

# Cloak, belt, and loincloth. 10<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> millennium BC depictions of clothing from Göbekli Tepe and other Upper Mesopotamian sites

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## Zusammenfassung

**Mantel, Gürtel und Lendenschurz. Darstellungen von Kleidung aus dem 10. bis 9. Jt. v. Chr. aus Göbekli Tepe und anderen obermesopotamischen Fundstätten**

*Funde von erhaltenen Textilien sind seltene Ausnahmen im frühen Neolithikum (Akeramisches Neolithikum, PPN, 9600–7000 v. Chr.) Südwestasiens. Die meisten Belege stammen von bildlichen Darstellungen. Die bei weitem größte Ansammlung solcher Darstellungen ist von Göbekli Tepe, Provinz Şanlıurfa im Südosten der Türkei bekannt, hauptsächlich in Form von Reliefs auf den bis zu 5,5 m hohen, T-förmigen Kalksteinpfeilern, die integraler Bestandteil der Gebäude der älteren Bauphase der Stätte sind. Der Ausgräber K. Schmidt identifizierte die Pfeiler überzeugend als anthropomorphe, stilisierte Darstellungen menschlicher Körper, nicht zuletzt, weil einige der Reliefs Kleidung in Form von Gürteln und Lendenschurzen zeigen. Schmidt machte auch auf eine häufige Darstellung auf ihren Vorderseiten aufmerksam: zwei parallele vertikale Bänder, die er als stolaähnliches Gewand identifizierte. Hier wird eine nuancierte Interpretation vorgeschlagen: Es werden Argumente vorgebracht, um die Identifizierung dieses Merkmals mit den Säumen langer Gewänder zu untermauern. Dies führt zu einer neuen Interpretation der Tiere, die häufig auf den Seitenflächen der Pfeiler abgebildet sind – sie befinden sich auf den Gewändern und beziehen sich wahrscheinlich auf gestickte oder mit Farbe auf die Kleidungsstücke aufgebrachte Darstellungen. Der vorliegende Beitrag wird nicht nur die Art der in Göbekli Tepe dargestellten Kleidung untersuchen, sondern auch ihre Bedeutung, die wahrscheinlich im Bereich der Paraphernalia für schamanische Rituale anzusiedeln ist.*

**Schlagwörter** Südwestasien, Akeramisches Neolithikum, Göbekli Tepe, Kleidung, Schamanengewand

## Introduction

Finds of preserved textiles are rare exceptions in the Early Neolithic (Pre-Pottery Neolithic, PPN, c. 9600–7000 BC) of south-west Asia (Bar-Yosef 2020)<sup>1</sup>. Evidence from PPNA Jerf el Ahmar, Aleppo Governorate, Syria, and Körtik Tepe, Diyarbakır Province, Turkey, in both cases in the form of alleged textile imprints, is disputed (Bender Jørgensen et al. 2023). Remains and imprints of textiles, baskets, and mats

## Summary

*Finds of preserved textiles are rare exceptions in the Early Neolithic (Pre-Pottery Neolithic, PPN, 9600–7000 BC) of south-west Asia. Most of the evidence comes from imagery. The by far largest assemblage of such depictions is known from Göbekli Tepe, Şanlıurfa Province, in south-eastern Turkey, mainly in the form of reliefs on the up to 5.5 m high, T-shaped limestone pillars that are integral parts of the buildings of the site's older construction phase. The excavator, K. Schmidt, convincingly identified the pillars as anthropomorphic, stylised depictions of human bodies, not least because some of the pillars include reliefs of clothing in the form of belts and loincloths. Schmidt also drew attention to a common depiction on their front sides: two parallel vertical bands, which he identified as a stole-like garment. Here, a nuanced interpretation is put forward: arguments are presented to substantiate the identification of this feature with the hems of long gowns. This results in a new interpretation of the animals frequently shown on the lateral faces of the pillars – they are located on the gowns and probably refer to embroidered or stamped ornaments. The present contribution will explore not only the form of the clothes represented at Göbekli Tepe but also their meaning, which can likely be pinpointed to the realm of paraphernalia for shamanic rituals.*

**Keywords** South-west Asia, Pre-Pottery Neolithic, Göbekli Tepe, clothing, shaman costume

have been reported from PPNB graves at Tell Halula, Raqqa Governorate, Syria (Alfaro Giner 2012). Fragments of baskets, linen yarns and fabrics, as well as ropes, have been discovered in the Nahal Hemar Cave, Southern District, Israel (Schick 1986; Shamir 2020), where an assemblage of PPNB ritual objects, including plastered skulls, plaster sculpture and a mask, was discovered (Goren et al. 1993). Woven textile and basketry fragments from Çatalhöyük, Konya Province, Turkey (Burnham 1965; Mellaart 1967, 218–220) have

<sup>1</sup> The earliest, pre-PPN evidence from the region would be the possible fibre fragments interpreted as remains of cordage from

Ohalo II, Northern District, Israel, some 19 000 years old (Nadel et al. 1994). Recently, perforated pebbles from the Natufian sett-

lement of Nahal Ein-Gev II, Northern District, Israel, have been identified as possible spindle whorls (Yashuv/Grosman 2024).



**Fig. 1** A clay figurine from Nevalı Çori, south-eastern Turkey. The person is wearing a broad, dotted loincloth/belt, possibly a leopard skin. Belts are restricted to male figurines at the site. Whether this implies that belts, also present – for example – on some pillars at Göbekli Tepe, are generally exclusive to males remains open.

*Abb. 1* Eine Tonfigurine aus Nevalı Çori im Südosten der Türkei. Die Person trägt einen breiten, gepunkteten Lendenschurz/Gürtel, möglicherweise ein Leopardenfell. Gürtel treten an diesem Fundort nur bei männlichen Figürinen auf. Ob dies bedeutet, dass Gürtel, die zum Beispiel auch auf einigen Pfeilern in Göbekli Tepe zu sehen sind, generell nur von Männern getragen wurden, bleibt offen.

recently been identified as being made of oak, elm and willow/poplar bast instead of the flax assumed earlier (Rast-Eicher et al. 2021; Loudon et al. 2023). These finds dating to the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium are currently regarded as the earliest preserved woven textiles (Bender Jørgensen et al. 2023).

Additional – and in fact, most – evidence for PPN clothing comes from imagery, be it the leopard skins shown on anthropomorphic clay figurines from Nevalı Çori, Şanlıurfa Province, Turkey (Fig. 1; Morsch 2002; Morsch 2017), on the

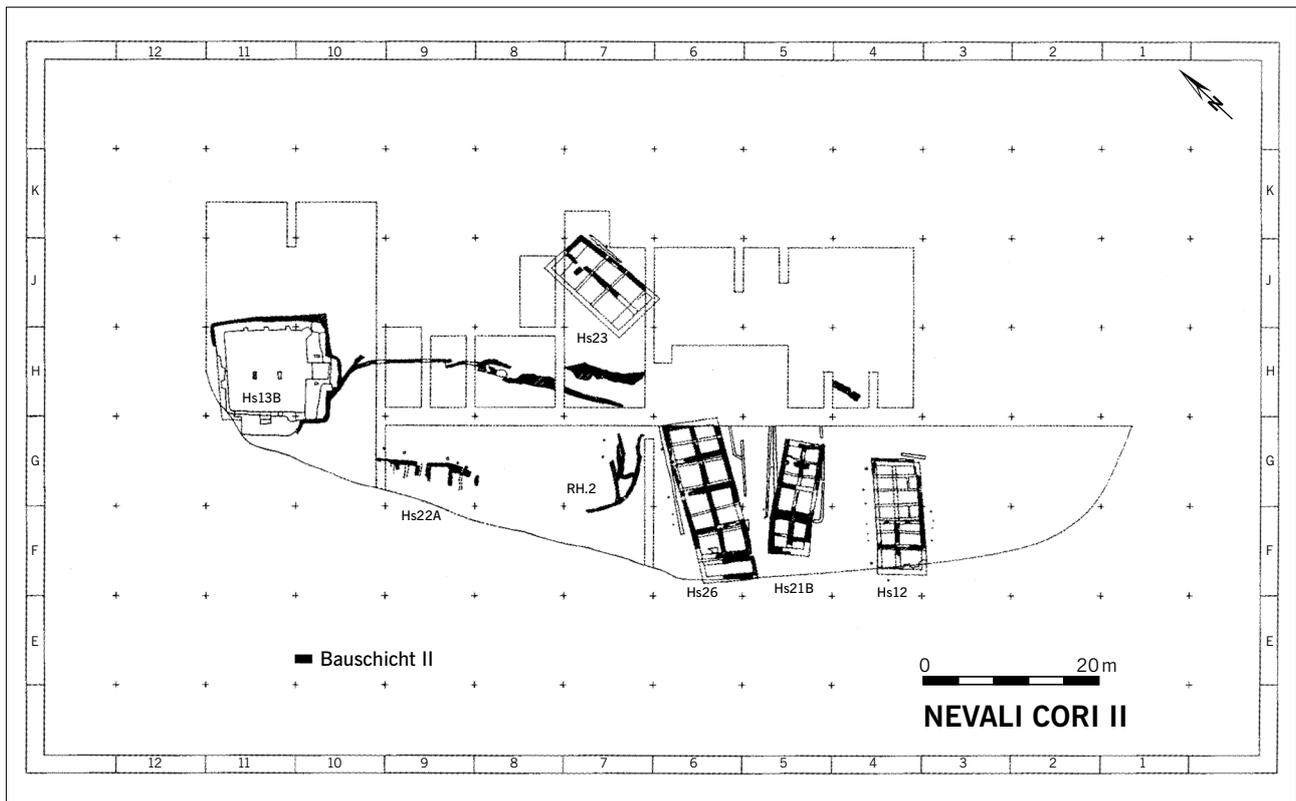


**Fig. 2** A sculpture (ht. 66 cm) found face-down in one of the younger, 9<sup>th</sup> millennium BC buildings at Göbekli Tepe. The person is depicted standing with the arms bent at the sides of the body, hands lying side by side on the stomach, and wearing cap-like headgear that exposes the ears. The face is heavily sintered and difficult to judge, but there are indications of a beard. The gaze is directed upwards. Gender and legs are not specified; the sculpture ends in a conical peg.

*Abb. 2* Eine Skulptur (H. 66 cm), die mit dem Gesicht nach unten in einem der jüngeren Gebäude aus dem 9. Jt. v. Chr. in Göbekli Tepe gefunden wurde. Die Person ist stehend mit seitlich angewinkelten Armen dargestellt, die Hände liegen nebeneinander auf dem Bauch. Sie trägt eine mützenähnliche Kopfbedeckung, bei der die Ohren frei bleiben. Das Gesicht ist stark versintert und schwer zu beurteilen, aber es gibt Hinweise auf einen Bart. Der Blick ist nach oben gerichtet. Geschlecht und Beine sind nicht angegeben; die Skulptur endet in einem konischen Zapfen.

murals at Çatalhöyük (Mellaart 1967, 218–220) or the apparent skirt-like items depicted on some figurines (Beuger 2019). However, the by far largest assemblage of depictions related to clothing and specific garments comes from the limestone sculptures and the T-shaped pillars that are ornamented by bas-reliefs discovered at sites like Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe (Fig. 2) in south-eastern Turkey<sup>2</sup>. The pillars present

<sup>2</sup> Hauptmann 1993; Hauptmann/Schmidt 2007; Schmidt 2010; Dietrich et al. 2019; Dietrich 2024.



**Fig. 3** Plan of the excavations at Nevalı Çori, layer II. The site was excavated by H. Hauptmann between 1983 and 1991 in the run-up to the construction of the Atatürk Dam and produced Early and Middle PPNB domestic architecture as well as one ›special building‹. In the image, the so-called channel houses, which divide into a small space for dwelling and a cool and dry storage area with underfloor channels, are clearly visible.

**Abb. 3** Plan der Ausgrabungen in Nevalı Çori, Schicht II. Die Fundstelle wurde zwischen 1983 und 1991 von H. Hauptmann im Vorfeld des Baus des Atatürk-Staudamms ausgegraben und erbrachte Wohnarchitektur des frühen und mittleren PPNB sowie ein ›Sondergebäude‹. Auf dem Bild sind die sogenannten Kanalplan-Häuser gut zu erkennen, die sich in einen kleinen Raum zum Wohnen und einen kühlen und trockenen Lagerraum mit Unterbodenkanälen aufteilen.

the most expressive imagery of garments and will be the focus of this overview.

### Nevalı Çori and Göbekli Tepe

Excavated by H. Hauptmann between 1983 and 1991 in the run-up to the construction of the Atatürk Dam, the settlement of Nevalı Çori is located in the foothills of the Taurus mountains; it extends on both banks of the Katara, a tributary stream of the Euphrates<sup>3</sup>. The tell site revealed five occupation layers assigned to the Early and Middle PPNB, which were sealed by Halaf Period and Early Bronze Age deposits. The architecture of settlement layers I–IV is characterised by the so-called channel house type, first described at Çayönü, Diyarbakır Province, in the Turkish Tigris region (Erim-Özdoğan 2011). The houses are divided into a small dwelling space and a cool, dry storage area with underfloor channels (Fig. 3; Hauptmann 2011, 90–94). Layer V, being the youngest, yielded structures similar to those known from subphase 5 at Çayönü (Hauptmann 2011, 94–95). Starting from layer II, a massive, almost square limestone building set on one side into a slope, was part of the settlement (Fig. 4; Hauptmann 1993; Hauptmann 2011,

95–98). T- or Γ-shaped stone pillars, likely serving as roof supports, alternate with benches along the inside walls; a pair of similar pillars were unearthed in the centre of the building (Fig. 5). Some of these pillars display arms at the lateral flanks that continue in hands resting on the front side, identifying them as highly stylised anthropomorphic depictions (Schmidt 2012, 73). In addition, they show two parallel raised vertical relief bands running along the borders of their front, which seem to be connected by two chevrons (V-shapes) below the head, identified as a stole-like garment. The ›special building‹ comprised at least three construction phases measuring 13.9 × 13.5 m in its earliest phase (Hauptmann 2011, 95–98). One wall had a niche interpreted by the excavator as the former location of a cult statue. This contributed to the identification of the building as a space dedicated to an ancestor cult.

In addition to the pillars, ten large limestone sculptures of humans and animals were discovered as *spoliae* in the eastern bank and wall (Hauptmann 2011, 98–100; see below Fig. 17). Interestingly, large stone sculptures are nearly all restricted to the ›special building‹, whereas the roughly 665 clay figurines known from the site were only found in the domestic areas (Morsch 2002; Morsch 2017). Roughly 90 % of these figurines represent humans. In about equal numbers,

<sup>3</sup> Hauptmann 1993; Hauptmann 1999; Hauptmann 2011.



**Fig. 4** Nevalı Çori, the rectangular special ›building‹. Starting from layer II, a massive, almost square limestone building, set on one side into a slope, was part of the settlement in addition to the domestic architecture. The building is characterised by T- or I-shaped stone pillars alternating with benches along the inside walls and a pair of similar pillars in the centre of the building.

*Abb. 4* Nevalı Çori, das rechteckige ›Sondergebäude‹. Ab Schicht II gehörte neben der Wohnbebauung auch ein massives, fast quadratisches Kalksteingebäude zur Siedlung, das an einer Seite in einen Hang gesetzt war. Das Gebäude ist gekennzeichnet durch T- oder I-förmige Steinpfeiler, die sich mit Bänken entlang der Innenwände abwechseln, und durch ein Paar ähnlicher Pfeiler in der Mitte des Gebäudes.



**Fig. 5** One of the central pillars from the ›special building‹ at Nevalı Çori. The pillar is decorated with arms on the broad sides and hands resting on the front side, where two V-shapes and raised vertical bands are also identifiable. In particular, the arms and hands motif hints at the anthropomorphic character of the pillar.

*Abb. 5* Einer der Zentralpfeiler aus dem ›Sondergebäude‹ in Nevalı Çori. Der Pfeiler ist an den Breitseiten mit Armen verziert; die Hände ruhen auf der Vorderseite, wo auch zwei V-artige Winkel und zwei erhabene vertikale Bänder zu erkennen sind. Vor allem das Motiv der Arme und Hände deutet auf den anthropomorphen Charakter des Pfeilers hin.

naked seated females and standing males are depicted (cf. Fig. 1). The latter are sometimes wearing belts or sashes; incisions and dots likely refer to animal skins as material; genitals are indicated in some cases (Morsch 2017, 131). The particular and mutually exclusive spatial distribution of clay and stone imagery (including the pillars) contributed to the view that the building was the location for ritual performances, clearly separated from domestic activities and domestic cult, which could indicate that the differently depicted garments belonged to different spheres of social practices.

A similar pillar-architecture was discovered a short time later at Göbekli Tepe, extending over a much larger spatial scale, comprising several partly contemporary ›special buildings‹. Göbekli Tepe is located some 15 km to the north-east of the provincial capital Şanlıurfa in south-eastern Turkey on a dominant point of the Germuş mountain range (Schmidt 2012; Kurapkat 2015; Dietrich/Schmidt in press). The tell (Fig. 6) rises about 15 m above the surrounding limestone plateau, whose lateral outcrops once served as the quarries for the large blocks used in the site's megalithic structures. Fieldwork at Göbekli Tepe began in 1995 under the direction of K. Schmidt (Beile-Bohn et al. 1998). After an initial survey and following prospective soundings, work concentrated within the south-eastern depression of the site (Fig. 7). There, the first of the monumental circular buildings of the PPNA to Early PPNB was uncovered, for which the site is world famous today<sup>4</sup>. The buildings are formed of circularly arranged, often richly decorated T-shaped limestone pillars interconnected by walls with bench-like structures along the inner faces (Schmidt 2012; Dietrich/Schmidt in press). These pillars rise to 4 m in height and are arranged around two even larger central pillars; the buildings' inner diameter is roughly between 10–20 m. The buildings were roofed and likely subterranean (Kurapkat 2012). Seven such monumental enclosures have been discovered so far (Buildings A–D<sup>5</sup>, E<sup>6</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, H<sup>8</sup>). The preserved entranceway of Building C has a deliberately ›difficult‹ layout with up- and downward turns and visual blinds (Piesker 2014). Set into the walls inside, sculptures of leaping dangerous animals baring their teeth and tusks confronted the entering visitors,



Fig. 6 Göbekli Tepe. View of the tell from the surrounding limestone plateau before protective shelters were erected above the site. The plateau served as the quarry area for the megalithic stone pillars and other building materials.

Abb. 6 Göbekli Tepe. Blick auf den Tell vom umliegenden Kalksteinplateau aus, bevor die Schutzbauten über der Anlage errichtet wurden. Das Plateau diente als Steinbruchgebiet für die megalithischen Steinfeiler und andere Baumaterialien.

who ended up face to face with the imposing pair of pillars rising to 5.5 m in the centre. In flickering light, the visitors would have been able to partly discern the likewise intimidating animal bas-reliefs on the encircling pillars. Smaller rectangular or sub-rectangular buildings of about 3 x 4 m, sometimes with small T-shaped pillars that largely lack animal reliefs, are the characteristic features of a second, early to middle PPNB architectural horizon<sup>9</sup>. Direct stratigraphic evidence for this chronology, indicating that (some of) the rectangular buildings belong to a phase following the round structures, exists only in a few locations<sup>10</sup>.

K. Schmidt interpreted Göbekli Tepe as a special site dedicated to cult and ritual, with only a few people or even no-one permanently living there (Schmidt 2005, 34). This interpretation was based on the impression that a stable water supply and substantial domestic buildings were missing next to the large pillar buildings. Meanwhile, however, evidence for domestic activity has accumulated. Already in 2011, deep

soundings had revealed simple small stone rings of max. 2 m diameter next to the monumental buildings (Schmidt 2011, 47–48), a type of architecture well-known from Epipalaeolithic or PPNA settlements of the region (Özdoğan 2017). Also, the rectangular buildings turned out to be partly contemporary with the later construction phases of the monumental round buildings (Dietrich 2011). They produced clear evidence for domestic practices at the site, including the large-scale grinding of cereals (Dietrich 2021). However, the complex house types known from contemporary settlements in the near vicinity of Göbekli Tepe (see above; Özdoğan 2017)<sup>11</sup> and storage facilities are still absent; nevertheless, much does indeed hint at seasonal fluctuation in site use with a reduced permanent presence of people (Dietrich/Dietrich 2024). While diverse interpretations have been put forward over the last decades for the clear evidence for ritual performances in the monumental buildings (Dietrich/Notroff 2015), an interpretation along the lines of shaman-

4 Layer III after Schmidt 2011, 42–48. Layers at Göbekli Tepe have been defined through their characteristic architecture. Building horizon would be a better label, as ›layer III‹ and the younger ›layer II‹ are actually composed of several strata resulting from complex formation processes: Dietrich 2021, 5–9. Radiocarbon data: Dietrich et al. 2013. Layer I

is the mixed and disturbed uppermost horizon.

5 Schmidt 2011, 44–47; Schmidt 2012; Piesker 2014; Kurapkat 2015; Dietrich/Schmidt in print.

6 Piesker 2014.

7 Dietrich/Wagner 2023.

8 Dietrich et al. 2016.

9 The so-called ›layer II‹: Schmidt 2012, 216–221; Kurapkat 2015, 18–22.

10 Schmidt 2000, 18–19; Schmidt 2012, 128, 228; Kurapkat 2015, 81–82.

11 The most complete succession of PPN building types still comes from Çayönü: Erim-Özdoğan 2011.



**Fig. 7** Göbekli Tepe. Overview of the south-eastern depression, where Buildings A–D were discovered. Building D in the foreground exemplifies the characteristic layout of these buildings: a circular wall is divided by up to 4 m high standing pillars and benches; two larger, up to 5.5 m high pillars stand in the centre.

*Abb. 7* Göbekli Tepe. Überblick über die südöstliche Senke, in der die Gebäude A–D entdeckt wurden. Das Gebäude D im Vordergrund ist ein Beispiel für den charakteristischen Grundriss dieser Bauten: Eine kreisförmige Mauer wird durch bis zu 4 m hohe Pfeiler und Bänke untergliedert; zwei größere, bis zu 5,5 m hohe Pfeiler stehen in der Mitte.

ism embedded in an animistic ontology has recently gained momentum<sup>12</sup>.

### Anthropomorphic pillars as images and image carriers

Nearly all pillars in the monumental and the younger buildings at Göbekli Tepe share the same basic form resembling the Latin letter 'T' when viewed from the side; the Γ-shape, which seems to relate to refurbishing of T-pillars, is rare (Fig. 8). K. Schmidt saw the Göbekli Tepe pillars as both images and image carriers (cf. Hauptmann/Schmidt 2007, 79–80; Schmidt 2012, 70–72). He perceived the T-shape as the stylised representation of the human body

in profile, with the wider part at the top as the head and the shaft below representing the body. This view had been induced by the pillars discovered earlier during excavations at Nevalı Çori, which, as mentioned, had anthropomorphic traits and indications for depictions of clothing. At Göbekli Tepe, bas-relief depictions of arms and hands appear on nine pillars, 29 show the relief bands on the front side, and five the V-shapes in the neck area (Dietrich 2024, 14–17 Tab. 2). On the central pillars of Building D (Pillars 18 and 31; Fig. 9–10), these elements were found in combination with representations of belts and loincloths (Köksal-Schmidt/Schmidt 2010).

A comparison with other Early Neolithic anthropomorphic depictions strengthens the case for identify-

<sup>12</sup> Benz/Bauer 2013; Borić 2013; Benz/Bauer 2015; Dietrich 2024.



**Fig. 8** Göbekli Tepe, Pillar 43. All pillars in the monumental buildings at Göbekli Tepe share the same basic form, resembling the Latin letter 'T' when viewed from the side. They are frequently decorated with animal reliefs. Pillar 43 in Building D is among the most richly ornamented pillars.

**Abb. 8** Göbekli Tepe, Pfeiler 43. Alle Pfeiler der älteren Monumentalbauten in Göbekli Tepe haben die gleiche Grundform, die von der Seite betrachtet dem lateinischen Buchstaben 'T' ähnelt. Sie sind häufig mit Tierreliefs verziert. Pfeiler 43 in Gebäude D gehört zu den am reichsten verzierten Pfeilern.

ing the T-shape as a reference to the human body (Fig. 11; Hauptmann/Schmidt 2007, 79–80; Kurapkat 2015, 99–101 Fig. 159). The best-preserved example of a life-sized anthropomorphic PPN sculpture is the so-called Urfa-Man (cf. Fig. 11,1), found during construction work in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic site Urfa-Yeni Mahalle/Yeni Yol, Şanlıurfa Province, Turkey (Çelik 2011), broken in four nearly equal pieces (Hauptmann 2003)<sup>13</sup>. The sculpture depicts a man standing frontally with arms depicted on the sides of the body and hands resting on the front in the pubic area above the phallus. Eyes (probably originally emphasised by obsidian inlays), nose, and ears are depicted; the mouth is absent. The figure seems to be naked, apart from a double V-shape on the upper body. The position of arms and hands is similar to their depiction on the T-shaped pillars. The chevron, i.e. the double V-shape, resembles the reliefs on the Nevalı Çori



**Fig. 9** Pillar 18, one of the central pillars of Building D at Göbekli Tepe. The pillar features arms, hands, a belt and a loincloth, as well as relief bands. It stands on a pedestal decorated with a row of birds, and has the relief of a fox on its right broad side.

**Abb. 9** Pfeiler 18, einer der beiden Zentralpfeiler von Gebäude D in Göbekli Tepe. Der Pfeiler zeigt Arme, Hände, einen Gürtel und einen Lendenschurz sowie Reliefbänder. Er steht in einem Sockel, der mit einer Reihe von Vögeln verziert ist, und trägt auf ihrer rechten Breitseite zusätzlich das Relief eines Fuchses.

pillars and on some at Göbekli Tepe (e.g. Pillar 74 in Building F; Dietrich/Wagner 2023). The nakedness of the depiction argues against a connection of this feature with the assumed 'stole' (relief bands). Seen from the side, the Urfa-Man appears distinctly stele-like; the depth of the body is not anatomically correct, except for the head, prompting an association with the T-shape of the pillars. This association is even stronger regarding a second, more abstract image. The so-called Kilisik Statue (Fig. 11,2), about 80 cm tall, was acquired from a farmer in 1965 near the village of Kilisik (Hauptmann 2000). It has a long, curved T-bar-shaped head; along its body, bent arms similar to those observed on the pillars appear. At the front, the arms seem to hold the head of a second, smaller figure; below this figure is a deep perforation. Set beside these examples, the Nevalı Çori (Fig. 11,3) and Göbekli Tepe (Fig. 11,4) pillars seem like the endpoints

<sup>13</sup> The find context remains unclear, as the site was destroyed mostly without archaeological observation. Images show a smaller T-shaped

pillar, which may hint at a destroyed 'special building': Çelik 2011, 142 Fig. 19.



Fig. 10 Pillar 31, the second central pillar of Building D at Göbekli Tepe. Like Pillar 18, it features complex depictions of clothing, including a belt and fox fur loincloth.

Abb. 10 Pfeiler 31, der zweite Zentralpfeiler von Gebäude D in Göbekli Tepe. Wie Pfeiler 18 weist er komplexe Darstellungen von Kleidung auf, darunter einen Gürtel und einen Lendenschurz aus Fuchspelz.

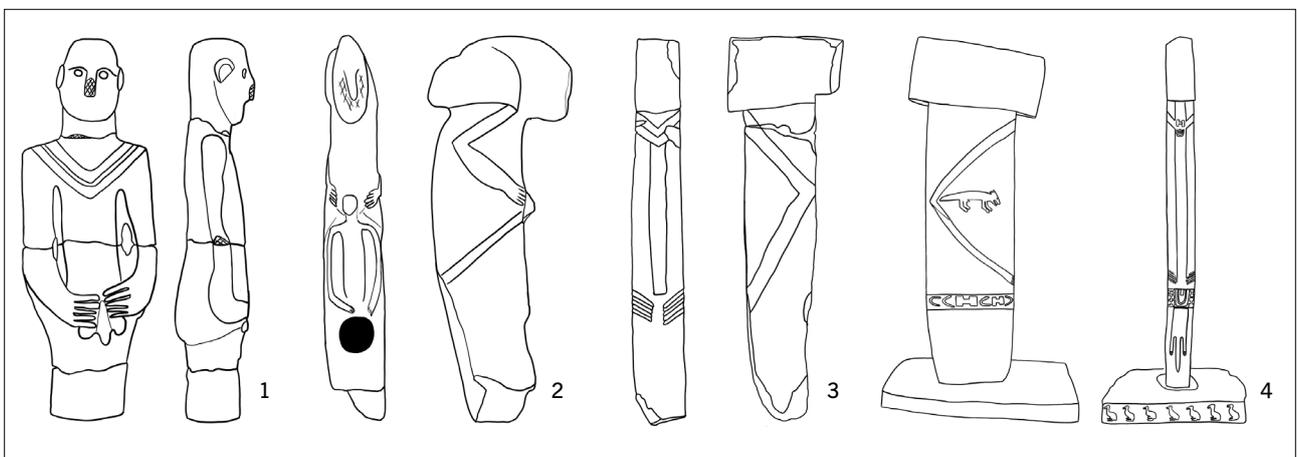


Fig. 11 A comparison of PPN anthropomorphic depictions strengthens the identification of the T-shape as a reference to the human body and shows the steps towards stylization. 1 The so-called ›Urfa-Man‹; 2 The Kilisik sculpture; 3 pillar from Nevalı Çori; 4 Pillar 18 from Göbekli Tepe. Not to scale.

Abb. 11 Ein Vergleich anthropomorpher Darstellungen des akeramischen Neolithikums sichert die Identifizierung der T-Form als stilisierte Darstellung des menschlichen Körpers weiter ab und klärt die Abstraktionsschritte. 1 Der sogenannte ›Urfa-Mann‹; 2 Die Kilisik-Skulptur; 3 Pfeiler aus Nevalı Çori; 4 Pfeiler 18 aus Göbekli Tepe. Nicht maßstabsgetreu.

in a sequence of ever more abstracted images of the human body. This is not a chronological sequence, though, as the more naturalistic small to approximately life-sized anthropomorphic sculptures appear in parallel with the stylised T-shapes. Rather, it seems that the T-shape is the PPN cultural convention of rendering large anthropomorphic figures. In any case, K. Schmidt's view that the pillars were both anthropomorphic representations themselves and – at the same time – image carriers, is fully justified.

### Anthropomorphic pillars with zoomorphic decoration

To date, 72 pillars have been uncovered inside the monumental round Buildings A–D, F and H (Dietrich 2024; Dietrich/Schmidt in press). Fifty-one carry bas-reliefs or traces of erased reliefs; most represent animals, but some also display ›abstract signs‹ in the form of the Latin letters ›H‹ or ›C‹ (Morenz/Schmidt 2009). The variety of the images is wide but not random, and there are undisputable preferences for some motifs. Sorted by frequency, the number of pillars displaying certain images is as follows: relief bands (29), snake (19), bird (24), fox (14), wild boar (11), leopard (9), arms/hands (8), aurochs (7), H-shaped signs (7), bucranium (6), V-shape (5), arthropod (4), circle/disc (4), human (3 or 4), gazelle (2), chevron band (2), H- and C-shaped signs (2), clothing (2); some additional motifs occur only once (Dietrich 2024, 14–17 Tab. 2). The predominance of certain images in particular buildings was mentioned early on and has been confirmed as the iconographical canon of depictions has grown (Peters/Schmidt 2004, 208–209 Pl. 2; Becker et al. 2012, 33–37). Snakes are common in Building A, foxes in Building B, wild boar in Building C, and leopards in Building H. Snakes and foxes are also common in Building D, but birds occur in equal numbers. In contrast, Building F displays the highest number of anthropomorphic elements.

The imagery fails to reflect the locally hunted fauna in both its spectrum and frequency. The hunted game was predominantly gazelle, aurochs, and Asiatic wild ass (Peters/Schmidt 2004, 206–208; Pöllath et al. 2018, 32). The most frequently hunted animal, the gazelle, appears on two pillars only and the wild ass only once (Dietrich/Schmidt in press). There is a certain tendency to depict powerful animals like wild boar, leopards, aurochs, and bears, or the poisonous Levantine viper (Peters/Schmidt 2004, 183–184). On the other hand, foxes are skilled predators and, like leopards, are often depicted in leaping positions. The high frequency of bird depictions is also remarkable – for the PPN, the role of birds in beliefs surrounding death has been noted<sup>14</sup>. If the gender of animals is indicated, it is always expressively male. Almost all mammals are shown in attitudes of intense motion, often leaping (Busacca 2017). As for the animals on the lateral flanks of the pillars, their movement is almost consistently oriented towards the centre of the buildings. On the pillar fronts, they frequently occur in either upward or downward orientation (Busacca 2017, 326 Fig. 7). Snakes tend to transgress the limits between the image panels and

are the only animals frequently shown moving downwards (Peters/Schmidt 2004, 184). The general sense of movement towards the centre of the buildings evokes a congregation, actively focusing on and emphasising the two central pillars. K. Schmidt aptly called this an ›animal gathering‹ (Schmidt 2012, 118). In any case, the deliberate choice of certain animal species that do not reflect the hunted spectrum but share certain characteristics (power, prowess, danger) is remarkable. As will be shown below, their placement on the pillars is key to a deeper understanding of the site.

### Vested anthropomorphic pillars

The belts and loincloths on two pillars not only prove their anthropomorphic character but further show that the depicted individuals, at least in some cases, were meant to be shown as wearing vestments. As Göbekli Tepe's imagery is characterised by a high degree of stylisation, sometimes bordering on abstraction, further hints for clothing must be addressed. The starting point for a deeper discussion of garments on the pillars is the two parallel relief bands running down the frontal faces of many pillars. K. Schmidt interpreted these as stoles. Notwithstanding their interpretation, these depictions remained, to some degree, enigmatic. At one stage, L. D. Morenz and K. Schmidt (2009, 17) also suggested that the bands might symbolise the chest. Here, a third interpretation is favoured, which arises from a close inspection of the two most elaborately vested examples, Pillars 18 and 31. The present argument starts from the lower area of the pillars, where the hands and the belts/loincloths are depicted. On Pillar 18 (cf. Fig. 8; Fig. 12,1), the hands rest on the relief bands. The relief bands are worked lower in this area, giving the impression of disappearing below or ending at the belt. The belt, on the other hand, is shown again by slightly depressing the relief, as if lying above the fox pelt loincloth and securing it. The upper part of the fox pelt is turned down and superposes the belt. While the two relief bands are not continued below the pelt on Pillar 18, they are, however, on Pillar 31, which otherwise is similarly designed (cf. Fig. 12,2). Apparently, on Pillars 18 and 31, layers of clothing are depicted. In fact, it seems possible that the pillars are shown to wear long, open gowns, and the parallel bands represent the hems of these gowns. Whether these gowns have long sleeves remains unclear: a scratched line in the hand area could mean this or might be intended to delineate the hand (Fig. 13).

As the bands do not continue below the belt at Pillar 18, two kinds of gown differing in length could be meant (Fig. 14). Of course, this detail could have been omitted for another reason, e.g. the pillar could be unfinished. A hint in that direction is the belt, which – on the left lateral flank – remains empty in its rear part. Few other pillars are complete (respectively completely excavated) in their lower parts to serve as a comparison here. However, several pillars exist with relief bands along their complete length (Fig. 15). Pillar 33 in Building D is the only one with decorations all over the

14 Lichter 2007 with references.



**Fig. 12** A comparison of the details of the relief bands and belts of Pillars 18 (a) and 31 (b) reveals that layers of clothing are depicted.

*Abb. 12* Ein Vergleich der Details der Reliefbänder und Gürtel der Pfeiler 18 (a) und 31 (b) zeigt, dass Kleidungsschichten dargestellt sind.



**Fig. 13** Göbekli Tepe, detail of arms and hands above the belt on Pillar 18. A scratched line in the hand area could mean the end of a long sleeve or delineate the hand.

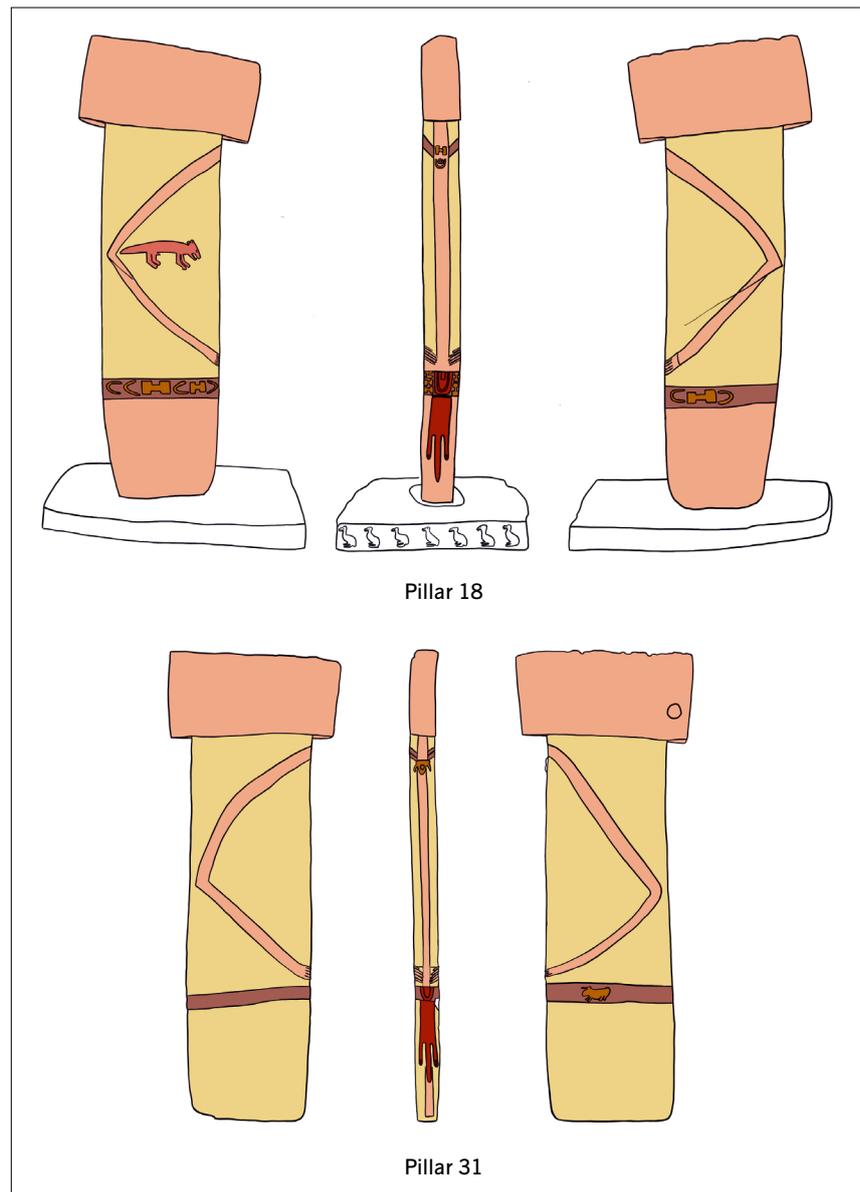
*Abb. 13* Göbekli Tepe, Detail von Armen und Händen oberhalb des Gürtels an Pfeiler 18. Eine eingeritzte Linie im Handbereich könnte das Ende eines langen Ärmels andeuten oder die Hand abgrenzen.

relief bands (Fig. 16; 18,2). Interestingly, the decorations in the lower parts actually represent the heads of snakes whose bodies are located on the pillar's broad sides. No part of the decoration transgresses the borders of the relief bands, strengthening the case for a cloak. In the case of Pillar 33,

the area between the bands is also decorated, hinting at another layer of clothes. The consequence of the interpretation of clothed pillars would be that many of the reliefs actually are located on the gowns, referring to possibly embroidered or stamped ornaments on Early Neolithic garments.

**Fig. 14** Göbekli Tepe. Garments shown on pillars 18 and 31. The relief bands at the front sides of the pillars can be interpreted as the hems of long gowns; the animal reliefs would then be decorations on these garments.

**Abb. 14** Göbekli Tepe. Kleidungsstücke auf den Pfeilern 18 und 31. Die Reliefbänder an den Vorderseiten der Pfeiler können als Säume von langen Gewändern interpretiert werden; die Tierreliefs wären dann Verzierungen auf diesen Gewändern.



Depictions located on the broad side of the heads would then either have to be interpreted as body paintings, tattoos, or as being located on the hoods of the individuals' clothes, which would explain the omission of ears, hair and facial features. In any case, we are confronted with garments likely to serve a special purpose, closely related to that of the monumental buildings.

### Special garments at the dawn of a new way of life

The author has recently proposed that the imagery and ›special buildings‹ of Göbekli Tepe and contemporary sites can be seen in the context of an animistic ontology in the sense of P. Descola (2013) with shamans as ritual specialists. This argument is based on finds, architectural details and iconography (Dietrich 2024). As such, brief remarks with an emphasis on clothing may suffice here. In many hunter-gatherer societies, shamans play a key role in negotiating social life and crisis situations. Shamans contact the spirit

world during an altered state of consciousness (Lewis-Williams 1988; Lewis-Williams/Dowson 1993; van Pool 2009, 178) and their soul or alter ego travels to the otherworld guided and guarded by helper spirits, often in zoomorphic form, to assist their community. The layout of Göbekli Tepe's ›special buildings‹, with the emphasis on a congregation of animals centred on the two large pillar-beings placed roughly in the middle of the buildings, could well mirror a cosmology. Sculptures that likely depict individuals in a trance accompanied by animals (Dietrich 2024, 39 Fig. 13) or imagery that refers to the shamanic voyage (Dietrich 2024, 38–40) strengthen this interpretation. The characteristic fields of shamanic activity are healer, diviner, psychopomp, bringer of luck/misfortune, overseer of sacrifices (Bäckman/Hultkrantz 1978, 14–17), and keeper of a group's myths/traditions through creation, memorisation, and performance of songs and poetry (Lommel 1980, 18; Hoppál 1994, 16, 22). The rich iconography on many pillars, which has been interpreted as referring to mythical stories (e.g. Borić 2013; Schmidt 2013), may illustrate the latter



Fig. 15 Pillars 37 (foreground) and 27 in Building C during excavations in 2009. Both have relief bands along their entire front sides. Pillar 37 is the building's western central pillar and was destroyed in prehistory. Pillar 27 is the only one so far known at Göbekli Tepe with a preserved high relief on its front side. It depicts a leopard lurking in front of a boar in low relief.

*Abb. 15 Die Pfeiler 37 (Vordergrund) und 27 in Gebäude C während der Ausgrabungen im Jahr 2009. Beide tragen Reliefbänder entlang ihrer gesamten Vorderseiten. Pfeiler 37 ist der westliche Zentralpfeiler des Gebäudes und wurde bereits in vorgeschichtlicher Zeit zerstört. Pfeiler 27 ist der einzige bisher bekannte Pfeiler in Göbekli Tepe mit einem erhaltenen Hochrelief. Das Hochrelief zeigt einen Leoparden, der vor einem in Flachrelief dargestellten Wildschwein lauert.*

aspects. Elaborate garments richly decorated with animal imagery would certainly fit this line of interpretation, as the costume features prominently among the shamanic sacra.

The equipment of Eurasian shamans frequently includes a specific costume (cloak, shirt, trousers, belt, headdress, mittens, shoes) that differs regionally and in elaboration<sup>15</sup> but usually has references to or images of helper spirits, often in the form of zoomorphic pendants/applications, embroidery, or textile strands. The sum of the pendants or embroidered zoomorphic and anthropomorphic images on the costume often represents the assembly of an individual shaman's helper spirits. The whole coat can be meant to symbolise an animal (Shirokogorow 1935, 67; Prokofjeva



Fig. 16 Pillar 33 in Building D at Göbekli Tepe. Most reliefs are located on the right broad side and the front side; the left broad side has fewer images. Unlike most other pillars, the reliefs partly cross the boundaries between these areas. In the lower part of each broad side (Fig. 18b) is a group of snakes whose heads lie on the front side. No part of the decoration transgresses the borders of the relief bands, strengthening the case for a cloak.

*Abb. 16 Pfeiler 33 in Gebäude D in Göbekli Tepe. Die meisten Reliefs befinden sich auf der rechten Breitseite und der Vorderseite des Pfeilers; auf der linken Breitseite gibt es weniger Darstellungen. Im Gegensatz zu den meisten anderen Pfeilern überschreiten die Reliefs teilweise die Grenzen zwischen diesen Bereichen. Im unteren Teil jeder Breitseite (Abb. 18b) befindet sich eine Gruppe von Schlangen, deren Köpfe auf der Vorderseite liegen. Kein Teil dieser Verzierung überschreitet jedoch die Grenzen der Reliefbänder, was für einen Mantel spricht.*

1963, 129). Evenki shaman costumes, for example, can feature fabric bird wings (Hoppál 1994, 30–31 Fig. 19). In Enets costumes, the bird imagery is reduced to fringes on hems and sleeves, meaning feathers, and three wedge-shaped projections on the back, suggesting the bird's tail (Prokofjeva 1963, 128 Fig. 2–3). Tuva coats often display bundles of ribbons on the back, symbolising snakes as important helper spirits; rows of pendants are meant to symbolise birdwings (Djakonova 1978, 333–334; 337–338 Fig. 2).

In the Polar North, belts richly decorated with miniaturised objects, animal teeth, bones, skin, figurines, textile strands, and full-sized weapons or tools received from their community were both shamanic paraphernalia and impor-

15 Holmberg 1922; Nioradze 1925, 66–74; Shirokogorow 1935, 67–69 Fig. 2–4; Prokofjeva 1963; Djakonova 1978; Gračeva 1978; Hoppál

1994, 108–114; Pavlinskaya 1994; DuBois 2009, 177; Anawalt 2014; Reymann 2015, 92–99.

**Fig. 17** Nevalı Çori, the so-called bird man (ht. 23 cm) from the ›special building‹. Seen from the side, one has the impression of a bird with a large beak and wings hanging vertically at the sides of the body. However, the frontal view reveals a human face inside the beak, and a ridge running along the forehead changes the impression, suggesting a human wearing a hooded cloak.

**Abb. 17** Nevalı Çori, der sogenannte Vogelmann (H. 23 cm) aus dem ›Sondergebäude‹. Von der Seite betrachtet hat man den Eindruck eines Vogels mit einem großen Schnabel und senkrecht an den Seiten des Körpers hängenden Flügeln. In der Frontalansicht erkennt man jedoch ein menschliches Gesicht innerhalb des Schnabels, und ein entlang der Stirn verlaufender Grat lässt auf einen Menschen schließen, der einen Kapuzenmantel trägt.



tant signs of the profession (Laugrand 2010, Fig. 34; Ryan/Young 2013, 28–29). Belts with chimes, rattles and various small objects also feature in costumes of other shamanic traditions (Hoppál 1994, 114–115 Fig. 140–141). Headdresses may vary from a simple band over caps with zoomorphic elements (Prokofjeva 1963, 140–141 Fig. 19; Hoppál 1994, 121 Fig. 156–157) to complex shaman ›crowns‹ that frequently feature antlers, feathers, or metal applications (Nioradze 1925, 74–76; Hoppál 1994, 29, 76 Fig. 84–85; 116–121 Fig. 144–155; Hamayon 2021). Headdresses often include a veil-like element meant to hide the shaman's face from malevolent spirits (Reymann 2015, 85, Fig. 27, 99–101), made of cloth or strings with dangling animal teeth (Hoppál 1994, 52–53 Fig. 51–52; 62–63 Fig. 63; 76 Fig. 84; 90 Fig. 105; 117 Fig. 147–148). Like the veil, masks<sup>16</sup>, which often have no (Prokofjeva 1963, 140 Fig. 20–22) or only small eye openings (DuBois 2009, 179), can be used to hide the shaman's face during contact with the spiritual world (Shuyun 2003, 167–168). Masks are seen as protection from supernatural attacks, much like the costume in general (Shuyun 2003, 169–170). However, their functions are broader: masks are tools that facilitate contact with spirits; by cutting off contact with the real world, they force the shaman to focus his gaze inwards (Shuyun 2003, 166–167).

The shaman costume is seen as an animate object with several functions: a) representation of a special position of the wearer; b) symbolic or actual depiction of the helper spirits; c) protection from supernatural attacks; d) representation of cosmology; e) seat of part of the vital energy or supernatural power of a shaman<sup>17</sup>. In some cultures' belief systems, the spirits will not recognise the shaman without the specific costume – lacking it, he or she would be helpless

in the otherworld (Kortt 1991, 28). As the costume represents a specific assembly of spirits, in some cultures, shamans possess multiple costumes for different occasions (Gračeva 1978, 315–316; Hoppál 1994, 29; DuBois 2009, 177; 179).

While the site has delivered a variety of finds that may be identified as shamanic sacra (Dietrich 2024, 43–48), the imagery discovered at Göbekli Tepe and contemporary sites hints at the shaman costume beyond the animals depicted on the clothes worn by the T-shaped pillar-statues. First, there is ample evidence for masks and masking. Several stone-sculptured depictions of masks are known from Göbekli Tepe and other sites like Jerf el-Ahmar and Nevalı Çori (Dietrich et al. 2018a; Dietrich et al. 2018b). However, they depict only human faces without allusions to animals. Regarding other imagery, topics that hint at human-animal transitions or masking as animals are frequent motifs. The so-called birdman, a limestone sculpture from Nevalı Çori (Fig. 17), is a good example (Hauptmann 2011, Fig. 13a–b). Seen from the side, the impression is of a bird with a large beak and wings hanging vertically at the sides of the body. But the frontal view reveals a human face inside the beak, and a ridge running along the forehead changes the impression, suggesting a masked human wearing a hooded cloak. Given the static features of the upward-looking face with rounded opened mouth, and its similarity to a miniature mask from the same site (Dietrich et al. 2018b, 5 Fig. 2.), the depicted person is very likely wearing a mask. The sculpture points to the crossing of fluid borders between humans and animals, a topic that recurs in many PPN images (Dietrich 2024). It also provides an argument for the long gowns and hoods identified as a possible feature of the T-pillars.

<sup>16</sup> Nioradze 1925, 77; Gračeva 1989; Hoppál 1994, 88 Fig. 102; 122–123 Fig. 158–161; Ivanov/Stukalov 1975; Shuyun 2003; DuBois 2009, 182–184.

<sup>17</sup> List after Reymann 2015, 97, with bibliography.

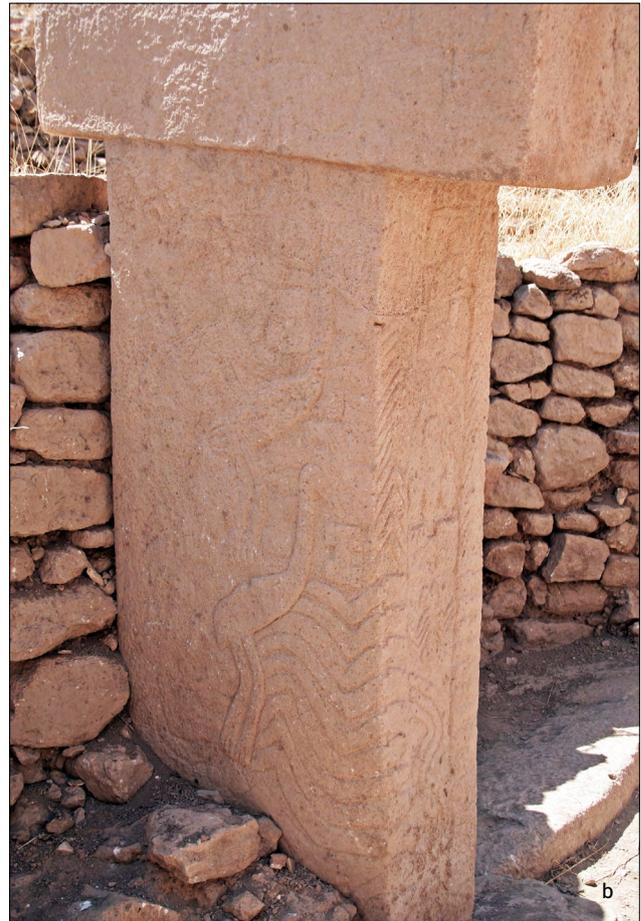


Fig. 18a–b Göbekli Tepe, crane imagery on Pillar 2 (a) and Pillar 33 (b). While images of other birds are anatomically correct, crane images at Göbekli Tepe frequently have human legs. It is likely that those images depict masked humans.

Abb. 18a–b Göbekli Tepe, Kranichabbildungen auf Pfeiler 2 (a) und Pfeiler 33 (b). Während Bilder von anderen Vögeln anatomisch korrekt sind, haben Kranichbilder am Göbekli Tepe häufig menschliche Beine. Es ist wahrscheinlich, dass diese Bilder maskierte Menschen darstellen.

Among the pillar reliefs, depictions of cranes provide important evidence. At an early stage, it had already been noticed that while images of other birds were anatomically correct<sup>18</sup>, some of the crane images at Göbekli Tepe displayed human legs (Fig. 18). Hence, it may be that those images depict masked humans. This fits well with observations made by M. Benz and J. Bauer (2015, 3–4 Fig. 2–4) on the depictions of human figures on stone vessels from Körting Tepe (Özkaya/Coşkun 2011, Fig. 4; Özkaya et al. 2013, 32) and Hasankeyf Höyük, Batman Province, Turkey (Miyake 2013, 45 Fig. 1), which the authors convincingly interpret as shamans. The images feature long striped gowns, headgear indicated by two long stripes possibly representing feathers, outstretched arms, leg positions implying movement, and in some cases, a beak-like mouth. Sometimes the individuals are associated with animals, but are always the only human-shaped beings in the images. A closer look reveals an interesting detail: on their remarkably narrow, rectangular front sides, the depictions on two vessels from Körting Tepe clearly feature two parallel bands (Özkaya/Coşkun 2011, Fig. 4; Özkaya et al. 2013, 32). The shamans are wearing the gowns depicted on the Göbekli Tepe pillars.

## Conclusion

This brief overview of findings from Göbekli Tepe and contemporary sites is intended to highlight two key findings. First, the earliest life-sized to monumental stone sculptures made by humankind – highly stylised depictions as well as more naturalistic images – offer hints at clothing for a period that so far has produced few primary sources in the form of preserved textiles/fabrics. The items of clothing identified encompass simple headgear, belts, and loin-cloths, as well as long, probably hooded gowns abundantly decorated with animal figures. Second, the latter element of clothing, in particular, most likely does not represent a garment worn by all group members. Stylised anthropomorphic pillars with their animal symbolism are restricted to »special buildings«, just like the stone sculptures with similar elements of clothing, while Nevalı Çori shows that clay figurines from domestic areas have different features. According to their context and style, the long gowns worn by the pillar-statues, as well as the complex belts with fox fur loin-cloths, can be identified as clothing worn in ritual settings, most likely by shamans.

18 Peters et al. 2014, 176 with references.

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