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WHAT DOES GÖBEKLİ TEPE, THE WORLD'S OLDEST TEMPLE, TELL US IN TERMS OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGY?¹

Dr. Hasan ÖZALP²

ABSTRACT

Göbekli Tepe is regarded as one of the oldest temples of the humanity according to archaeologists. In this work, by going back twelve thousand years, we will attempt both to provide information about this structure and to make interpretations by highlighting the theological and philosophical associations of this structure. In our study, we will examine Göbekli Tepe not from the perspective of archaeology and history of art but from that of philosophy of religion and religious symbolism. In our research, we benefit from the data of archeology and historical geography. The basic aim of this search is archaeological data that is obtained in the region and to evaluate these data based on the historical geography and the history of religions. When it is, we have interpreted according to language of religion and religious symbolism. As a result, contrary to popular belief, we saw important reasons Göbekli Tepe area that is sacred structures, the people of the Stone Age is not primitive and faith is as old as humanity. We have reached the conclusion that must be rethought the development of hu-

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2 Assoc. Prof. Dr., Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Faculty of Theology. ozalphan66@gmail.com

man civilization on the Göbekli Tepe Temples. Our main objective is to connect Göbekli Tepe with philosophical and theological literature and to propose a method and subject as to how to accomplish this. Thus, our study is just an attempt at interpretation.

Key Words: Temple of Göbekli Tepe, Stone Age, Religious Symbolism, Archaeology and Anthropology, Philosophy of Religion.

Known as the fertile crescent, the Upper Mesopotamia spans the most ancient settlements of the human history. This area occupies Urfa and Harran regions in the southeastern part of our country. A student of Aristotle, Alexander of Macedonia named this place as Edessa to reminisce about the lands where he had grown up (Schmidt, 2007: 24). Urfa and Harran are two magical cities where religions and myths have emerged. This region is known by Anatolian people as the “city of prophets”. This is the region where many civilizations such as the archaic Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Chaldean states were established and collapsed. According to divine religions, Prophet Abraham, who is regarded as the father of monotheistic faiths, lived in this region for seventy-five years (Genesis, 11 / 31-32; Gündüz, 2006: I, 54). The Romans named this region as *Hellonopolis*, meaning a pagan city (Weir, 1987: V-1, 299). This is because it is one of the most significant areas of settlement for paganism in Mesopotamia where temples devoted to Shamash, the solar deity, and Sin, the lunar deity (Şeşen, 1997: XVI, 237) are located. In addition, Sabians (Mandaeans), who are among the significant representatives of the gnostic belief, and who trace their creeds back to Prophet Adam (Karakaş, 2009: 38), lived in this region. Therefore, it is also possible to interpret the history of this region with reference to an earlier era when Prophet Adam, who is regarded as the first human being, was created, as this region also covers the Garden of Eden, which is mentioned in the Torah and where Prophet Adam was domiciled. The relevant passage from the Old Testament is as follows:

“Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden. And there he put the man (Adam) he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four head-

waters. The name of the first is the Pishon. It winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin[a] and onyx are also there. The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.” (Genesis: 2/8-14)

It is understood from these statements that the Euphrates and the Tigris are rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden. In this context, we can trace the history of the region and, hence, of the people of the region back to much earlier times. Furthermore, it can be deduced that humanity originated from these regions and civilization started to overflow from the Near East.

Today, the region spanning Urfa and Harran attracts the attention of especially researchers in the fields of archeology and history of religions. Therefore, the region has been the subject of discussion in philosophy and theology in the context of interdisciplinary research methods. Archaeologists have previously performed research in the region and reached a dozen materials dating back to antiquity in localities such as Nevali Çori and Gürcü Tepe (Schmidt, 71-102; Voigt, 2002: 274). Urfa museum also houses the world’s oldest statue “Urfa Man” or “Balıklıgöl Statue” shaped at the size of a human being. However, the actual distinctive excavation works have been conducted in Göbekli Tepe locality, which is regarded as the ground zero of history. These excavation works led to discovery of data that would undermine many conceptions which were assumed to be true concerning the history of humanity and civilization. The data that have been unearthed would require reconsideration of the knowledge and belief traditions of the humanity. In fact, it was argued in archeology that in the Neolithic Age (New Stone age), i.e., 12 thousand years ago, humans could not make pottery yet, did not possess kiln-drying knowledge and led their lives based on hunting and foraging. However, excavation findings have shown that this is far from the truth.

1. Göbekli Tepe

Göbekli Tepe is 12 km far from Urfa, which is one of the archaic and mystical cities in history. The site was discovered by German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt (1953-2014). According to Schmidt, the site

was not unknown, but it was not recognized, either. In addition, the excavation site is not a secluded area hidden in the midst of a valley; on the contrary, it is situated at the summit of the highest hill with a commanding view. Arriving at the site in 1994, Schmidt commenced excavations in 1995 and obtained efficient results. Schmidt discovered open-top megalithic structures without a residential purpose. These structures with no residential purposes were meant for religious and liturgical purposes. Examinations performed with the carbon-14 dating method have indicated that the structures dated back 12 thousand years (9-10 thousand BCE) (Schmidt, 102-103). According to geomagnetic research, this group of structures consisting of twenty temples were erected on the basis of a certain arrangement. These are circular megalithic structures consisting of a twin T-shaped obelisk at the center and surrounding stones and wall. These stones were produced by carving limestone with a flintstone. Each obelisk weighs at least 40-50 tons and has a length of 4 to 6 meters. What is more interesting is that these limestones were brought to this site probably from a distance of 2 km.

It is also interesting how the temples survived to this date. This is because it would be expected for this group of structures dating back 12 thousand years to have suffered significant deformation. However, some of this group of structures remained intact up to the present. While some of the temples were covered up due to natural phenomena such as air and erosion, the rest were buried by human hand using hundreds of cubic meters of stone, soil and similar materials approximately one thousand years after their construction (Schmidt, 258). In other words, humans buried by hand the temples that they had built again by their hands.

It is possible to speculate as to why Göbekli Tepe humans acted this way by referring to potential scenarios such as forced migration, anticipated natural phenomena, climate change, state of war, hunger or famine. The common point in all possible scenarios appears to be an ominous incident that they expected to happen for sure. This can be either a war or a natural disaster. Another possible reason might be the intention to conceal concrete structures representing their beliefs due to a fear of suffering oppression on account of their beliefs. For instance, the Mayans, one of the civilizations that flourished in America, suffered the same fate. The Mayans were advanced enough

in astronomy to determine the solar year and they worshiped celestial bodies. It is understood that they left their homeland in an urgent manner for a still unknown reason (Güven, 2010: 385). Nevertheless, there is no information available as to why Göbekli Tepe people buried these structures in a calculated manner and then left. It looks as if the reason behind this feature of Göbekli Tepe will remain an ancient and unsolved mystery of history.

2. Their Beliefs and Rituals

There is no definitive and agreed-upon concept concerning how to define the relationship of prehistoric peoples with the sacred. In general, concepts such as spiritual life, religious beliefs, rituals, symbolism, myths and cults are used to represent this relationship (Özdöl, 2011: 176). Therefore, it is not possible to pinpoint the exact perceptions and conceptions of Göbekli Tepe people concerning the sacred. Nevertheless, this article discusses the issue along the lines of the concepts of belief, ritual and symbolism from the perspective of philosophy of religion. Indeed, the shape of the temple and the structure of symbols remind us of ritual mythoi. As stated by Hooke, these mythoi did not consist of sole acts. Magical components accompanying them also constituted a prime part of the ritual (Hooke, 2002: 14). First of all, it may be necessary to answer the question of whether Göbekli Tepe people had a religion? To that end, the epistemological structure of the phenomenon called religion should first be identified. Although there are various definitions of religion, it can be generally defined as a system formed around the concept of ultimate reality, experienced at individual and social levels and incorporating certain rituals (Peterson et al., 2006: 4). Religious beliefs tend to revolve around five basic domains. First, people find themselves at a dead end. Second, they need a way out of this dead end. Third, they have an existential purpose, which is a transcendent Ultimate Reality. Fourth, transcendent reality can be known and approached. Fifth, there is a need to do certain things in order to attain salvation or freedom (Peterson et al., 4).

As will be seen in the following exploration, Göbekli Tepe people seem to satisfy almost all of these properties. However, the extent to which this set of beliefs can be regarded as a religion in itself seems to be an elusive question. This is because it seems difficult to determine which belief Göbekli Tepe people had or what kind of God they

believed in. Still, based on data obtained from excavations, it seems definitive that they had faith. This is because the appearance of their structures suggests that they were not intended as a place of residence.

The structures generally consist of two large obelisks at the center circularly surrounded by 12 obelisks. Around this arrangement, there is a structure where people can sit and watch. It is understood from the structure that an act (play, ritual) was performed at the center and the surrounding people watched it, just as in Greek and Roman theaters.³ The floor, on the other hand, is liquid proof and equipped with water channels. That is, people performed their worship not in a simple environment, but inside a complex. Moreover, the monuments inside these complex structures are full of reliefs made by skilled hands and bearing certain meanings. Furthermore, people of the neolithic era without the skill of pottery actually understood what they meant (Schmidt, 2007: 149). Therefore, it is possible to trace the phenomenon of faith back to the oldest periods of humanity. Accordingly, and tentatively, it could be argued that in this region, God is associated with deeper and essential denotations than a made-up or fabricated idea.

It does not appear to be an appropriate method to link the creed of Göbekli Tepe people “*directly*” to celestial bodies based on symbols. However, in consideration of the Holy Scriptures, archaeological, historical and geographical research, it is our opinion that the people of the region believed in celestial bodies and were interested in astronomy and astrology. This is because the tradition of worshipping the stars existed in this region (such as Assyrian-Babylonian polytheism and Mandaism) (Honigmann, 1986: XIII, 50), and the figures embossed on the obelisks that have been found in the region as well as their number and structure lead us to this assumption (Schmidt, 150). Prophet Abraham, who did not live *at the same date* but lived *in the same region* as Göbekli Tepe people, had a life story in which astronomy/astrology⁴ played an important role. According to the *Torah* and

3 Indeed, it is thought that the beliefs of Mesopotamia had an impact on the Greeks (Kılıç-Uncu, 2011).

4 The tendency of the people in the region towards magic and sorcery is also mentioned in the Holy Quran (2/ Al-Baqarah, 102). Accordingly, it is stated that two angels named Harut and Marut were sent to the community living in Babel, which is not too far from the region, to teach magic and sorcery in order to put them to the test. This belief exists in many regions from Mesopotamia to Assyria and to Persia (Demirci, 1997: 262-264).

the *Holy Quran*, Prophet Abraham struggled against both the belief in heavenly bodies and idolatry. It is controversial when Prophet Abraham lived. However, it is generally accepted that he lived between XXII and XVIII centuries before Christ (Harman, 2000: 267). The life of Prophet Abraham corresponds to much later periods after Göbekli Tepe people, but their living areas overlap. The common feature of the region in subsequent periods is idolatry and astrology. Indeed, the findings in Göbekli Tepe, reliefs and figures have also been observed in Syria, Iraq and Egypt, too. Schmidt has occasionally highlighted this point.

If we consider that civilizations spread over an extent area, that periods of change are generally not short-lived and that they follow a process transcending eras, significant changes would probably not be expected in beliefs and culture. Hence, it would not be far-fetched to make an association between Prophet Abraham and the beliefs of the people in the region. The Holy Quran recounts the contemplation of Prophet Abraham in search of proofs of God's existence. Instead of following an easier method by explaining God through cosmological and teleological arguments based on elegance and aesthetics of creatures around him, Prophet Abraham leads a discussion by following a more difficult method based on godhead of celestial bodies. This shows that the people in the region probably believed in the holiness of celestial bodies such as the sun, moon and the stars.

When Abraham said to his father Azar, "Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error." And thus did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith]. So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that disappear." And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray." And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate with Allah. Indeed, I have turned my face toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Allah." And his people argued with him. He said, "Do you argue with me concerning Allah while He has guided me? And I fear

not what you associate with Him [and will not be harmed] unless my Lord should will something. My Lord encompasses all things in knowledge; then will you not remember?" "And how should I fear what you associate while you do not fear that you have associated with Allah that for which He has not sent down to you any authority? So which of the two parties has more right to security, if you should know?" They who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice - those will have security, and they are [rightly] guided. (6/ Al-An'am, 75-82).

Similarly, the *Torah* also records that the people of the region believed in the stars. It is a known fact that various passages of the *Torah* rejects worship of heavenly bodies.⁵ However, in the Book of Amos, it is recounted that Prophet Amos warned his people not to worship celestial bodies. The relevant passages are as follows:

Yet you will carry away Sukuth, your king, and Kaiwan, your star-image, your gods that you have made for yourselves. (Amos, 5/26)

It is understood that Prophet Amos tried to deter his people from worshipping Sakuth and Kaiwan, which are the names of gods worshiped by Assyrians that lived on the banks of Tigris in Northern Iraq. Although there are terminological differences, it is known that Assyrians worshiped Anu, which was regarded as a sky god. Similarly, the Sumerians who lived in the region had a sky god called An. Thus, it is seen that the civilization in the region was interested in celestial bodies mostly from a theological perspective and this interest affected and shaped their lives. It is observed that they subsequently developed a theological celestial triad consisting of Shamash (the sun), Sin (the moon) and Ishtar (the stars) (Sarıkçıoğlu, 2002: 24). We also know that the name of the supreme God worshiped by Sabians, who lived in a much later period, was *Malka d Nhura*, meaning the 'King of Light' (Gündüz, 2002: 143). Rather than entering a discussion of whether the pantheon of Gods had a mythological meaning, or whether they are a teleological expression of consecration of local heroes, it should be noted that the common denominator is the polytheistic structure reflected in celestial bodies.

⁵ And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars-all the heavenly array-do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven. (Deuteronomy, 4/19)

It is thought that those who built the structures in Göbekli Tepe performed certain rituals. The fact that the floor is liquid proof and that there are water channels suggests that a ceremony was performed involving a sacrifice in which a liquid (e.g., blood, water, wine) was possibly used. Indeed, the ritual of sacrifice is important for the people of the region (Gündüz, 2004: 8) and it was believed that the blood of sacrificed animals would cleanse the temple. Therefore, the temple would be cleaned with water prior to ceremonies (Black and Green, 1992: 30, 104, 159). According to Schmidt, there is compelling data evidencing that Göbekli Tepe is a “site of dead cultural monuments” (p. 124). In this case, could Göbekli Tepe be a site of worship and altar where any kinds of religious rituals were performed? Indeed, some stone cups were found with a small external channel horizontally leading its way into the center of the cup. Schmidt considers them as “offering cups” (p. 128). When we visited Göbekli Tepe, we found it very interesting that very large rocks in close proximity to the site of obelisks were engraved with these figures. It seems difficult to discern whether these figures were made in order to perform a worship or a totally different act. However, these hollows on rocks closely resemble water channels, and ceremonies where water is used are frequently observed in Mesopotamia.

In view of the location of the site, Schmidt also finds the structures of Göbekli Tepe similar to *dakhmas*, which are also known as “Towers of Silence” in the Zoroaster tradition. In Zoroastrianism, earth, water, air and fire are regarded as sacred and, therefore, it is forbidden to defile them. Accordingly, dead human bodies become defiled, so they can neither be buried in earth, or burnt. Therefore, the deceased used to be carried up to *dakhmas*, meaning graves, built at high positions, and they were left there for scavengers (O’Brien and Palmer, 2009: 119-120). In consideration of the form of construction (architecturally) of Göbekli Tepe, its height and position, Schmidt considers the possibility that this site was built for a similar purpose. He cites as evidence not only these similarities, but also vulture bones abundantly found in excavations at the site (Schmidt, 133). Finally, according to Schmidt, Nevali Çori was the place of the living, and Göbekli Tepe was that of the dead. (p. 145). Therefore, Göbekli Tepe can be conceptualized as a site of temples where ceremonies for the deceased were performed.

3. Religious Symbolism

Constituting an important problem for the philosophy of religion, symbolism is an issue that needs to be considered in terms of the language of religion. God is an infinite concept, and it is really difficult to express him within the bounds of limited linguistic molds of semantics. Just as ceremonies and rituals performed for God carry a symbolic meaning, so too does the language expressing him have a symbolic meaning (Koç, 1995: 89). Therefore, symbolism is another way of expressing faith (Tillich, 1968: 138). Symbols are the carriers of both faith and culture. They are sometimes images that externalize thought in cases where words fail in expressing what is meant. For sometimes what is intended with words may transcend the bounds of literal semantics, or literalism may constrain emotions that are felt. However, symbols also have a certain philosophical structure. According to Tillich, the language of faith is the language of symbols (Tillich, 2000: 45). Therefore, symbols have certain properties.

- a. Symbols denote something external which cannot be directly comprehended.
- b. They are incorporated into the reality of the thing that they represent.
- c. They enlighten certain levels of reality that are close to us.
- d. They open up the hidden depths of our existence.
- e. They surface in individual or collective subconscious. For this reason, they cannot be produced at will.
- f. Symbols are biological. They are born, raised and they die (Tillich, 1958: 41-48).

During the time of Göbekli Tepe when written language was not fully developed yet, undoubtedly symbolism must have been the very basic means of expressing and communicating people's beliefs, feelings and thoughts. By using symbols, these people not only expressed their religious feelings, but also experience in everyday life and convey to posterity the knowledge and meaning that they have encoded. In this context, symbols carry the spirit of meaning. Frankly, the ambi-

guity concerning what constitutes a symbol and what meaning a symbol denotes brings about an epistemological problem of methodology. This also applies to Göbekli Tepe.

There are dozens of figures, reliefs and symbols primarily including figures of animals on the stones in Göbekli Tepe. Primary examples of these figures are foxes, boars, common cranes, bulls, eels, goats and spiders. According to Schmidt, the figures contain rich symbolic meanings well beyond our ability to interpret them (Schmidt, 2010: 253). Rather than being simply drawn, these figures seem to have been crafted by a skilled artist. Figures can either be intended to render the temple visually appealing, or carry a symbolic meaning. According to Schmidt, it is not possible to say something certain about them. They can be either fables or animal totemism (Schmidt, 2007: 120-121). However, the fact that the above-mentioned animals are also found in the region may constitute a reason for regional tendency. Nevertheless, the fact that the figures represent a composition indicates that they have symbolic meanings from a hieroglyphic point of view. They may also be considered as iconography, but this seems to be a remote possibility. On the other hand, it is known that in Mesopotamia, Gods are symbolized in the form of certain animal figures (Black and Green, 40) on stones based on an order of importance (Black and Green, 113-114).

It does not appear possible to remark on interpretation of the symbols. This problem may be overcome in time. This is because Mesopotamia is a region with abundance of symbols and hieroglyphic writings, and, as stated by Tillich, symbols are meaningful only for people who believe in them. In order to decipher the symbols, it is necessary to research both the ancient civilizations which lived in this region, and the current cultural geography. The historical traces of these meanings can be pursued only in this way. For this reason, we attempt to convey our thoughts regarding the symbols in consideration of symbolism of the civilizations which lived in this region beforehand or afterwards. Schmidt does not think that the figures are a phonetic type of writing. We agree with him based on our observations. If these figures are not phonetic, the first alternative that logically comes to mind is that they are symbolic. Indeed, Schmidt thinks that the T-shaped stones symbolize human beings. This is because the T-shaped structures are stylized in the form of human beings and they

contain reliefs shaped like arms and fingers. The two obelisks at the center may symbolize God and Goddess (Schmidt, 116-117).

One of the important reliefs in Göbekli Tepe is the fox. However, the fox is not a figure that is commonly used in such structures. The fox symbol is exemplified most often in *kudurru* stones in Babel (Black and Green, 113). It is not possible to speculate much about what the fox represents. However, in Babylonian and Sumerian faiths, the fox star in the Big Dipper constellation belongs to Enlil. In other words, God Enlil is symbolized with the fox (Schmidt, 222). Enlil, on the other hand, is the primary God that controls the Earth. His role in the polytheistic tradition is to punish people by creating storms, lightnings and floods. This, in turn, seems to confirm Schmidt's assumption that Göbekli Tepe is a place where a ceremony of death would take place. Similarly, the snake is a symbol to which many meanings were attached in the ancient Egyptian, Indian and Near Eastern civilizations. The meaning that is most often associated with it is protection (see Schmidt, 220). Thus, it can be assumed that the fox figure symbolizes the power which controls the nature and protects human beings.

The most typical figures in Göbekli Tepe that can be interpreted metaphysically are human torsos with a goat or dog head. Schmidt interprets them as jinn, which are considered as supernatural creatures. The reason that leads Schmidt to this idea is that other civilizations which lived in the region regarded such figures as jinn or monsters (see Schmidt, 235-40). Schmidt associates these figures with Shamans, who use masks shaped as animal heads during their dance (rituals) and who have an occult mindset. This is because a Shaman who wants to possess supernatural forces / spirits and to communicate with them should turn into an animal in order to fulfill this task. Another reason is that common cranes perform a dance (Schmidt, 241). While not rejecting Schmidt's this interpretation, more serious and strong data are required to confirm it. Furthermore, we do not fully know the shamanic culture, components and impacts in the region. On the other hand, the fact that there is no Shamanist culture in the region does not entail non-existence of animist beliefs.

Obelisks themselves are T-shaped. In ancient Egypt, 'T' represents plurality and 'O' represents unity (Inman, 96). Likewise, in ancient Indian thinking, too, 'O' symbolizes cosmic order, invariance, integrity of divine essence and unity (Burckhardt, 2009: 14-15). How-

ever, we would like to reiterate that these interpretations do not go beyond speculation. Although these assumptions are speculative, according to Schmidt, all these figures belong to a spiritual world (p. 223). The findings entail a context which definitely fulfills the contents of the word 'holy' and have a logical relationship amongst themselves (Schmidt, 250).

It is, however, possible to search for the counterparts of these symbols also within Hermetism, which is the most archaic symbolic tradition. In fact, the image of the common crane is engraved on the T-shaped stones. One of the important animals living in the region, the common crane was the holy animal of Demeter, the Goddess of the Harvest and Fertility, in antiquity (Schmidt, 217) and symbolizes Hermes in ancient Egypt. Hermes is an important figure in gnostic philosophy and history of science, and although it is often claimed in the ancient Egyptian, Indian, Greek and Islamic traditions, it is not known exactly who he was. According to Hebrews, the real name of Hermes is Uhnuh, meaning 'to enlighten'. It is narrated that the name of Akhnaton, the founder of solar monotheism, turned into Uhnuh. Sabians regard Egyptian Hermes as a prophet. Mes'udi, a renowned Islamic historian, states that the word Hermes means the planet Mercury, highlighting that it represents a cosmic value (Kılıç, 1998: 229-230). At any rate, Hermes is a key figure at the source of knowledge and enlightenment. When we consider Hermetism, it is possible that the nature of enlightenment is both scientific and astrological. We are not sure to what extent we can interpret this along the lines of *philosophia perennis* or *theologia perennis*. We cannot, either, say that wisdom consisting of a synthesis of religion and philosophy has not prevailed in this region.

Based on the embossed 'H' shape and the disc shape inside a semicircle opposite to it, which frequently appear on obelisks, Schmidt thinks that the embossed H shape represents the male, and the circle and crescent symbolize the female. Similarly, a full circle inside a semicircle symbolizes virginity in the ancient pagan culture (Inman, 2004: 96). This, in a way, represents purity and purification. In addition, there are reliefs on the stones representing women who overly express their sexual identity. They may symbolize fertility in a geographical sense. According to Schmidt, one should be cautious when interpreting sexuality (Schmidt, 151).

Undoubtedly, one of the most important sexual figures frequent-

ly observed in the reliefs and statuettes in Göbekli Tepe is the figures of penises in erection (Schmidt, 106). Another similar relief is that of a figure in erection with a severed head. This can be interpreted as a phallic cult. It is, however, necessary to make certain deductions in order to interpret the issue in this manner. The human figure without a head on the stone number forty-three that is in a state of erection is quite interesting. The state of erection without presence of a head that represents will and thinking may lead us to establish a relationship between will and sexuality. This representation can be interpreted in moral terms as inclination of a human being without willpower. In other words, it can be understood as acts that will be committed by a human being not using his intellect, or as disengagement of willpower as a result of a life bound by excessive sexual desires. In fact, extravagance resulting from transgression of desires beyond the control of mind is interpreted in this fashion in philosophy of ethics (Platon, 2002: 142-152; a. mlf, trs.: 35 and so on).

In our opinion, what is of interest is the astronomical meanings and values of symbols. There are several reasons that lead us to this thought. First, as mentioned above, at ancient times, there were many people in this region who worshiped and attributed divinity to celestial bodies. Second, the main theme of the structure leads us to make such an association. That is to say, there are two T-shaped stones at the center surrounded by similarly shaped twelve stones. The number twelve⁶ is used in both astronomy and astrology at the same time. While the number twelve denotes the months of the year in astronomy, in astrology it is the number of the stars in the Zodiac constellation. That is to say, faith in God, impact of celestial bodies on human nature, fate and the star signs intersect at this point. In other words, religion, science, magic and mythology seem to have been intertwined on these lands in ancient times.

In terms of religious symbolism, Göbekli Tepe suffered the same

6 The relationship between the mathematical and musical harmony of numbers and philosophy in general and ontology in particular has played a major role in the thinking of certain philosophers such as Pythagoras, Euclid, Plotinus and İhvan-ı Safa. For instance, according to İhvan-ı Safa, the principle of numbers (mabadi) is the elements of creatures for Pythagoreans, who likened the universe to the system of numbers. Creatures are numbers and the universe is numbers and music. According to İhvan-ı Safa, who attaches importance especially to astronomy in his *Booklets* and who thinks that astrology shapes the human character, Pythagoras was a member of the Harran community who considered Hermes as their prophet (Çetinkaya, 2003: 91). According to Nasr, on the other hand, mathematics is a bridge that connects the quantitative world to the world of archetypes (Nasr, 1985: 60). This, in turn, leads us to associate numbers with celestial bodies.

fate as other symbols. Although we are currently engaging in the process of perusing symbols by tracing them in different civilizations, as noted by Tillich, they used to live in the mind of the relevant community, so they were born and possibly died with them. However, the unchanging reality concerning symbols also applies to the symbols in Göbekli Tepe. This reality is the fact that symbols transcended literalism to signify an entity beyond themselves and revealed the hidden depths of the human existence and spirit.

4. A Suggestion for Introduction Instead of a Conclusion

As can be seen, in spite of all its mysteries, Göbekli Tepe appears to unravel many religious, philosophical, anthropological and cultural mysteries pertaining to the ancient history of humanity. Having interpreted Göbekli Tepe from these perspectives at the very least, we are of the opinion that certain facts generally accepted by modern thought and science need to be opened up for a discussion and restoration. Therefore, we suggest an introduction rather than a conclusion. The following are several important questions/problems that need to be addressed and for which answers should be sought.

First of all, Göbekli Tepe needs to be dealt with and interpreted by using interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary methods. To that end, support should be garnered from archeology, anthropology, art history, mythology, theology and philosophy. Only this way would it be possible to make accurate and proper evaluations concerning Göbekli Tepe. At this point, we believe that historical geography will offer us abundant materials.

It has been assumed so far that people of antiquity were primitive creatures who engaged in hunting and foraging and whose intellectual abilities were not developed much. How is it then possible that a people living in caves or as nomads, and engaging in hunting and foraging around the time of 10 thousand BCE create such meaningful megalithic structures? It could be argued that the region was established by the first people who transitioned from a nomadic life to agriculture. However, there are only temples in Göbekli Tepe without any settlements. Based on this observation, we can draw two conclusions: The first is that religions did not emerge subsequently; on the contrary, they are as old as the human history. After all, the city Urfa, where Göbekli Tepe is located, is known in Anatolia as the “city of prophets”.

Secondly, Göbekli Tepe undermines the idea that agriculture led to the settled life, as has been claimed so far, and highlights the thesis that religions and beliefs heralded transition to the settled life.

Furthermore, in contrast to recent historical and archaeological studies, these people who were claimed to be devoid of language achievement and to have lived off hunting and foraging, and who were presented as primitive, were actually intelligent, smart and wise. They had certain worldviews, conception of the universe and beliefs. They had knowledge and appreciated art. Therefore, it is necessary to readdress both the biological development of humanity, which is argued to depend on evolution, and its spiritual and cultural development which have accelerated accordingly.

Having examined Göbekli Tepe, we highlight that it is not an accurate approach to date the start of the development of human civilizations back to ancient Greece, for which a tendency has existed in the last several centuries in spite of serious debates concerning its validity, or to interpret the concept of the model human based on the western human prototype which is regarded as the pure race. In fact, having developed at various speeds in diverse regions, humanity may have experienced downfall at some points in time, and rise at certain others. This being the case, the upper Mesopotamia seems to be one of the points of action in civilization. For instance, Islamic philosopher Al-Farabi (870-950), regarded as the Second Teacher after Aristotle, thinks that the source of philosophy is attributable to the Chaldeans who lived in this region, and then it was passed on to Egypt, the Greeks, Assyrians and Arabs, respectively (Al-Farabi, 1995: 86).

All Abrahamic religions regard all prophets starting with Adam, the First Human Being, also as teachers of civilization for the humanity. In other words, all these prophets led the people they were sent to in terms of faith, morals, knowledge and art. However, it is claimed by recent anthropological and archaeological ideas with reference to certain sites that human communities including the first human being were primitive, wild, violent and engaged solely in hunting and foraging. Göbekli Tepe shows us that such claims are open for serious debate and lack adequate scientific bases. Based on Göbekli Tepe, we can say that at least some of the people living at the time did not lead such completely primitive lives. The same is also true for the present

time. Indeed, in modern time while some people use high technologies and struggle against obesity, the rest of them - the majority - have not had a chance to get to know the opportunities of civilization and fight with famine and poverty. Therefore, it is a serious problem to take a certain time and region as a reference and to conceptualize history as a straight line when evaluating development of humanity or civilization. Frankly, it is a completely false approach to consider development of human civilization as monolithic. It is also reductionist and problematic to theorize on the development of civilization by focusing on humans at a single location.

In regard to the finds of Göbekli Tepe, the problem that needs to be addressed in terms of philosophy of religion is the origin and form of expression of faith in God. First of all, it should be stated that faith is as old as the human history. Moreover, it is necessary to readress and question certain assertions made by Durkheim, Freud and Feuerbach which claim that the idea of God did not exist in the first place, but emerged afterwards, and which have been presented as sociological, psychological and anthropological laws. It is also necessary to find empirical bases for contentions that the source of faith comes from natural phenomena such as lightnings, thunderbolts and earthquakes, which do not at present go beyond pure fantasy and fiction. This methodology seems to be somewhat difficult at present. Nevertheless, it will emerge in the future when social and physical anthropology and archeology support theology, as long as the problem is handled with objective and rational methods that are not ideological.

Another problem mentioned above is the form of expressing faith and its relationship with the era and culture. For we do encounter such a reality in Göbekli Tepe people. This subject calls for a completely original piece of research.

Obviously, much can be said about Göbekli Tepe. As archaeological studies on Göbekli Tepe continue, this will further increase the interest in the region amongst the fields of history of religions, philosophy of religion and anthropology. Therefore, researchers should follow the developments in the site seriously, and ensure proper and comprehensive communication and interaction with the cultures in the region. It looks as if Göbekli Tepe will whet researchers' appetite even more. Interest and knowledge will further increase as excava-

tions and research continue.

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