peer polity interaction spheres,²⁰ engaging in the exchange of valued goods and materials, sharing value-systems, knowledge and innovations, and engaging with each other in ‘competitive emulation’.

We may set this picture of the emergence of large-scale societies alongside the changes in scale of societies described by Robert Bellah in his great book²¹ which was the summation of a huge amount and range of knowledge. Bellah structures his book, showing how as societies become larger and larger, their religious beliefs and practices become more complex and more demanding. Interestingly, Bellah also links changes in the form of religious beliefs and practices to modes of cultural communication and cognition, as these have been formulated in Merlin Donald’s evolutionary account of three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition.²² In general, small-scale societies are associated with religious rituals and practices that are focused on building group solidarity without the need for supernatural agents; Bellah illustrates with examples how these rituals use Donald’s mimetic (through mime, gesture, action, dance and music) and mythic (story-telling and myth-telling) modes. In the step up to larger-scale societies, Bellah sets out to ‘consider how the resources for the production of meaning ... can be expanded to deal with much larger and more stratified societies through the development of new forms of ritual and myth, new understandings of the relations between cosmos, society, and self’.²³ This is where he

¹⁶ Goring-Morris – Belfer-Cohen 2011, S199, fig. 2.

¹⁷ Kuijt 2000, 83–85, fig. 2, tab. 2.

¹⁸ Watkins 2008.

¹⁹ Childe 1929.

²⁰ Renfrew 1986.

²¹ Bellah 2011.

²² Donald 1991.

²³ Bellah 2011, 175.

turns to Donald's third stage, which Donald calls theoretic culture. Donald wrote that the capacity to think and communicate in terms such as, for example, 'the relations between cosmos, society and self' required the evolution of systems of external symbolic storage, in particular alphabetic writing.²⁴ Donald's third stage, theoretic culture, may have reached its fulfilment with the capacity to store and transmit in written form anything that we could think, imagine, and put into words; but it began to emerge much earlier, in the material form of European Upper Palaeolithic two- and three-dimensional art (and we should remember that Donald was writing a decade before our attention was drawn to the examples of symbolic expression in later Middle Stone Age Africa²⁵). In response to Colin Renfrew's challenge at an archaeological conference on his ideas,²⁶ Donald explained his thinking more fully, taking account of other, non-linguistic modes of material expression.²⁷ Since then, he has written on art and architecture as forms of external symbolic storage in the service of religion.²⁸ Elsewhere I have several times drawn on Donald's work in support of the view that early Neolithic symbolic architecture and sculptural representations were systems of external symbolic storage, ways that Neolithic communities devised for materialising ideas about their world and their place in the world.²⁹ Now it may be possible to link those views about the Neolithic world, Donald's theoretical culture and external symbolic storage, and Bellah's account of religion in human evolution.

After what he calls 'tribal religion', and its mimetic and mythic rituals and stories as the means to produce meaning, Bellah turns to larger-scale societies, in which we may expect to find new forms of meaning-making. His examples take the form of a spectrum of the chiefdoms of Polynesia and their religious practices and beliefs, for which he is reliant on the work of P. V. Kirch.³⁰ For Bellah, larger societies are hierarchical societies, ranging from quite small population units and simple chiefdoms up to complex, multi-level chiefdoms that were emergent states. He points to the general inter-relationship between anthropomorphic gods and their ritual service and chiefs and their authority. And in the following chapter, where he discusses religion in the archaic states such as those of southern Mesopotamia and early Egypt, he extends that relationship to the closely linked roles of (divine) kings and powerful, anthropomorphic gods. But he presents no examples of larger-scale societies, such as the networks of sedentary Neolithic communities, which are not chiefdoms. Unless we can make a case that our Neolithic communities were chiefdoms, they find no parallel in Bellah's ethnographic assemblage; and I do not find any evidence to suggest that our Neolithic communities were chiefdoms, although they were certainly a scale-order larger than their Upper Palaeolithic predecessors. Were the Neolithic super-communities not large enough to be considered large-scale? Or is the existence of a social hierarchy the critical factor that produces religious ideas that give power to gods that mirror the power of chiefs?

It seems that our early Neolithic societies were the first large-scale societies, but they were acephalous, or segmentary, societies in which no-one enjoyed ascribed positions of authority and power. Acephalous, or segmentary, societies, together with chiefdoms, kingdoms, empires and modern industrialised societies, are counted among large-scale societies by a group of sociologists and anthropologists writing about the evolution and structure of human groups.³¹ In the opposite direction, some of the simplest ethnographically documented chiefdoms can number smaller than the population of one of the mega-sites of the later aceramic Neolithic; structure is at least as important as raw population numbers. Our Neolithic networked super-communities were a scale-order larger than the small-scale societies of earlier times; yet, on the other

²⁴ Donald 1991.

²⁵ McBrearty – Brooks 2000.

²⁶ Renfrew 1998.

²⁷ Donald 1998.

²⁸ Donald 2006; Donald 2009.

²⁹ Watkins 2004a; Watkins 2004b; Watkins 2006.

³⁰ In particular, Kirch 1984; Kirch 2000.

³¹ Jordan et al. 2013.

hand, they differed from subsequent large-scale societies, whether chiefdoms of various levels of complexity, or emergent kingdoms. They were thus liminal, different in important ways from what had gone before but different also in important ways from what followed. In their material systems of external symbolic storage, they represent a distinct increase in recursive complexity compared to what had gone before: however, they did not employ a system of signs to represent words and sentences. In terms of their mode of religiosity, Whitehouse would term them imagistic, with infrequent rituals that are highly arousing, involving ecstatic practices and altered states of consciousness.³² The alternative mode of religiosity, which Whitehouse terms doctrinal, is typical of large-scale societies, involving frequent, repetitious rituals, often controlled by religious leaders, requiring explicit knowledge of complex religious teachings, which, in literate societies, are often held in written form. At Çatalhöyük, Harvey Whitehouse and Ian Hodder believe that the beginnings of the dogmatic mode of religiosity can be seen in changes in the rituals and the forms of symbolic representation.³³ I believe that we can say that the recursive complexity of the symbolism that we can see (although we cannot 'read' it) at Göbekli Tepe was as richly informative to the people who contributed to its making as was a Byzantine basilica or a European cathedral to Christians, whether learned doctors of the church or simple laity. I would therefore argue that the monumental architecture, richly symbolic sculpture and lexicon of carved signs represent, in Whitehouse's terms, the beginning of a doctrinal mode of religiosity.

After a number of years of indecision based in ignorance, I have come to the provisional conclusion that the early Neolithic T-shaped monoliths, such as those of Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe, probably were representations of powerful, anthropomorphic, supernatural beings but not supernatural agents. They have the right characteristics and occur in appropriate contexts. They are both human-like and at the same time counterintuitive. They inhabit monumental constructions, which resemble archaic, semi-subterranean, domestic 'houses', and the communal buildings that have been found at settlements in the region and further afield in southern Jordan and contemporary Cyprus. Cultural evolutionary theory indicates that large-scale societies need powerful, shared belief systems that are expressed in material form and demanding common practices. Historical evidence shows that the beliefs and practices of such cultural systems are centred on powerful, supernatural, anthropomorphic deities. In that context, the construction of the enclosures, the quarrying and making of the monoliths, the assembling of monoliths in each enclosure, and all the other demanding activities at Göbekli Tepe can be understood as the challenging practices of a set of complex beliefs that support the ultra-sociality of a super-community. And the faceless, counterintuitive, T-shaped monoliths of Göbekli Tepe can readily be understood as representations of powerful, supernatural beings. So far as I am aware, supernatural agents, gods who communicate with and act in the everyday world, gods to whom people cede power and authority, and who generally require the service of their people, are found in large-scale societies in which there are chiefs, kings, or emperors whose status and authority are founded on their relations to the divine. To be clear, the T-shaped monoliths of Göbekli Tepe and Nevalı Çori can be described as supernatural beings because of their non-natural characteristics, but it is difficult to claim that they were supernatural agents.

To return to the starting point of this paper, Jacques Cauvin proposed that the small-scale, three-dimensional representations of females and of bulls were the realisation of powerful female and male deities, the prototypes of deities that can be identified in the iconography of the early cities of southern Mesopotamia. Here, I have been considering the case for the great, faceless monoliths of the same early aceramic Neolithic period as gods, that is, supernatural agents. Unfortunately, Cauvin's case is hard to accept because of the lack of continuity between the images of the early aceramic Neolithic, whether faceless monoliths, or Cauvin's female figures

³² Whitehouse 2002; Whitehouse 2004.

³³ Whitehouse – Hodder 2010.

and bull figurines. Around the middle of the aceramic Neolithic period, the T-shaped monoliths ceased to be made. In an early chapter in which he discusses how we should put together the various components of the Neolithic transformation, Cauvin dismisses exogenous factors such as climate change or population pressure as the cause that set the process of change in motion. Rather, he gives us, with typical brevity, his view of how change takes place: ‘The different factors continually impact on one another in an almost circular movement of reciprocal interactions, without anyone being able to identify exactly what set the wheel of change in motion ...’³⁴ It seems to me that we could re-phrase Cauvin’s account of the working of the process of change in terms of cultural niche construction theory³⁵ and argue that ideas of authority and power co-evolved reciprocally in the emergence of hereditary chiefs and of gods as supernatural agents active in the world and requiring service and respect. The correlation of scales of social organisation, from simple chiefdoms, to states and empires, with beliefs in increasingly active, demanding and even ‘moralizing’ gods that is proposed by Robert Bellah and others is a form of co-evolution within the cultural niche. In the present context, however, we should conclude that the T-shaped monoliths are representations of very impressive supernatural beings, perhaps something like ancestor-gods but that we cannot define them as supernatural agents. In this regard, too, societies of the aceramic Neolithic were liminal. On the one hand, their religious concepts were a scale order different and more complex than those of their Palaeolithic predecessors, and their rituals, such as the construction of enclosures at Göbekli Tepe and the making of their strange inhabitants, were likewise hugely more demanding of labour, resources and commitment; however, on the other hand, it seems that concepts of supernatural beings that could be powerful agents, acting in the everyday world, had to wait for the emergence of chiefs with hereditary power. Big gods needed big men to attend to their service, as big men needed the authority with which their association with big gods endowed them and, at the time of Göbekli Tepe, that was in the future.

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³⁴ Cauvin 2000, 65.

³⁵ Cf. Sterelny – Watkins 2015; Watkins 2015.

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