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THE CHARACTER OF THE NEOLITHIC 'IMAGERY' IN THE UPPER EUPHRATES VALLEY AND KONYA PLAIN AND ITS ROLE IN DISCERNING CHANGES IN RELIGIOSITY

ABSTRACT: In recent years, the study of rituals and manifestations of religious practices in prehistoric societies has taken on a new, multifaceted dimension. These studies have been inspired by a series of innovative research concepts emerging from the fields of history and sociology of religion, coupled with the application of modern methods from the realm of digital humanities. This article aims to analyze a range of objects, motifs, and decorative remnants, collectively referred to as *imagery*, which exhibit rich symbolism, facilitating their interpretation within ritual contexts. The main focus of the article involves a comparison of two crucial regions of the Neolithic of the Near East, the Upper Euphrates Valley and the Konya Plain, with an emphasis on the presence and characteristics of imagery. Furthermore, drawing from the same array of sources, the article endeavors to delineate the emergence and subsequent transformations of the Neolithic belief system from the 9th to the end of the 7th millennium BCE. The application of the “divergent modes of religiosity (DMR)” concept developed by Harvey Whitehouse for interpreting the above sources yields interesting observations regarding the trajectory of development of Neolithic lifeways, in particular, transformative forms of religiosity in these communities.

KEYWORDS: Neolithic Imagery, Neolithic Rituals, Upper Euphrates Valley, Konya Plain, Divergent Modes of Religiosity, Symbolism

Introduction

The Near East, known as the cradle of civilization and the birthplace of the Neolithic revolution, is associated with highly significant transformations in economic (e.g., Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2011; Purugganan and Fuller 2009; Özdögan 2010; Marciniak 2021), social (e.g., Flannery 1972; Marciniak 2008; Düring and Marciniak 2005; Hodder 2022), demographic (e.g., Pearson *et al.* 2023; Yaka *et al.* 2021; Larsen *et al.* 2019), and religious spheres (e.g., Cauvin 1994; Verhoeven 2011; Hodder 2010). In the context of the latter, this period and region constitute an extraordinary reservoir of various symbolic representations, the so-called “explosion of symbolism”, particularly observed in art and the architecture of dwellings (Verhoeven 2011).

Issues related to ritual and religiosity are among the most intriguing yet relatively challenging aspects to discern in the archaeological record of Neolithic communities. The challenge arises from the fact that objects with immense symbolic potential carry the possibility of complex interpretations, extending beyond ritual considerations to social, identity, or cultural contexts. Therefore, it is crucial to contemplate the collection of objects, motifs, and decorative elements—collectively referred to as *imagery*—within a broad context, acknowledging the multitude of their potential meanings.

Efforts toward a comprehensive conceptualization of these elements, including their description, categorization, and interpretation of meanings, combined with the creation of a coherent methodological procedure enabling their reliable identification using a variety of interconnected methods, have been and continue to be the focus of many researchers. Notably, among them is Harvey Whitehouse, a British social anthropologist and historian of religion, the creator of the concept known as *Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (DMR) (e.g., Whitehouse 2002; Whitehouse 2008).

The term *imagery*, as discussed in this paper, is understood as a set of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or other types of representations that are integrally connected to the materiality of the carriers on which they are placed and the context in which they are found (cf. Filipowicz 2019, 39). This term has been previously used by several researchers in numerous publications (e.g., Conkey

1987; Filipowicz 2019; Kuijt and Chesson 2007; Meskell 2008; Hodder 2010; Renfrew and Morley 2007).

The set of representations comprising Neolithic imagery, analyzed in this article, will be considered in the perspective of the *longue durée* of the Near Eastern Neolithic. The research will focus on two areas crucial to the Neolithic revolution and the transformations and dissemination of Neolithic resources, both ideological and material. These comprise (1) the Upper Euphrates Valley in northern Mesopotamia and (2) the Konya Plain in central Turkey (Pl. 1: 1).

Both areas are distinctive due to their location, the former is in the so-called "Fertile Crescent", the original site of the Neolithic Revolution, while the latter is in the region where the first adoption of the "Neolithic package" occurred. In the Upper Euphrates Valley around 9,000 BCE, Neolithic *imagery* took shape, accompanied by the emergence of monumental architecture. In contrast, peak development in the Konya Plain occurred around 7,000 BCE, with the Neolithic symbolic sphere appearing in a significantly transformed, non-linear form. Therefore, it is both interesting and valid to trace the changes and transformations of Neolithic imagery in these two areas over the long term. This combination adds a new dimension to discussions about the *imagery* canon in the Near Eastern Neolithic.

This article has two objectives. The first involves a comparative analysis of material remains containing motifs and decorative elements, which consist of *imagery* and can reasonably be associated with ritual and religious practices. The empirical basis for this analysis includes comprehensively collected objects belonging to this imaginative sphere. The article takes into account the latest research results on the Upper Euphrates, conducted as part of the Taş Tepeler project, with a particular focus on discoveries in Karahan Tepe—a settlement rightfully compared to Göbekli Tepe, which is dated as at least contemporaneous (e.g., Collins 2024) with the significantly earlier and better-known Göbekli Tepe.¹

Christopher Caletti also mentions other similar sites around the Harran Plain, likely created by the same Early Neolithic groups that initiated the oldest Neolithic civilization in the Near East.² Among them are Ayanlar Höyük,

¹ One should bear in mind that the chronological position of both sites and the character of their corresponding developments are still under debate. This is not only due to the intensive research at Karahan Tepe but also to the latest in-depth investigations of the chronology of Göbekli Tepe.

² A number of publications address the process of domestication taking place in the early Neolithic (see e.g. Banning 2023). It should be noted that this process is considered by researchers to have spanned over several hundred years (Ayaz *et al.* 2022), casting doubt on the relevance of the dualistic

Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle, Sayburç, Sefer Tepe, Hamzan Tepe, Harbetsuvan Tepesi, Kurt Tepesi, and Taşlı Tepe (Caletti 2020, 104; Karul 2021). The recent findings are particularly significant for the pre-ceramic Neolithic period (Pre-Pottery Neolithic, 10,000 – 7,000 BCE), addressing changes characteristic of the “Neolithic package”, including ritual and religious aspects. Intensive research and new discoveries also pertain to the *Çatalhöyük* settlement, where annual excavations shed new light on Neolithic symbolism (Marciniak *et al.* 2022; Marciniak *et al.* 2023).

Secondly, the article aims to elucidate changes in the nature of imagery to understand the emergence and further transformation of the Neolithic belief system from the early 9th to the end of the 7th millennium BCE. The conceptual framework for this purpose is Whitehouse’s Divergent Modes of Religiosity (DMR). The innovative aspect lies in the attempt to combine both regions within the context of this theory, providing new insights into ritual matters, the dynamics of changes in this regard, and geographical differences. This juxtaposition is novel and promises to shed new light on the issues of ritual, the dynamics of change, and geographical variations.

Conceptual basis

There are several researchers whose considerations on prehistoric symbolism, including those of the Neolithic Near East, have become crucial to the discourse on religiosity (see, for example, Cauvin 1994; Watkins 2001; Rollefson and Watkins 2001). One of these researchers is Ian Hodder, a British post-processualist archaeologist and longtime director of excavations at *Çatalhöyük*. Hodder has developed various concepts that connect ritual and religious aspects with the social functioning of Neolithic communities. He emphasizes the role of symbols, arguing that they form the fundamental basis of prehistoric religions (e.g., Hodder 2010; Hodder 2014; Bredholt Christansen and Warburton 2013). Hodder also underscores the importance of interdisciplinary research in the study of religious issues, advocating for the integration of contextual archaeological data with specialized methods from the natural sciences.

classification of these communities as either hunter-gatherer or proto-agricultural. In my opinion, the most appropriate description would be to label this period “an early stage in the transition from hunter-gathering to farming” (as per Clare 2020).

In collaboration with Lynn Meskell, Hodder conducted a comparative analysis of the canon of representations in the Neolithic Near East. Their findings challenged the notion of the dominance of female representations and fertility motifs in favor of the presence of male elements and animality (Hodder and Meskell 2011).

Another notable researcher is Harvey Whitehouse. His concept of Divergent Modes of Religiosity (DMR) pertains to early-stage religious communities that employed specific symbols. The foundation of this concept lies in the belief that rituals can take two forms: (a) occasional events and (b) routine actions integrated into everyday life (Whitehouse and McQuinn 2013). The earlier model of religiosity, termed *imagistic*, was characterized by infrequent but highly stimulating rituals, which were exclusive in nature and associated with strong emotional arousal among participants (Whitehouse 2002, 304). The later chronologically situated model, termed *doctrinal*, was characterized by high frequency, an inclusive nature, gentleness, routine repeatability of rituals, and complex theology or doctrine (Whitehouse 2002, 302). Whitehouse categorized variables describing both models into two groups: *Psychological Features*, encompassing characteristics that describe the intensity, course, and distinctive features of the ritual, and *Sociopolitical Features*, encompassing characteristics associated with the social context of the ritual.

According to Whitehouse, a characteristic of the imagistic model was the creation of strong bonds and cohesion among individuals participating in the ritual. In this case, the presence of intermediaries or priests was not necessary; each participant individually experienced the supernatural element. The purpose of ritual in the doctrinal formula of religiosity, on the other hand, was to solidify and sustain social memory. Its complex nature facilitated the creation of conditions for it to endure for centuries or even millennia, giving it historical value (Whitehouse 2002).

One illustrative example of the Divergent Modes of Religiosity (DMR) theory is the research conducted by Harvey Whitehouse in Çatalhöyük (Whitehouse and Hodder 2010). According to Whitehouse, changes of a socio-ideological nature occurred in the settlement around 7,000 BCE, which aptly illustrate the transition between the imagistic model and the emerging doctrinal model of religiosity during that period. The DMR model was first applied by British archaeologist S. Mithen (2004), who considered the socio-economic and ritual aspects of Near Eastern communities from 20,000 to 7,000 BCE.

Another researcher worth mentioning is Marc Verhoeven, a Dutch archaeologist whose studies primarily focused on the social dimension of ritual practices. His formulated theses revolved around the identification and distinction of so-called “ritual frames” that took place in communities during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (Verhoeven 2002). These frames manifested through various material remains such as ceremonial buildings, statues, steles, zoomorphic motifs in depictions of humans, wall and floor paintings, decorated stones and bones, animal horns, bucrania, anthropo- and zoomorphic figurines, burials, decorated skulls, and deformed skulls (Verhoeven 2002, 6). Verhoeven is also the author of the theory of projection, aiming to demonstrate how the concept of supernatural authority emerged in prehistoric societies (Verhoeven 2015).

Empirical basis

The aim of the article is achievable through the use of the innovative Seshat Global History Databank project (<https://seshat-db.com/>), aligning with the field of digital humanities. This groundbreaking historical and archaeological database allows for a comprehensive collection of information about cultural, economic, social, and ritual transformations worldwide, spanning the Neolithic period to the 19th century. Using the variables collected within it, the database facilitates the integration of various aspects and their comparative analysis, enabling the study of complex issues, including those related to religiosity and societal transformations, all based on robust empirical foundations.

The Seshat Global History Databank, established in 2011, enables the analysis of long-term processes, allowing for the tracking of significant civilizational and religious changes. Its primary objective is to test various complementary research theories and hypotheses. In its design, the Seshat Global History Databank adopts an interdisciplinary approach, gathering data from scholars in different fields of the humanities and social sciences, including biology, anthropology, and history.

In the context of this article, empirical data related to so-called “ritual variables” were used, referencing the criteria of the Seshat database. These variables pertain to diverse material remnants interpreted as connected to the realm of ritual practices. As indicated above, the focus of the article is on one category of these variables—*imagery*. Seshat distinguishes six groups of material remains associated with the imaginative sphere, and my analysis covers them systemati-

cally. These comprise the presence of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and abstract/geometric forms on six types of carriers: figurines, wall paintings, reliefs, monumental sculptures, ceramic vessels, and other smaller mobile artifacts.

The empirical material collected in this form, which has been included in the analysis, comes from monographic publications, excavation reports, archival materials, other databases, and online resources. The completion of the research goals was possible through the systematic collection and organization of precisely defined manifestations of symbolic and ritual behaviors, which are evident in the six groups of material remains in the imaginative sphere mentioned above.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of the analysis is to recognize the nature of Neolithic imagery and its changes over time. In this regard, materials from two important centers of the Neolithic in the Near East, representing two different phases of development, were subjected to analysis. These include: (1) northern Mesopotamia in the Upper Euphrates Valley, located in parts of present-day Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Iraq; and (2) the Konya Plain in Turkey. Both of these areas developed settlements rich in symbolic material remains, the nature of which suggests their analysis in a ritual context.

The chronological scope of the presented analyses for the Upper Euphrates Valley includes the period from the emergence of the monumental sacred complex,³ Göbekli Tepe, in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period to the end of the Neolithic. The periods covered are: 1) Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (10,000-8,700 BCE); 2) Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (8,700-7,500 BCE); 3) Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (7,500-7,000 BCE); 4) Early Pottery Neolithic (7,000-6,100 BCE); 5) Pre-Halafian (6,300-6,100 BCE).

For the Konya Plain area, the studied chronological range falls within three chronological phases: 1) Late Aceramic Neolithic (8,500-7,000 BCE); 2) Pottery Neolithic (7,000-6,500 BCE); 3) Late Neolithic (6,500-6,000 BCE), covering the duration of two major settlements in this area, Boncuklu and Çatalhöyük.⁴

³ The Göbekli Tepe site has been continuously and intensively studied over the past thirty years. A number of proposals and interpretations have been put forward regarding its non-domestic and ceremonial character. Researchers agree that the site has a ritual character, but there are differences in the interpretation of its significance, nomenclature, and the extent of its domestic occupation (e.g., Dietrich and Notroff 2015; Banning 2023; Clare 2020).

⁴ All above calibrated dates originate from the Seshat database.

Comparative analysis

The Upper Euphrates Valley

I will start the analysis of the empirical material from the Upper Euphrates Valley, and the first group of ritualistic remains to be considered will be figurines. A characteristic feature of this region during the early Neolithic period is the relatively low prevalence of figurines in their most widespread sense (see, e.g., Bailey 2005). However, it is worth noting zoomorphic figurines, as well as small carved faces originating from Göbekli Tepe from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) and from Nevalı Çori from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) (see Karul, Kozbe and Yavuzkır 2021).

However, during the PPNA period, the vast majority of figurines are rather larger sculptures, often serving as an integral part of construction—especially those from sites like Göbekli Tepe or Karahan Tepe.⁵ They mostly depict male figures. According to Turkish researchers, due to the emphasis on sexual characteristics, these sculptures could symbolize fertility, ultimately leading to population growth (see Çelik and Uludağ 2018).

Besides anthropomorphic forms, zoomorphic forms also existed, such as a recently discovered statue of a wild animal in Göbekli Tepe, whose size resembled the natural dimensions of the creature. Notably, traces of red, black, and white paint have been preserved on this statue (Milligan 2023).

In subsequent periods, figurines become significantly smaller and more diverse, particularly in terms of their greater variety in form, raw material, and style. From the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) and Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (LPPNB) periods, there are numerous examples of figurines from sites like Nevalı Çori and Tell Halula (e.g., Hauptmann 2012). They take on anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, as well as spherical and geometric forms. From the early Ceramic Neolithic onwards, a new type of figurine emerges, characterized by distorted heads and exaggeratedly marked eyes, often associated with shamanic figures (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005, 70). It is also noteworthy to highlight a special practice related to figurines, identified during the pre-Halaf period.

⁵ Both sites are still being investigated in terms of their chronology and the character of their stratigraphic sequences. Considering the current state of the art, we should consider that artifacts coming from Göbekli Tepe and Karahan Tepe belong to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) period. However, it cannot be ruled out that they might have originated from later occupations and been redeposited into PPNA contexts.

This involved removing the heads of the figurines and reintroducing them into circulation in this altered form. This practice is known from the Tell Sabi Abyad site. Figurines with openings in the head area suggest their mobility, possibly as a form of jewelry (Croucher 2012, 193).

The next group of objects from the Seshat database that can be classified as imagery is wall paintings. As it turns out, they are not a very common medium in this area; they were not recognized throughout the entire Neolithic period. This is a striking contrast to the rich Neolithic wall paintings in the Konya Plain area, which will be discussed below. However, it's worth keeping in mind that this situation may be associated with the likelihood of poor preservation, which could have led to the absence of recognizable wall paintings thus far.

The next two groups of carriers—reliefs and monumental sculptures—can be considered together since both forms were recognized only during the PPNA and PPNB periods. However, their presence has not been documented in the later periods of the Neolithic in the discussed area. Monumental sculptures and reliefs were found in oval ceremonial structures at sites such as Göbekli Tepe, Karahan Tepe, and Nevalı Çori. They reached several meters in size and, in most cases, had the shape of the letter 'T' or a phallus (Pl. 1: 2). At the extensively researched site of Karahan Tepe, dating from 2019, in addition to four round architectural structures with pillars reaching 4.5 meters high, an anthropomorphic stone statue, 2.3 meters in size, depicting a seated man holding his genitals, was discovered (Milligan 2023). Interestingly, this is not the first statue of this kind found in the Harran Plain area; a similar one was found at the Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle site (Çelik 2014, 101). Another intriguing anthropomorphic example is a bas-relief, 2 meters long, carved into the wall of a human head with distinct facial features, facing the probable entrance to the building (Karul 2021), and an impressive relief from Sayburç depicting a male figure surrounded by four leopards (Pl. 2: 1). The relief covers the entire inner wall of the room. Similar to the statue of the man from Karahan Tepe, this figure also holds his penis with its hands (Özdoğan 2022).

As Hodder and Meskell argue in their 2011 article, all figural representations in this area were strongly masculinized, placing masculinity at the center—as a kind of source of power and authority, both in the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic dimensions. However, it's important to note that this emphasis on masculinity does not preclude the presence of female or genderless representations. The masculinized motifs apply not only to the Göbekli Tepe site (Hodder and Meskell 2011, 237), but, as recent research shows, also to Karahan Tepe.

Pillars at both sites were covered with a variety of decorations in the form of reliefs. Most of them had a zoomorphic form. The most common motifs in the incredible repertoire of representations were wild animals such as bulls, snakes, wild boars, foxes, ducks, cranes, spiders, scorpions, and vultures—symbolically associated with the theme of death (Schmidt 2006, Karul 2021). Additionally, a popular motif on the pillars was that of human arms, seemingly “embracing” the sculpture. Another interesting monumental sculpture discovered during recent research at Karahan Tepe, this time zoomorphic, is a stone statue of a bird with clearly marked features—beak, eyes, and wings—interpreted as a vulture statue (Milligan 2023). Bas-reliefs of animals, mainly quadrupeds, were a popular motif in the iconographic canon at Karahan Tepe.

From Nevalı Çori, there are additional examples of monolithic stone monuments known as composite pillars, suggesting a totemic pillar form due to their nature. The most popular pillar depicts a bird figure standing on two human heads (Lichter 2007, 430). Monumental sculptures from the PPNA and PPNB periods also include large anthropomorphic figures, which are mentioned in connection with figurines and statuettes.

Motifs on stone and ceramic vessels constitute another group of material remains through which imagery is manifested. Thus far, no artifacts of this type have been discovered in this area during the PPNA period. However, from the pre-ceramic Neolithic B period, a stone bowl with an anthropomorphic motif, likely depicting a dance scene, was discovered at Nevalı Çori (Pl. 2: 3) (Garfinkel 2003). Zoomorphic and geometric decorations have not been confirmed in the Upper Euphrates Valley during the PPNA and PPNB periods. A similar situation occurred in the Late PPNB and early ceramic Neolithic periods. The full repertoire of decorations, taking various forms, appears in the pre-Halaf period and later periods, where very popular motifs, besides geometric motifs, include predators, snakes, humans with distorted heads and marked eyes, quadruped animals, and plant elements (e.g., Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005; İpek 2019). It is also worth noting that ceramic vessels often appear in fragmentary form, making this type of analysis particularly challenging.

The last group of considered material remains is motifs and decorations on small artifacts. Similar to vessels, such artifacts did not appear in archaeological material in the PPNA period in this area. This situation also occurred from the PPNB period to the end of the early ceramic Neolithic. Decorations on mobile artifacts were confirmed only from the pre-Halaf period for all three forms—anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometric. These include motifs decorating the vessels discussed above, as well as stamp seals, which began to appear in the

pre-Halaf period. Seals were adorned similarly to painted vessels, primarily with geometric motifs, but also featuring human figures such as archers and representations of animals (İpek 2019).

The Konya Plain

In the second of the analyzed areas—the Konya Plain—types of carriers of the imagery sphere will be considered in the same order. The first of them—figurines—was recognizable throughout all analyzed periods, from the Late Aceramic to the end of the Late Neolithic. However, the periods with the most abundant imagery were the Pottery Neolithic and Late Neolithic, during which the *Çatalhöyük* settlement functioned. More than half of all discovered figurines in this settlement are zoomorphic forms, primarily quadrupeds. Following these in terms of percentage are the so-called “abbreviated” forms, which can take on both human and animal representations, then anthropomorphic forms (Pl. 2: 2), with a predominance of male representations, and finally, other or geometric forms (Nakamura *et al.* 2014, 208).

Certainly, among such abbreviated forms, the bone figurine discovered in 2016, with incisions resembling human eyes, can be included (Pawłowska and Barański 2020). Interestingly, such types of figurines were also known from the Late Aceramic Neolithic period in the Boncuklu settlement (Baird 2020, 39). As for zoomorphic forms, quadrupeds prevail; interestingly, in *Çatalhöyük*, there are no bird figurines, despite their popularity in paintings, as will be mentioned below. Recent discoveries in *Çatalhöyük* speak of two head-shaped figurines—both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic heads—found in the so-called “special building”. The figurines themselves could be related to the ritual process of abandoning and filling a room (Marciniak *et al.* 2023).

It is worth examining the context of the discovered figurines in the Konya Plain area. The most important deposition sites for anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and other figurines during the ceramic Neolithic period include refuse dumps. In the Late Neolithic period, these figurines were also deposited in burial contexts, as well as in buildings and rooms of a ritual character (Nakamura *et al.* 2014; Marciniak *et al.* 2023). However, in these places, representations of anthropomorphic figures constitute the largest percentage of figurines.

A noteworthy practice is the removal of heads from anthropomorphic figurines, adding special holes through which a string could be threaded to make a pendant, or combining different materials from which the figurine was made (most commonly clay and marble) (Meskell and Nakamura 2009). Figurines

with movable heads most often depicted female figures (Hodder and Meskell 2011, 248). From the gathered data, it appears that similar practices took place during the Middle and Late Neolithic periods concerning anthropomorphic representations.

Another type of carrier in the realm of imagery is wall paintings—an emblematic form of material culture in the Neolithic period at *Çatalhöyük*. Those with anthropomorphic motifs appear in the ceramic Neolithic and continue until the end of the Neolithic. Most figural scenes depict people in the company of animals—wild birds, probably vultures with outstretched wings (Czeszewska 2014, 192), suggesting a hunting scene (Pl. 3). Notably, the figures in these paintings are devoid of heads. Most paintings from this period are colorful panels with a predominant red pigment. A similar motif of a narrative scene also appears in the Late Neolithic, characterized by a large painting depicting a dominant bull in the foreground, surrounded by much smaller human figures hunting it (Czeszewska 2014).

Zoomorphic paintings, like anthropomorphic ones, were characteristic of the periods from the ceramic Neolithic to the early Chalcolithic. Specifically, zoomorphic motifs constituted the largest percentage of paintings during the initial phase of the settlement's operation. A significant part of these paintings includes representations of wild animals, mainly bulls, aurochs, deer, and the previously mentioned vultures (Czeszewska 2014).

The last of the considered types of representations in the form of paintings—the geometric/abstract type—has been identified since the pre-ceramic Neolithic period. It takes the form of red-decorated floor fragments in Boncuklu and Pınarbaşı (Baird 2012). Subsequently, this type is characteristic of the Ceramic and Late Neolithic periods. Paintings with geometric motifs constitute a significant percentage of all wall representations in the *Çatalhöyük* settlement (Czeszewska 2014). Panels with a single pattern of geometric motifs or more complex arrangements are distinctive. An interesting and relatively common example of paintings is imprints on the wall featuring human hand motifs, which have become one of the symbols of the settlement (Czeszewska 2014, 192).

Reliefs—another example of the imagery sphere—are somewhat less popular than figurines or paintings in the Konya Plain during the analyzed time periods, but several significant patterns can be observed. All types of reliefs—anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometric—were made of clay and were found in domestic spaces. Among the most characteristic examples of anthropomorphic reliefs are representations of human figures from *Çatalhöyük* with raised

arms and legs, often suggesting a dance scene or, according to some researchers, a scene of prayer (Mellaart 1967; Cauvin 2002). The gesture of raised limbs is common in representations of both humans and animals. Among zoomorphic representations, a popular relief depicts a bear with raised limbs and a concentrically marked belly. Other examples of zoomorphic reliefs show leopards facing each other. Animal elements such as claws, horns, or the beaks of predators are also present. The last type of reliefs includes geometric patterns or rosettes, sometimes accompanied by spots, likely imitating fur (Mellaart 1967; Çamurcuoğlu 2015).

The next carrier of the imagery sphere subjected to analysis is larger sculptures, often of monumental proportions. However, unlike the Upper Euphrates Valley area, no remains of such objects representing anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or geometric images have been identified on the Konya Plain thus far. Vessels with clearly marked anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or abstract/geometric decorations have been identified in the Neolithic period on the Konya Plain. Similar to earlier groups of objects, the majority of them pertain to *Çatalhöyük*—the Ceramic Neolithic and Late Neolithic. One particularly intriguing vessel from this site is a unique combination of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations. The so-called “face from *Çatalhöyük*” features images of human faces on both sides of the vessel, parts of which contribute to the bucrania motif (Meskell 2008, 384). Another interesting example of anthropomorphic relief on a clay vessel was discovered in Building 175. The found part of the vessel depicts a fragment of a face and the lower part of an arm (Çiler et al. 2020, 53). Among zoomorphic motifs, a notable example is a fragment of a vessel with relief decoration in the form of a bull's head (Çiler et al. 2020, 54).

The last group of objects subjected to analysis is smaller artifacts, such as palettes, seals, small tools, and toiletries. They were mainly made of clay and stone. Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms of these objects were present during the ceramic Neolithic period. The last type—geometric—was only observable during the Aceramic period. For the other periods of the Neolithic, no such clay objects have been identified, or there is a lack of representative data.

Discussion

A. Changes in the Neolithic Imagery

The analysis of collected materials from both regions, representing two distinct phases in the development of Neolithic communities in the Near East, allows for the formulation of several important conclusions. They indicate that in both areas—in the Upper Euphrates Valley and on the Konya Plain—*imagery* plays a significant role in the period of emerging agricultural communities during this time. Both regions abound with impressive findings in the realm of imagery, but in their nature, forms, and characteristics, one can find numerous similarities and significant differences. These are presented in Table 1.

In the PPNA and PPNB periods in the Upper Euphrates Valley region, as expected, there are numerous examples of symbolic representations, as evidenced by the latest discoveries. Particularly significant for the early Neolithic were monumental forms, such as sculptures or reliefs, primarily in anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms. The former mainly depicted male figures with clearly marked gender characteristics. Thus, these two periods in the Upper Euphrates Valley were rich in symbolic intensity, characterized by spectacular and monumental shapes, a significant presence of male and animal elements, and a low number of smaller objects. On the other hand, the *imagery* in the Late Aceramic Neolithic on the Konya Plain was of a significantly different character. Large, almost monumental forms, such as sculptures or pillars, are virtually absent on the Konya Plain and in the PPN in subsequent Neolithic periods. For this period, a characteristic feature was a low intensity of carriers and rather small forms of imagery—mainly geometric.

An interesting period for the Upper Euphrates Valley seems to be the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, during which a noticeable change in the distribution of carriers and motifs of imagery can be observed. Characteristic features of this period include a low intensity of carriers, the disappearance of large, monumental forms, and a certain inhibition in the emergence of new types of carriers.

In the Early Pottery Neolithic period in the Upper Euphrates Valley, there is a relatively low intensity of carriers, such as small figurines or vessels with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic motifs. Animal and masculine motifs are not as prominent as in the early Neolithic. In contrast, in the Pottery Neolithic period in the Konya Plain, almost all types of carriers and forms are present, except for the monumental ones. Special practices, such as the decapitation of

figurines' heads, are noticeable, and the paintings are rich in motifs of hunting and wildlife.

Further changes in imagery patterns can be observed in the Late Neolithic. In the Upper Euphrates Valley during the pre-Halaf period, small decorated mobile objects appeared, while other carriers were not represented to a great extent. In contrast, the Late Neolithic on the Konya Plain is associated with the continuation of trends from the earlier period, but there is a slightly lower intensity of carriers. Special practices, such as the decapitation of figurines' heads, are still present but to a lesser extent. There are also changes in motifs on wall paintings—predators and hunting scenes are replaced more often by geometric motifs.

Table 1. Presence of all types of imagery in the discussed time periods with comments

	Time periods	Figurines	Comment	Wall-paintings	Comment	Reliefs and monumental statues	Comment	Vessels with motifs	Comment	Small objects with motifs	Comment
Upper Euphrates Valley	Pre-Pottery Neolithic A	Present	Mainly large figurines with a sculptural character	Absent	-	Present	Spectacular pillars richly decorated with reliefs	Absent	-	Absent	-
	Pre-Pottery Neolithic B	Present	Small and large figurines, any type	Absent	-	Present	Pillars, reliefs, and totem poles	Present	One bowl with a dance motif	Absent	-
	Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B	Present	Smaller figurines, any type	Absent	-	Absent	-	Present	A small number of remains	Absent	-
	Early Pottery Neolithic	Present	Smaller figurines, any type	Absent	-	Absent	-	Present	A small number of remains	Absent	-
	Pre-Halaf	Present	Small figurines, any type, also without heads	Absent	-	Absent	-	Present	A small number of remains	Present	All types of forms

<i>Konya Plain</i>	<i>Late Aceramic Neolithic</i>	<i>Present</i>	Small figurines, mainly anthropomorphic and zoomorphic	<i>Present</i>	Only geometric paintings in the form of straight lines	<i>Absent</i>	-	<i>Unknown</i>	Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs	<i>Present</i>	<i>Only geometric forms</i>
	<i>Pottery Neolithic</i>	<i>Present</i>	Figurines of various shapes and forms, also without heads	<i>Present</i>	Every type of paintings	<i>Absent</i>	-	<i>Present</i>	Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs	<i>Present</i>	<i>Varied forms</i>
	<i>Late Neolithic</i>	<i>Present</i>	Figurines of various shapes and forms, also without heads	<i>Present</i>	Every type of paintings, but an increasing prevalence of geometric motifs	<i>Absent</i>	-	<i>Present</i>	-	<i>Present</i>	<i>Only zoomorphic forms</i>

Table 2: Summary of key symbolic features of imagery in the Upper Euphrates Valley and the Konya Plain

Upper Euphrates Valley		Konya Plain	
Time periods	Summary	Time periods	Summary
Pre-Pottery Neolithic A	High intensity of imagery in the form of spectacular and monumental forms, a significant presence of the male and animal element, low number of smaller objects	Late Aceramic Neolithic	Low intensity of carriers, rather small forms, mainly geometric
Pre-Pottery Neolithic B	High intensity of imagery in the form of spectacular and monumental forms, a significant presence of the male and animal element, low number of smaller objects	Pottery Neolithic	Almost all types of carriers and forms are present, except for the monumental ones. Noticeable special treatment practices such as decapitation of figurine heads and motifs of hunting and wild animals
Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B	Low intensity of carriers, disappearance of large, monumental forms	Late Neolithic	Lower intensity of occurrence, but almost all types of carriers and forms are still present, except for the monumental ones. Noticeable special treatment practices such as decapitation of figurine heads
Early Pottery Neolithic	Relatively low intensity of carriers; animal and male motifs are not noticeable		-
Pre-Halaf	Small, decorated mobile objects appear; other carriers are not represented to a great extent		-

B. The Neolithic Imagery and Changes in Religiosity

An attempt to explain the meaning and transformations in the use of *imagery* to understand changes in the belief systems of the Neolithic Near East, based on Whitehouse's models of religiosity, seems to be an interesting but rather challenging endeavor. The interpretation is based on revealed major components of *imagery* in two major regions of the Neolithic Near East (Table 2). Table 3 presents a frame of reference provided by characteristics of two types of religiosity, as defined by Whitehouse (Table 3). I will link individual elements belonging to the sphere of imagery to the characteristics of religiosity models. I will focus only on the so-called "Psychological Features", one of the two aspects encompassed by the DMR theory and interpretable based on the category of *imagery*. The second aspect, *Sociopolitical Features*, does not pertain to the analyzed media of *imagery* in this paper.

The first feature considered by Whitehouse is *Transmissive Frequency*, referring to the frequency of performed rituals. In the imagistic model, the frequency of transmission is low, whereas in the doctrinal model, it is high. The type of carriers may be responsible for this feature in the *imagery* repertoire. While, during the PPNA and PPNB periods in the Upper Euphrates Valley, large carriers are characteristic, forming a cultural landscape element and permanently integrated into the architectural layer, from the Early Pottery Neolithic period onward, carriers are smaller, more mobile, and suggest their everyday use. This may indicate that, in the early Neolithic in the Upper Euphrates Valley, spirituality was an extremely important element of social life, but rituals might have been performed depending on needs or at longer intervals. Their presence may have been permanently woven into the fabric of everyday life only from the Early Pottery Neolithic or even the pre-Halaf period.⁶ Interestingly, this hypothesis is not as clearly noticeable in the Konya Plain, where more distinctive elements of the *imagery* sphere suggesting a transition between the imagistic and doctrinal models are lacking. Indeed, smaller decorative forms suggesting mobility and, consequently, higher frequency appear from the Pottery Neolithic period onwards; however, in the earlier period, there are not very many larger carriers, which are architectural elements.

The second characteristic of the DMR theory is *Level of Arousal* concerning the participants in a given ritual. For the imagistic model, this level is high and associated with strong emotions. For the doctrinal model, on the other hand, the arousal level is low. This characteristic can be linked to the symbolism of specific carriers—especially the symbolism known from the early Neolithic. The PPNA and PPNB periods in the Upper Euphrates Valley are characterized by symbolism related to wild animals and masculinity, which can be interpreted as strength, vitality, and fierceness. These characteristics may be associated with high emotional arousal. Similar symbolism is noticeable in the Konya Plain. Animal motifs, especially in the form of predators and vultures, are particularly evident in wall paintings, while masculine motifs are seen in figurines. This is noticeable in the Pottery Neolithic period; in the subsequent period, this symbolism gradually becomes less apparent.

⁶ However, it is worth bearing in mind the significant socio-economic differences between the Neolithic period and the pre-Halaf period. In the pre-Halaf period, more distinct manifestations of social hierarchy are observed, particularly in religious and administrative aspects, which are reflected in the emergence and widespread use of various items, including seals (e.g., Duistermaat 2012).

The third characteristic considered in the DMR theory is *Principal Memory System*, which is episodic/flashbulb for the imagistic model and is based on semantic schémas and implicit scripts for the doctrinal model. The fourth characteristic relates to the *Ritual Meaning*, which can be internally generated for the imagistic model and learned for the doctrinal model. However, these characteristics seem challenging to verify based solely on the imagery layer and will not be further developed in this article.

The fifth determinant of the DMR theory—*Techniques of Revelation*—can be associated with specific carriers of imagery. While, according to Whitehouse, the imagistic model is linked to iconicity, multivocality, and multivalence, the doctrinal model, as in other cases, is directly opposite, associated with a certain rhetoric and logical integration. These characteristics are evident in the quantity, size, and forms of imagery carriers. In the first two Neolithic periods in the Upper Euphrates Valley, we observe monumentality in carriers and complex forms that combine human figures with animal figures, as seen in reliefs on composite pillars and the relief known from Sayburç. Unusual combinations of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs, as well as a rich repertoire of motifs in this period, can be associated with polyphony and greater expressiveness than was noticeable in later periods. On the Konya Plain, the mentioned combination of motifs and their large quantity is visible in wall paintings, especially from the Pottery Neolithic period. The Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (LPPNB) period for the Upper Euphrates Valley is when the techniques of revelation of the imagistic model begin to fade, but the characteristics of the doctrinal model are not yet fully distinctive and unequivocal in the remaining Neolithic periods. The Late Neolithic on the Konya Plain also shows a lower intensity of imagery carriers and polyphony in the form of more sophisticated figurines or paintings. However, interpreting the repertoire of imagery from this period in terms of rhetoric or logical integration is not entirely clear and justified based on the collected data.

Table 3. Models of religiosity according to H. Whitehouse (after Whitehouse 2008, 111)

<i>Characteristic feature</i>	<i>Imagistic mode</i>	<i>Doctrinal mode</i>
Transmissive frequency	Low	High
Level of arousal	High	Low
Principal memory system	Episodic/flash-bulb memory	Semantic schémas & implicit scripts
Ritual meaning	Internally generated	Learned
Techniques of revelation	Iconicity, multivocality, and multivalence	Rhetoric, logical integration, narrative

Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the imagery sphere in the Upper Euphrates Valley and the Konya Plain has demonstrated both similarities and significant differences in the groups of imagery carriers in the examined time periods. These similarities and differences pertain to the presence of imagery carrier types and their characteristic features, such as size and form (zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, or other). Recent discoveries from sites like Karahan Tepe, Sayburç, and Çatalhöyük further confirm these observations. What is essential and common to both regions is the type of symbolism derived from the interpretation of imagery carriers. Despite different temporal dynamics, remnants in both areas can be associated with attributes like strength, vitality, and masculinity. It is also reasonable to attribute to them shared characteristics such as expressiveness, polyphony, narrativity, static or mobile nature, and rhetoric.

The above conclusions stem from both the comparative analysis and the adopted research perspective embodied by Whitehouse's DMR model, which effectively encapsulates the essence of the analyzed data. Certainly, features of both the imagistic and doctrinal models are visible in both analyzed regions. In the case of the Upper Euphrates Valley, the imagistic model emerged in the PPNA period and was prominently observable in the forms of imagery present in both the PPNA and PPNB periods. The transition to a doctrinal belief system, however, occurred less distinctly and was spread over time. Signs of this model are evident in the pre-Halaf period. In the Konya Plain, the beginning of the imagistic model can be associated with the Pottery Neolithic period, indi-

cating that, like other features of the “Neolithic package”, this model appeared secondarily in comparison to the Upper Euphrates Valley. What is interesting, however, is the dynamics of changes, which appear significantly faster on the Konya Plain. Despite distinct changes, certain indications of the imagery sphere suggest that the doctrinal model developed during the Late Neolithic period in the Konya Plain.

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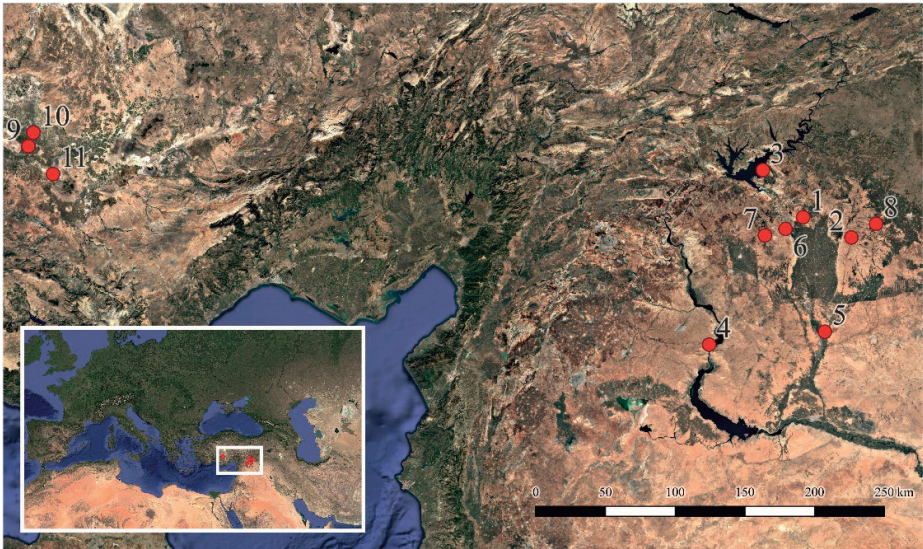
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PLATE 1



1. Göbekli Tepe, 2. Karahan Tepe, 3. Nevalı Çori, 4. Tell Halula, 5. Tell Sabi Abyad, 6. Şanlıurfa-Yeni Mahalle, 7. Sayburç, 8. Sefer Tepe, 9. Çatalhöyük, 10. Boncuklu Höyük, 11. Pınarbaşı

1



2

Pl. 1: 1 – Map of sites mentioned in the text (Author: Kamila Niziołek)

Pl. 1: 2 – Monumental pillars in the shape of phalluses from Karahan Tepe, photograph by A. Marciniak

PLATE 2



1



2



3

Pl. 2: 1 - The male figure situated between leopards from Sayburç,
 photograph by K. Akdemir (after Özdoğan 2022, fig. 6)

Pl. 2: 2 - Small anthropomorphic figurine from Çatalhöyük,
 Çatalhöyük Research Project (own archive)

Pl. 2: 3 - A dancing scene on a bowl from Nevalı Çori, (after Hauptmann 1999, fig. 16)

PLATE 3



1a



1b

Pl. 3: 1a-b – Çatalhöyük Wall Paintings: a) Çatalhöyük, Bull hunting scene; b) Çatalhöyük Stag Hunting Scene Copies of painting on plaster. 6th millennium BC (after Ayten 2019, 17)