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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Ritual as a Social Phenomenon in Ancient Near Eastern Societies

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**Abstract:** One of the most complex issues in understanding the evolution of human society is religion. However, religion in this sense is not the spiritual dimension of confessional or rhetorical form; rather it is a social phenomenon that has long been considered as one of the fundamental components of human society. Archaeological excavations often lead to the unearthing of movable and immovable objects that bear an obvious symbolic insignia; this is suggestive of the roles of beliefs and convictions in the formation of these objects. For instance, during the Neolithic period in some archeological sites such as Catalhoyuk in Anatolia, Sheikhiabad in Kermanshah and a number of other sites in the Near East, some objects were found that can be considered as symbolic made for specific purposes according to humans' rituals and beliefs. In the present article, we study the views and theories of anthropologists and sociologists about religions, and the views of archaeologists about symbolism and religion in the contemporary world and in the beginning of the Neolithic period. Employing an interpretive approach, we examine and analyze possible intentions behind construction and functions of these symbolic objects.

**Keywords:** Social Phenomenon; Religion; Society; Early Neolithic; Symbol; Ritual; Totem.

## Introduction

One of the most complex issues in understanding the evolution of human society—from its simplest forms to the most complex—is the category of religion. However, religion in this sense is not the spiritual dimension of confessional or rhetorical form, but rather it is a social phenomenon that has long been considered as one of the fundamental components of human society. Contrary to conventional understanding in the social sciences which examines religion and ritual through the history of the agricultural period and then the history of the industrial period, we believe that the genealogy of religion requires an understanding of human life in a broader sense among which archaeology reconstructs one of the key epistemological models that has not yet been seriously studied and critiqued by social scientists. Owing to different reasons, scholars in the field of religion and social sciences fail to cover a broader period of time. We are of the idea that the time is ripe for social sciences in Iran to pay special attention to the basic propositions of archaeology in understanding the issue of religion and study and critique the genealogy of religion and ritual with a broader perspective. It is interesting to note that archeologists have long been possessed with the movable and immovable discoveries which

are usually decorative and symbolic to find out the whys and wherefores of their construction and functionality.

The study of symbols and objects has been a research interest of scholars for years. One of these scholars is Collin Renfrew and Paul Bahn who has been trying to figure out what the ancients were thinking about (See Renfrew and Bahn, 2015). The study of such symbols and objects enables the scholars to structure the symbols and conduct cognitive studies in the hope of learning about the beliefs, thoughts and rituals of ancient people. Scholars study symbolism and its relationship with human life developments through the recognition of initial rituals.

## Religious Studies

David Hume was the first scholar to discuss religion, its origin and its evolutionary stages in his '*The Natural History of Religion,*' and considered polytheism as the first form of religion (Fazaei, 1977: 65). He believed that the first religious beliefs emanated from early humans' concern about life events and from their consternations and hopes that drive human thought (Ibid: 78). Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), the German linguist, was another scholar who had conducted research in the field of religion; he is known as the founder

of comparative studies on rituals. However, it is interesting to note that it was anthropologists and sociologists who studied the religious aspects and beliefs, and then categorized religion while living amongst the Native American tribes and the Aborigines of Australia, Oceania, and Africa. One such scholar was John Lubbock, the American anthropologist, who enumerated a five-stage evolution for religion through a lineal theory: 1. Atheism; 2. Naturalism or Totemism; 3. Animism; 4. Idolatry and polytheism; 5. Monotheism (Fazaei, 1977: 69). Edward Burnett Tylor, in his *Religion in Primitive Culture* (1958), also developed a notion of three stages of social evolution: animism ('belief that a spirit or spirits is active in aspects of the environment' (Hinnells, 1995: 41)); polytheism (belief in, or worship of, many gods); and monotheism (belief in, or worship of, one god) (Bowie, 2000: 15; Insoll, 2004: 46).

James George Frazer also studied the principles of magic and sorcery, and he explored the relationship between magic and science in his book *The Golden Bough* (1890). Of particular importance to Frazer were: a) magic, religion, science; b) idolatry, animism, polytheism, and monotheism (Fakuhi, 2014: 133).

Emile Durkheim also studied religion in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim, 1995). In fact, he came to focus on perhaps the ultimate form of a nonmaterial social fact—religion—in his last major work. Durkheim examined primitive society in order to find the roots of religion. Specifically, in the case he studied, the clan was the source of a primitive kind of religion, totemism, in which things like plants and animals are deified. Totemism, in turn, was seen as a specific type of nonmaterial social fact, a form of the collective conscience. In the end, Durkheim came to argue that society and religion (or, more generally, the collective conscience) was one and the same. Religion was the way society expressed itself in the form of a nonmaterial social fact (Ritzer, 2011: 20).

Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus considered cognitive archaeology to be the study of all aspects of ancient cultures produced by the human mind: the perception, description, and classification of the universe (cosmology); the nature of the supernatural (religion); the principles, philosophies, ethics, and values by which human societies are governed (ideology); the ways in which aspects of the world, the supernatural, or human values are conveyed in art (iconography); and all other forms of human intellectual and symbolic behavior that survive

in the archaeological record (Flannery and Marcus, 1993: 261).

Collin Renfrew and Paul Bahn also took the pioneering step by disciplining cognitive archaeology and launching a new strategy called 'Ancient Thought.' He examined and analyzed the symbols and maintained that there are at least 5 different uses to which symbols are put:

- 1) A basic step is the establishment of place by marking and delimiting territory and the territory of the community, often with the use of symbolic markers and monuments, thereby constructing a perceived landscape, generally with a sacred as well as a secular dimension, a land of memories.
- 2) A fundamental cognitive step was the development of symbols of measurement – as in units of time, length, and weight – which help us organize our relationships with the natural world.
- 3) Symbols allow us to cope with the future world, as instruments of planning. They help us define our intentions more clearly, by making models for some future intended action, for example plans of towns or cities.
- 4) Symbols are used to regulate and organize relations between human beings. Money is a good example of this, and with it the whole notion that some material objects have a higher value than others. Beyond this is a broader

category of symbols, such as the badges of rank in an army, that have to do with the exercise of power in a society.

- 5) Symbols are used to represent and to try to regulate human relations with the Other World, the world of the supernatural or the transcendental – which leads on to the archaeology of religion and cult (Renfrew and Bahn, 2015: 260).

### **Symbolism in Archaeological Records**

Paul Mellars, the British Archeologist, argues that “symbols defined as ‘anything, be it object, sign, gesture or vocal expression which in some way refers to or represents something beyond itself’” (Mellars, 1996, cited in Insoll, 2004: 26). Debate persists over the origins of ‘symbolic’ behavior linked with what historians of religions call ‘homo symbolicus’, defined by Ries (1994: 6) as being the result of imagination, meaning ‘man [sic] grasps the invisible by means of the visible and can become the creator of culture and cultures (Ries, 1994: 6, cited in Insoll, 2004: 46).

An engraved fragment of mammal bone which was discovered along with two pieces of ochre ‘deliberately engraved with abstract patterns interpreted as symbolic, meaningful representations’ from Blombos Cave, another Middle Stone Age site also in South Africa (D’Errico et al., 2001: 309).

The site of Klasies River Mouth in South Africa contains the remains of early modern humans, are not from conventional burials but show evidence of charring, ‘impact fractures and cut marks’, possibly consistent with cannibalism, ‘inspired by ritual rather than hunger’ (Deacon and Deacon, 1999: 104-105). Or burials of Neanderthals in various areas such as Shanidar Cave (Solecki, 1971), Cobra Cave (Bar-Yosef et al., 1992; Pettitt, 2002), Krapina (Minugh-Purvis et al., 2000), Guattari (White and Thoth, 1991) and other similar sites have led anthropologists and archaeologists to express different views on these practices. Some scholars have considered Neanderthal burial to be intentional in parallel with the complexity of the brain and social relations. Others, however, can trace ritual ideas in burials (Smirnov, 1989).

Similarly, burial ceremonies and shamanism, and the construction of abstract and artistic objects in caves continued in the Neolithic period as well (Bar-Yosef, 2007). The burial of children in Sungir, Russia never ceases to fascinate archeologists and other scholars. This mortuary site contains elaborate burials of a boy and a girl buried together covered in ochre, and next to them were placed embellishments such as pendants, mammoth ivory spears and ivory beads (Formicola, 2007). However, scholars such as Cauvin

consider the Neolithic revolution and the critical human transition from hunting-gathering to agriculture-animal husbandry to be the culmination of symbolism and rituals, and label this period as the ‘Revolution of Symbols.’ Cauvin maintains that the fundamental changes and developments of this period are related to the changes in the system of human thinking and beliefs. Technological and economic changes in the Neolithic period followed the Revolution of Symbols and are characterized by the images of a bull and a female (Cauvin, 2000). Although we see patterns of symbolism in the Old, Middle, and New Paleolithic periods as it has been described earlier, it is in the Neolithic period that symbolism becomes widespread, and it is this broad distribution of rituals and symbolism in the Neolithic period that prompted scholars like Cauvin to call it the period of the ‘Revolution of Symbols.’

During the Neolithic period, symbolism and belief in the Near East intensified concurrently with the economic transformation and the need to domesticate plants and animals that required human cooperation; the symbolism went beyond the making of symbolic objects such as stone and mud sculptures, pendants, ivory beads, and the like and instead the construction of monumental buildings with special functions for the unity

between the tribes became popular. A prominent example is the construction of memorial building supported by massive stone pillars in Göbekli Tepe situated in Southeast Anatolia. Klaus Schmidt and his colleagues argue that these buildings were constructed by wandering hunters-gatherers who were working together to protect their grains from wild animals such as gazelles and zebras. This probably led to forming a basic social organization of the various tribes in the area (Kleus-Dieter Linsmeier, 2003; cited in Shaikh Baikloo, 2013).

### **Catalhoyuk Site**

The Catalhoyuk site is located 32 km southeast of the present-day Konya and 11 km south of Çumra in Turkey. During the years 1961-1965, James Mellaart, the British archeologist, excavated this area which belongs to the Neolithic period (6500 to 5700 BC) (Firuzmandi Shirejini, 2010: 62-63). These excavations unearthed forty shrines many of which were decorated with murals, relief carvings, and bulls' heads. These paintings show men hunting wild bulls, and also people who are dancing and performing burial rites (Firuzmandi Shirejini, 2010: 90). Statues of women have also been unearthed in this site (Firuzmandi Shirejini, 2010: 78). The bulls' horns and heads in normal sizes were hung on

the walls of the shrines in two or three rows (Firuzmandi Shirejini, 2010: 91). There was a bench in a room with six pairs of wild bull horns along the bench, as well as burials on the building platform.

### **Sheikhiabad Site**

Sheikhiabad is located in Kortavij, a village in Sahneh in the province of Kermanshah. This one-hectare site was identified in 2003 and excavated in the following years. Excavations of the second trench led to the discovery of two buildings. The second building which is T-shaped and has an area of 2 by 4 meters has thicker walls than the first building, which is 80 cm in diameter. The building is aligned along a north-south axis. On the south side, the horned head of 4 goats and the horned head of a wild sheep were very carefully implanted, and one of them had ocher flowers rubbed all over the teeth. The discovery of these 4 goats' horned heads and that of a wild sheep along with the thicker wall had led the archeologists to name this room as the 'Holy Room.' Based on the bone piece of the goat or the sheep found on the floor of this building, archeologist construed that the building was constructed circa 7590 BC, which is associated with the newest settlement of Sheikhiabad where nomadic hunters lived (Mohammadifar et al., 2010). Archaeologists in the Sheikhiabad site

have maintained that ritual activities were carried out in the second building - the Holy Room (Mohammadifar et al., 2011). It has also been mentioned sites that were probably ritual in the later periods in western Iran (See Hejebri Nobari., et al., 2022).

Although archaeology fails in reading human thoughts and intentions in the distant past, Ethnoarchaeology can overcome such shortcomings to some extent by methodizing and disciplining cognitive archaeology. Prior to delving into the probable function of archeological discoveries, we will first address totem and totemism among Native American and Australian tribes.

### **Totem and Totemism**

Totem and totemism has been one of the most important research interests for many anthropologists and sociologists. Totems could be animals, plants, or geographic features. Groups of people in every tribe have special totems. The members of each totemic group believed themselves to be descendants of their totem. They usually do not kill or eat their totem animals. However, this taboo was suspended once a year, when people assembled for ceremonies dedicated to the totem. Only on that occasion were they allowed to kill and eat their totem. These annual rites were believed to

be necessary for the totem's survival and reproduction (Kottak, 2017: 242).

Durkheim believes that the totem is not simply a name; it is an emblem, a true coat of arms, and its resemblance to the heraldic coat of arms has often been commented upon ... The totem is in fact a design that corresponds to the heraldic emblems of the civilized nations, and each person is authorized to wear it as proof of the identity of the family to which he belongs (Durkheim, 1995: 111). Totemic decorations suggest that the totem is not merely a name and an emblem. They are used during religious ceremonies and are part of the liturgy: Thus, while the totem is a collective label, it also has a religious character. In fact, things are classified as sacred and profane by reference to the totem. It is the very archetype of sacred things (Durkheim, 1995: 118).

Totem is, indeed, a symbol of the unity and solidarity of a tribe through which links are established between members of a tribe. Members of a tribe make an attempt to unite with their totem and gain the power of that totem. For instance, members of some North American tribes would artistically disguise themselves as their totem animals in order to gain the power of that totem. A prominent example of such tribe is the North American Omaha Tribe where some people would wear two bundles of hair on their heads like the two

horns of a buffalo, and some other would place a lock of hair vertically on their head to indicate a buffalo mane on the back. Another group of people that had a bird totem put some hair on their forehead and back of their head to bring back the image of the beak and tail of that totem (Shankai, 2007: 50).

Every clan has a totem that belongs to it alone; two different clans of the same tribe cannot have the same one. Indeed, one is part of a clan only by virtue of having a certain name. So all who bear this name are members of it in the same right; however, scattered across the tribal territory they may be, they all have the same kin relations with one another. In consequence, two groups that have the same totem can only be two sections of the same clan. It is common for a clan not to reside in the same place, but to have members in different places. Even so, the clan's unity is felt, though it has no geographical basis (Durkheim, 1995: 100-101).

The Algonquin people were the North American inhabitants forming three important tribes including Wabanaki (easterners) on the northeast coast, Cree Ojibwa in the middle, and Blackfoot in western North America (Shankai, 2007: 78). Totem played an important role in the lives of these tribes, and each attributed itself to a giant animal. The guardian spirit of a man was associated with the tribal totem. The

totem of a clan was, indeed, a guardian spirit of an ancestor that was revealed to him during sleep and in adulthood. If someone had to kill the totem animal, they would have asked for forgiveness first and then presented a part of the animal's body to the guardian spirit or Manitou (Shankai, 2007: 79).

In the great majority of cases, the objects that serve as totems belong to either the plant or animal kingdom but mainly to the latter. Inanimate things are used much more rarely. Of more than 500 totemic names listed by Howitt from among the tribes of the Australian Southwest, barely forty are not names of either plants or animals: They are clouds, rain, moon, sun, wind, autumn, winter, thunder, fire, water, red ochre, and sea (Durkheim, 1995: 101-102).

According to Frazer The clan totem is revered by a body of men and women who call themselves by the name of the totem, believe themselves to be of one blood, descendants of a common ancestor, and are bound together by common obligations to each other and by a common faith in the totem. Totemism is thus both a religious and a social system. In its religious aspect it consists of the relations of mutual respect and protection between a man and his totem; in its social aspect it consists of the relations of the clansmen to each other and to men of other clans (Frazer, 1910: 2-3).



## Discussion and Results

It is a too simplistic analysis to regard the above-mentioned archeological sites' discoveries as just a work of art that residents of Catalhoyuk in Anatoli and Sheikhiabad of Kermanshah painted the heads of bull, sheep, and goat and mounted them on the wall just for fun.

John Halverson had a similar stand and used the theory of 'art for art's sake' many years ago to interpret the cave paintings from the Paleolithic period. He believed that these works were, in fact, the foundations of art, expressed directly through perceptual reaction, and were the product of the first human thought indicating the growing human intelligence (Halverson, 1987: 63).

Although human aesthetics is an important issue that cannot be overlooked, it is hard to believe that such discoveries were just painted for fun in those sites. It is needless to acknowledge that illustrations have a decorative and aesthetic aspect for human beings today, but they had functional and crucial aspects in life for prehistoric human beings. Since goats and sheep are not as agile as deer and gazelle, it is easier to hunt and trap them than other animals, and they are easy prey for predators. On the other hand, since goat, sheep, and bull were sources of protein needed by humans, they were deemed very valuable in

prehistoric times; therefore, it was no surprise that primitive men tried to hunt and control those animals.

Goat has been used in a stylized way and with a symbolic sign in different cultures. Like the Ram, the he-goat symbolizes the powers of procreation, the life force, the libido and fertility, but at times this becomes the likeness of opposites since the ram is a solar creature of the day while the goat, more often than not, is a lunar creature of the night (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996: 435). This animal was once worshipped as the embodiment of the fertility of flocks, herds and humans; identified with the Sumerian fertility gods, Tammuz and Ningirsu. In Hindu mythology, as a sacrificial animal, it was the mount of Agni (Hall, 1996: 26).

Tragedy means, in Greek, 'goatsong', and it was originally the hymn sung ritually during the sacrifice of a goat at Dionysiac festivals. Dionysos was the god to whom goats were especially sacred and who made them his chosen victims (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996: 435).

To the Ancient Greeks, the she-goat symbolized lightning and the star of that name in the constellation Auriga, like Amalthea, the she-goat which suckled Zeus, heralded storms and rain. Also the Lord appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning. In

memory of this manifestation, the covering of the tabernacle was woven from goat-hair (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996: 437).

Bulls and cows had the same significant place in human life and had always been a symbol of fertility, life, and the source of fertilization and pregnancy (Warner, 2007: 506-509). Extremely rich protein sources, vigor and a number of other features allowed this animal to have an important role in human life and keep its position in human life. This animal has always had a ritualistic and important position in the mythologies of various lands including Iran, India, Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the discoveries of those archeological sites are not merely works of art given the significance of goats, sheep, and bulls. Scholars such as Eliade, calls for an understanding of 'homo religiosus' to be obtained, in part, through analogy with 'primitive societies' so that 'studying the rural societies of Europe provides some basis for understanding the religious world of the Neolithic cultivators' (Eliade, 1959: 164-165; Insoll, 2004: 55). Taken this into consideration and according to what has already been said about totem and totemism, we argue that the discoveries of Sheikhiabad, Catalhoyuk and other similar sites in the Near East are related to totem and totemism.

Evidently, the goat, sheep and bull were the totem of the residents of those areas which is why the residents had placed the heads of goats, sheep and bulls in a special room as their totem poles. In fact, the head of a goat and a sheep in the Sheikhiabad site, and the head of a bull in Catalhoyuk, had the status of a totem pole which represented the tribe and was implanted in a place where rituals were held. Following Frazer's theory of improving subsistence, members of the tribe provided their food sources from animals and plants. In prehistoric Middle Eastern societies, goats, sheep and bulls were the most important sources of protein for humans, and they had always been concerned how to hunt, control and obtain these valuable animals. The dependence of human livelihood on these animals and their profitability in the climate and environment of the Middle East had prompted man to devise a way for controlling these animals in order to have permanent access to them, and then to protect and multiply them. Since goats and sheep are not as agile as deer and gazelle, it is easier to hunt and trap them than other animals, and therefore, they are easy prey for predators.

Humans' heavy dependence on these valuable animals instigated them to consider animals sacred. To ensure that they have enough food resources, on the one hand, they

started thinking about devising ways to control their hunting, and on the other hand, they planned to have more multiplication and propagation. By the same token, the rationale behind sanctifying the animals and believing that these animals are their ancestors and totem was to prevent them from indiscriminate hunting. Thus, members of each totem group usually did not kill or eat their totem animals, but the taboo was lifted occasionally in times of holding rituals when they sacrificed the animal to meet their protein needs. The tribal elders would teach the younger generation the ways and tradition of preparing food as well as breeding, multiplication and propagations of their totem. The sacrifice of animals in rituals, indeed, unites the person with his totem which is a symbol of society and its people.

Marvin Harris proposed the theory of "Cultural Materialism" in his 1968 book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. Harris then directed field studies based on this theory and composed the book *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* in 1974, and *Cannibals and Kings: Origins of Cultures* in 1978. following Marvin Harris's theory of cultural materialism, the economic and ecological rationality of the people (Harris, 1978) goats and sheep in the Sheikhiabad site it has been important. The archeological record

shows that 53.4% of the total bones found in the Sheikhiabad area were bones of goats and sheep; the ratio of goat to sheep was 6 to 1 (Mohammadifar et al., 2011). Bulls also has a prominent place in Catalhoyuk area. Durkheim writes that in Central Australia in the Arunta tribe, a ceremony called *talo* or *intichiuma* is held with the presence of tribal elders whose job is to train the younger generation to produce and propagate totems by magical performance (Azadegan, 1993: 109). The discovery of murals in Catalhoyuk portraying dancing and prancing somehow confirms that rituals were held in this area. Therefore, it makes sense to argue that the inhabitants of these areas guaranteed their livelihood and survival by believing in the totem and their valuable animal. As noted earlier, Frazer is of the idea that the connection between a man and his totem is mutually beneficent. The totem provides the man's livelihood and protects the man, and the man shows his respect for the totem by preserving it and considering it sacred and by not killing it indiscriminately. The lack of enough samples in these archeological sites makes it hard to discuss how they tamed the animals; the discoveries of bones of the goats and sheep led archeologists to consider them wild animals (Mohammadifar et al., 2011). Although they were not engaged in the multiplication and propagation of these

animals, they had always been concerned to control and prevent indiscriminate hunting.

Belief in the totem in society had ensured the solidarity and cohesion of the society and its survival. In the light of Emile Durkheim's views concerning the collective spirit of totemism, we argue that social grouping is the source of everything that a human being possesses. Recognizing the behavior, words and thoughts of individuals is only possible through the recognition of the social group that nurtures them (Azadegan, 1993: 158). Durkheim considers tribe as the basis of primitive communities that recognizes the totemic system as the controller of tribal relations and the moderator of social movements. Since the name and sign of the tribe are borrowed from the totem, the tribe is equally respected as the totem by its members (Durkheim 1965: 134, 194, 236 cited in Azadegan, 1993: 159). Thus, a society, at least in prehistoric communities, bestows prestige and status to the individual, and the individuals find their position within society and tribe. Hence belief in the totem brought up social solidarity. Taking this into consideration, it is now evident that belief in the totem in the above-mentioned archeological sites had led to the social solidarity of the inhabitants of those areas, and served as a factor in protecting their own territory and resisting against not only

hunter-gatherers entering their territory to hunt animals such as goats, sheep and bulls, but also against wild animals that were a threat to both their totems and themselves.

On the other hand, the transition from the post-Paleolithic to the Neolithic period, and the modification of lifestyle and livelihood from the hunter-gatherer to the agriculture-animal husbandry led to a change in attitude and the subsequent social construction. Archaeologists study both the Paleolithic objects and the ethnography of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies. The ethnographic documents reveal that band was the most common form of political organization among hunter-gatherer societies. The band was a fairly small group of people tied together by close kinship relations (Scupin, 2011: 141). The ethnographic studies in contemporary societies help us conclude that humans in the Paleolithic period lived with kinship relations in smaller bands. In the transition from Paleolithic to Neolithic, the social structure changes from a band society to a tribal society. The change of human beliefs in the Near East during the Neolithic period concurrent with economic modifications and the need to domesticate plants and animals demanded the cooperation and collaboration of humans. That is why believing in totem led to social solidarity and consequent constructions of memorial buildings. Residents in

Sheikhiabad constructed a building with a special and different architecture in the shape of “T”, and Catalhoyuk’s residents constructed several shrines to augment this solidarity and social organization through congregation of inhabitants believing in the totem of goats,

sheep and bulls. As the dancing and prancing murals in Catalhoyuk indicate, these congregations would usually lead to special rituals.

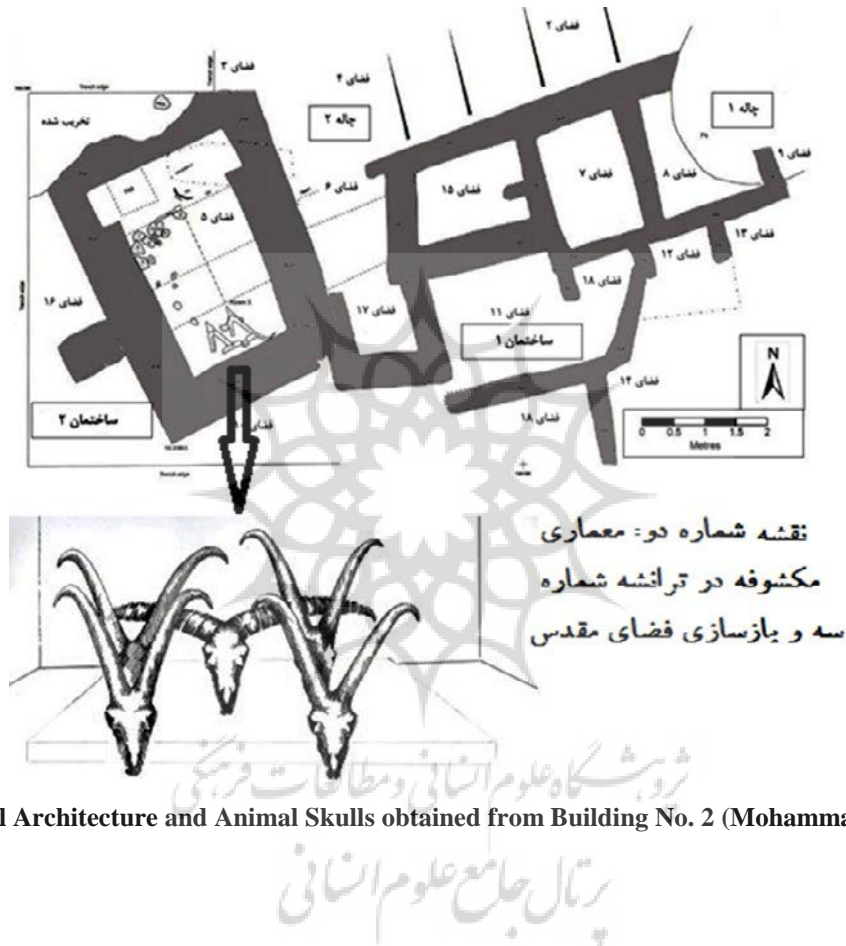


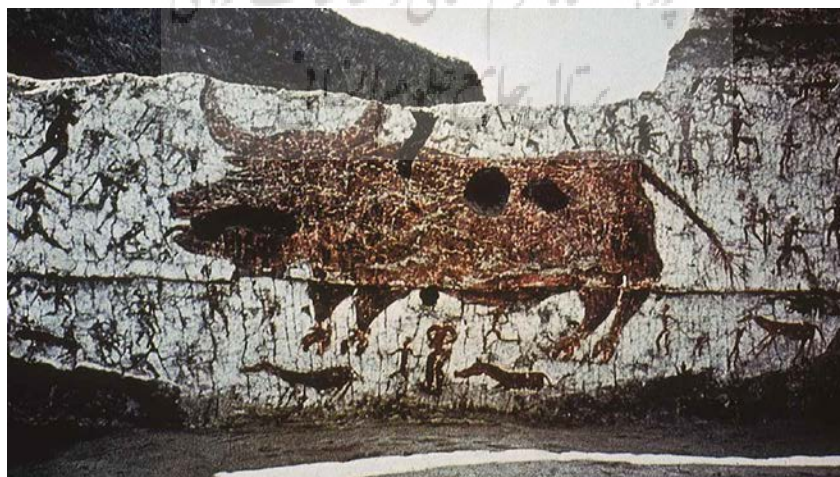
Fig. 1. Special Architecture and Animal Skulls obtained from Building No. 2 (Mohammadifar et al., 2011)



**Fig. 2.** Animal Skulls obtained from Building Number 2 (Mohammadifar et al., 2011)



**Fig. 3.** Cow Horn in the Çatalhöyük Site (<http://www.catalhoyuk.com>)



**Fig. 4.** Cattle Hunting Wall Painting in Çatalhöyük Site

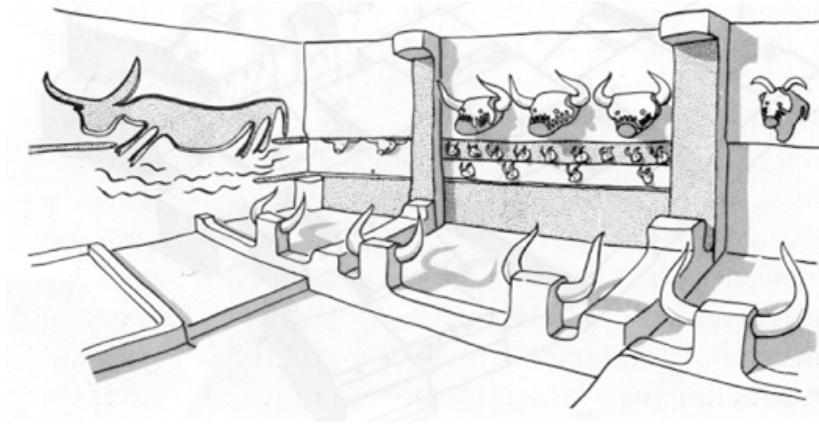


Fig. 5. Cow Horns and Heads with Paintings at Çatalhöyük Site



Fig. 5. The North American Indian next to their Totem Pole

([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward\\_Curtis\\_Image\\_005.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward_Curtis_Image_005.jpg))


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## آیین، امری اجتماعی در جوامع خاور نزدیک باستان

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چکیده: یکی از مسائل بسیار پیچیده در فهم تحول و تطور جامعه انسانی مقوله دین است. البته هنگامی که از دین سخن می‌گوییم بُعد معنوی کلامی یا اعتقادی آن مد نظر نیست بلکه دین به مثابه امری اجتماعی مد نظر است که از دیرباز به عنوان یکی از مؤلفه‌های بنیادین و اساسی جامعه بشری نقش آفرینی کرده است. کاوش‌های باستان‌شناسی گاه به یافت اشیاء منقول و غیرمنقولی می‌انجامد که وجه نمادین بسیار بارز و روشنی دارند که می‌توان گفت بر پایه باورها و اعتقاداتی شکل گرفته است. در برخی از محوطه‌های باستانی در خاور نزدیک در دوره آغاز نوسنگی همچون محوطه چاتال هویوک در آناتولی، شیخی‌آباد در کرمانشاه و شماری محوطه دیگر اشیایی یافت شده است که می‌توان آنها را اشیایی نمادین قلمداد کرد که برای هدف خاصی که به احتمال آیینی و مربوط به باورمندی انسان بوده ساخته شده‌اند. نگارندگان در این مقاله، به آراء و نظریه‌های انسان‌شناسان و جامعه‌شناسان درباره دین‌ها و همچنین باستان‌شناسان درباره نمادگرایی و آیین در جهان در سده‌های اخیر و در دوره آغاز نوسنگی می‌پردازند و با رویکردی تفسیرگرایانه، هدف احتمالی ساخت یا اعمال مربوط به این اشیاء نمادین را بررسی و تحلیل می‌کنند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: امر اجتماعی؛ دین؛ جامعه؛ آغاز نوسنگی؛ نماد؛ آیین؛ توتم



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