A Queer Perspective on the Early Neolithic Urfa Region: The Ecstatic Agency of the Phallus

by

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Koç University

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ABSTRACT

A Queer Perspective on the Early Neolithic Urfa Region: The Ecstatic Agency of the Phallus

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The phallus, which has an important place in the Upper Mesopotamian Early Neolithic iconography, has been evaluated in the archaeological literature through contemporary connotations rather than its material assets. The myriad phallic themes are interpreted as precursors for a male-centered society, although there is no material evidence that supports the existence of top-down hierarchical social stratification or binary sex system. This thesis offers a holistic interpretation of the phallic iconography by using Contextual Archaeology with the frame of Queer Theory on the archaeological material recovered from Nevali Çori, Göbeklitepe, Karahantepe, and Sayburç. In this study, instead of understanding the phallic imagery as a symbol for a male-centered society, the phallus is contextualized through its physical properties, as an ecstatic ritual tool that helped the mediator to transcend into the spiritual world. In this attempt, current archaeology politics of sexuality are criticized by using phenomenological approaches to queer studies. Moreover, strong post-structuralist relations between Queer Theory and Contextual Archaeology are revealed and novel ways of practicing Queer Archaeology are introduced.

ÖZETÇE

Erken Neolitik Urfa Bölgesine Kuir Bir Bakış: Fallusun Esrik Etkenliği

Emre Deniz Yurttaş

Arkeoloji ve Sanat Tarihi, Yüksek Lisans

15 Şubat 2024

Yukarı Mezopotamya Erken Neolitik ikonografisinde önemli bir yere sahip olan fallus, arkeoloji literatüründe maddi varlığından ziyade çağdaş çağrışımlarıyla değerlendirilmiştir. Sayısız fallik temalar, erkek merkezli bir toplumun işareti olarak yorumlansa da bölgede hiyerarşik bir sosyal tabakalaşmanın veya ikili cinsiyet sisteminin varlığını destekleyen hiçbir maddi kanıt yoktur. Bu tez, Nevali Çori, Göbeklitepe, Karahantepe ve Sayburç'tan ele geçen arkeolojik malzeme üzerine Bağlamsal Arkeoloji'yi Kuir Teori çerçevesiyle uygulayarak fallik ikonografinin bütünsel bir yorumunu sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, fallus imgesini erkek merkezli bir toplumun sembolü olarak anlamak yerine, fallus, fiziksel özellikleri üzerinden, aracının manevi dünyaya geçmesine yardımcı olan esrik bir ritüel aracı olarak bağlamsallaştırılmaktadır. Bu girişimde cinselliğe ilişkin güncel arkeoloji politikaları, kuir çalışmalara fenomenolojik yaklaşımlar kullanılarak eleştirilmektedir. Ayrıca Kuir Teori ile Bağlamsal Arkeoloji arasındaki güçlü post-yapısalcı ilişkiler ortaya çıkarılarak Kuir Arkeoloji'yi uygulamanın yeni yolları tanıtılmaktadır.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANT	Actor-network theory
EPPNB	Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic B
MPPNB	Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic B
m	Meter
m^2	Square meter
NNW	North-northwest
PPNA	Pre-Pottery Neolithic A
PPNB	Pre-Pottery Neolithic B
SSE	South-southeast

Chapter 1:
INTRODUCTION

The Early Neolithic Urfa region, which is located in modern Southeastern Turkey, has attracted great academic and public attention since the 1990s with its monumental architecture and rich visual material. The monumental construction projects were started at the end of the Epipaleolithic and continued until the Middle Pre-Pottery Neolithic (MPPNB) period in the region. Along with its popularity among scholarly and non-scholarly circles, the archaeological narrative of the region is defined through several sets of binaries, whose existence in the prehistoric period is highly dubious. The binary structure of the mainstream narrative can be easily seen especially in the arguments proposing the existence of a male elite class, whose power extended over the administration of economy and society. The fact that the elite identity is presented in the archaeological narrative as a composite identity with the male sex is due to the frequent occurrence of phallic imagery in the monumental buildings. In these narratives, binaries like male/female and elite/commoner, sacred/profane, and domestic/wild are utterly visible. With the advance of post-structuralist current, these classifications have started to get questioned as they do not provide a reliable account of comprehending the many faces of human experiences. On the other hand, the archaeological material of the Early Neolithic Urfa region has not been recontextualized by using a non-binary framework within a post-structuralist fashion (but see Banning 2011).

Deriving its roots from the post-structuralist current, Queer Theory has been instrumental in questioning the binaries that are especially related to sex and sexuality. Although it has been a driving force in many social sciences such as sociology and anthropology, the application of Queer Theory to archaeology somehow unprevailing. Although there are many reasons for this outcome, Queer Theory is instrumental in pushing the archaeologist to think outside of the boundaries drawn by modern norms and is provocative to situate the material in a non-normative context that does not apply to present norms. Although a separate study is mandatory for each of the binaries mentioned above, as the focus of this thesis, I will only focus on the elite male identity which is used for creating a dual societal plan in the prehistoric life of the region. As my main question deals with the concept of binaries which mainly dwells on sex identities, I have selected Queer Theory to deconstruct the mainstream narrative and to reason the motive behind interpreting the archaeological material in a certain way that favors the existence of male domination in prehistory.

As the sites, containing the most generous visual material, I have selected Nevali Çori, Göbeklitepe, Karahantepe, and Sayburç as my main points of investigation. In Chapter 2 “Feminist and Queer Theories and Archaeology,” I will give an overview of Feminist and Queer Theories, as both of them feed from each other through time, and review their contribution to archaeology while considering their challenges.

In Chapter 3 “His-Stories of Early Neolithic Urfa Region: Deconstructing the Mainstream Narrative”, I will apply the theoretical framework to the mainstream narrative that has been written for the region and evaluate its reliability by using the archaeological material recovered from the selected sites and recent studies. In this chapter, I will try to answer questions such as: Do we have material evidence to suggest that there was a segregation in terms of sex? Do we have labor differentiation in the archaeological account? Did the Early Neolithic Urfa region live in a binary sex system? By doing that, I aim to deconstruct the mainstream narrative that envisions male control over the Early Neolithic Urfa society.

The deconstruction of the mainstream narrative naturally requires a reconstruction of a new narrative that is contextualized in a different framework. In Chapter 4 “Phallus in Play: Context and Queer Action,” I will first give an overview of materiality studies in archaeology, then move to the possible ways of queering the ways we contextualize the archaeological material. In this chapter, using the Sayburç Relief, I will contextualize the action, that the high relief figure engages with, with a queer perspective. While doing that, I will also draw parallels from the current state of archaeopolitics of sexuality in a self-reflexive way and show how certain concepts related to sexuality are concealed out of a queer embracement.

In Chapter 5 “Spirits, Ecstasy, and the Phallus,” I will contextualize the phallus and queer action attached to it as an actor in the ritual network and try to demonstrate this in the selected works from the sites of the Early Neolithic Urfa region. By doing that, I aim to reveal the common theme embedded in these artistic representations and try to give an account of the possible activities that took place in these rituals and what the rituals aimed for.

Chapter 2:
FEMINIST, QUEER THEORIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

Queer theory, a post-modern theoretical framework, has exerted significant influence within the realm of social sciences. Its themes, which problematize conventional notions of gender and sexuality, have found application in the field of archaeology, where they have been employed to seek non-binary interpretations of historical phenomena. While originating from Gay and Lesbian Studies, queer theory transcends the confines of gender and sexuality, encompassing a broader spectrum of questions that extend beyond the purview of feminist practice. The wide-ranging nature of these inquiries, however, engenders certain challenges. This chapter aims to elucidate the multifaceted relationship between queer theory, feminism, and archaeology, shedding light on the emergence, utilization, and inherent complexities of queer theory.

2.2 Feminist Premise

With the first-wave feminist agenda starting in the 19th century, taking an impetus from Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), feminism accomplished a significant threshold as an ideology that managed to penetrate the organs of the state by reterritorializing the position of women within society as an actor, who has the right to speak, to get access to education, to vote and to take custody of her children, as a politically framed figure (Sanders 2001). Although first-wave feminism empowered women in the political scene and legal setting, it did not expand into the daily inequalities that women had to withstand in their everyday lives. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan (1965) identifies this discontinuity in the feminist movement, which started with the winning of voting rights, as feminism being a dead history for women born after 1920 (p. 93).

With the anti-Vietnam War movement, the rise in the consciousness of civil rights, and student movements of the 60s, second-wave feminism emerged out of the left-wing current to confront the oppressor (Thornham 2001, 25-26). The movement situated women as the socially oppressed and defended the sexual liberation of women with its focus on body and sexuality (Thornham 2001, 27). However, the second wave could not provide an instrumental agenda that would unearth the diverse experiences of women (Lorde 2000, 89). The internal dissociations in the second wave were prominently put forward by the black feminists who expressed that their racial and gender struggle is not considered in the middle-class white women's liberation movement (Beal 1969). Although the second wave identified a common socially oppressed category of woman and proposed a universal sisterhood, black women were not visible along with working-class and lesbian women (Thornham 2001, 27-28).

2.2.1 Overarching Oppressors

The prevalent concept of the category of woman was most significant for the second wavers, which stood for a common nuance for the universal experience of being a woman (Grant 1993). However, the conceptual framing of the women's experiences circumscribed by a modern/western border presented these experiences in a dual framework.

The dualism is best visible in a paradigm used for historicizing women's experience in the 19th century. One of the most potent contributions of second-wave feminism to the feminist canon is the introduction of the long-lasting paradigm of separate spheres (e.g., Welter 1966; Kerber 1988) which was perceived as the prime motive for the women suppression since the 19th century and was not contested by the first wavers (Sanders 2001, 16). In his book *American Democracy*, de Tocqueville (1840) examined the women's position in the American society. In his study, he separates the spheres of males and females. He believed that the aristocratic government brought women a sense of freedom and independence but when they get married, they are confined in the domestic sphere that prohibits them from stepping outside and focusing on their children and husbands (see also, Friedan 1963). In this sense, the private sphere is the opposite of the public sphere which represents the energetic, economic domain of men (e.g., Alcott 1838; Cott 1977; Wall 1991). For decades, the assumed "woman belongs home, man belongs at work" paradigm was used to justify the inaccessibility to higher education, income inequality, and restriction of freedom of birth and abortion. The criticism of the separate sphere paradigm is based on the over-simplification of the terms. The model could not even be securely applied to societies where women face extreme subordination. From an Orientalist perspective, the Middle East is mostly understood as a corrupt place in terms of women's rights in the West (Weber 2001, 125). However, even in that "corrupt" place, there are women as business patrons and investors, embedded into the public (Zilfi 2008), along with women who are out in the public to fulfill their responsibilities related to the public sphere. Whereas men return to the private sphere as the other part of their life, bringing goods to the household collected from the public sphere. Thus, rather than a strict dichotomy, the spheres are porous and overlap each other. Even in the houses, some of the rooms were more private than others (Yentsch 1991, 205). Tea parties, baptisms, and small-scale celebrations also take place in the private sphere yet with a public character (Nylander 1994, 241). In this sense, it would be highly dubious to talk about an ahistorical and universal border for where the domestic starts and where the public ends. At first look, the paradigm could be seen as instrumental in exemplifying the subordination of upper-class, non-working women but, according to the Marxist and socialist feminists, it makes domestic labor and its contributions to the overall social production invisible (Bergeron 2016, 180; e.g., Oakley 1974). As for the lower-middle class, working women, it has no validity since these women take active parts in the so-called public sphere.

In the second-wave feminist movement, the patriarchy, being the universal *raison d'être* for women's suppression resulted in the victimization of women and universal reduction of women's experiences around the world. The idea of the oppressor and the oppressed, however, as an opposing unchanging binary, stayed unshaken and posed another strong binary along with the formulation of the paradigm of separate spheres. Being a pre-second-wave feminist philosopher, Beauvoir (1956) states in her seminal work *The Second Sex*, the historical oppression of women is not related to the biological nature of womanhood but to society itself. In a society where the oppression of women is prohibited by tradition and law, it is not possible to mention the oppression of women and/or the oppressive agency of patriarchy (Beauvoir 1956, 63). Taking an external determinant, patriarchy, and presenting it as the ahistorical and stable dominant over the so-called universal oppression of women was the fallacy of the second wavers, which allowed the production of over-simplifying accounts of women's experiences (Mann & Huffman 2005, 58). The second wave unconsciously states women as a passive entity with no agency, which is dragged through the current. It is significant to indicate that the first and second waves of feminism must be cherished due to their contributions to the feminist canon, even if they were not able to demolish the static and ahistorical misplacement of women and their experiences constructed within a framework of universalizing binaries.

2.2.2 The Third Wave and Intersectionality

With the post-modern turn, the third wave was introduced into the academic discourse (Des Jardins 2011, 151). The anti-foundationalist framework of post-modernity allowed feminism to distance itself from the essentialist construction of women as a universalizing category that encompasses the same comprehensive experiences (Heywood & Drake 1997). Third wave feminism has branched out as an encompassing theory, which tries to understand how distinct intersections of identities make and change the experience of women without a mono-category. Third-wave feminism focuses on how different identities intersect with each other and generate different experiences (e.g., Tea 2006; Morgan 2006). For instance, the experience of a working-class, middle-aged woman of color would be dissimilar from an upper-class, elderly white woman. The first and the second waves of feminism did not assign a difference in experiences between these two examples. For them, both examples are expected to encounter similar obstacles caused by similar dysfunctions. Yet being a woman is not the only feature that shapes how a woman lives. A woman of color is not only dealing with inequality because she is a woman, but she is also a possible target for racial inequality. The contribution of different identities brings out varied stories that cannot be universalized or reduced to the outcome of a single determinant (Heywood 2006, xx). Thus, intersectionality is a substantial contribution of the third wave as it has been capable of intricately problematizing diverse experiences of women in different religious, racial, and economic contexts.

The monolithic categorization of women and the idea of a universal sisterhood, which only accommodated white middle-upper class women in its epistemological context, can be stated as the main point of questioning of third-wave feminism. In framing the third-wave feminist theory, gender (Rubin 1975), which was proposed before the advance of the third wave, was used in the deconstruction of this monolithic category. The reason for this seismic switch was not to describe but to theorize the social and cultural relationality between sexes, as the term allows for abstraction which helped to construct narratives that do not directly concern the biological sex (Des Jardins 2011, 150). By doing that, gender promises a free space from deeply rooted beliefs and modes of association with a particular sex (Scott 1986, 1055). The woman is decentered as the main subject of the problem, constituting an opposition to man, and relocated in a web with myriad intersectional relations with other identities, which allowed a paradigm shift from focusing exclusively on the category of woman (Heywood 2006, 366-367). Gender, in this sense, emancipates the fixed norms of being man and woman, and frames the discussion by being a cultural and social lens concerning the institutions and discourse. Through a post-modern lens, gender provides a framework that allows multiplicity and ambiguity in identifying identity (Heywood 2006, 257-258).

On the other hand, though the division between gender and sex is widely framed in the discussions in the third-wave agenda, sex was still seen as a feature that is universal and constant regardless of culture and society rather than a fluid phenomenon. Although it has been beneficial to the feminist discourse, as it has relocated the discussion from being a woman being the sole 'problem' to a wider relational frame that includes society and culture altogether, the third wave does not provide a solution to the binaries embedded in the identification of biological sex. It only ensures an alternative to examine the influence of society on the construction of gender identity, without problematizing how the body is sexed through the social norms. The term gender, indeed, was instrumental for the third-wave feminists to allow a further study on previously neglected identities under the shadow of the category of woman, for example, LGBTQ+ individuals (Des Jardins 2011, 152-153); however, it conserved the binary foundations which were prevalent in the feminist discourse from its beginning.

The intervention to these static binary forms (man/woman, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual) that relate to society but also biology, has become possible by the introduction of queer theory into the academic discourse. Although queer theory is understood as part of the third-wave feminist theory in the mainstream academic narrative, it is a different body of thought. It is, of course, not possible to fully detach queer from feminist discourse as they share a transitive foundation, where they both challenge normative constructions of sexuality by making a critique of stable identities. Still, I find it valuable to set queer theory to a distinct domain to demonstrate its extent and dimensions, with a special emphasis on its methodology.

2.3 Emergence of the Study of Queer

According to Halperin (1995), *queer* means "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (p.62). Before being the key term of a theoretical movement and reclaimed as a way of identification by the LGBT+ community, the word *queer* had a pejorative undertone, making a reference to the odd state of a person (Brontsema 2004, 3). The reclaimed word then had a strong political meaning and defined the activism. Without a doubt, the oddness comes from the position one takes against the authoritative power that sets the norms. Although it has been historically ascribed to the LGBT+ community as a way of self-referential identity, the initial meaning of the word implies numerous features of its use and extent.

2.3.1 Queer Theory: Unraveling the Q-Word

Taking an impetus from sexual liberation movements of the 70s and 80s, gay and lesbian studies were introduced to social sciences as a subdiscipline to scrutinize how sexuality constitutes the basis of political and economic life (Gamson & Moon 2004, 47). The current was supported by the writings of gay and lesbian writers (e.g., Katz 1976; Rowbotham & Weeks 1977; Smith-Rosenberg 1979) and the English translation of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978) (Voss 2000, 183). By the mid-90s, Queer Theory found itself a place in sexuality studies as a theoretical lens that affirms fluidity, ambiguity, and instability (Seidman 1996, 11) and a medium that positioned the stigmatized identities to the main scenery of knowledge production through creating group identities based on their differences from the norm (Butler 1993, 21). By the 90s, coined by Teresa de Lauretis (1991), queer theory got to question how sexual identities are formed by a heteronormative discourse, which has a fundamental organizing principle (Green 2002, 502). According to Stein and Plummer (1996), queer theory problematizes gender categories as unstable, leans on deconstruction, rejects binaries, and interrogates concepts that are conventionally not situated under sexuality (p. 134). Sexuality cannot be understood through heterosexuality and homosexuality since there is no stable category as such (Gamson & Moon 2004, 49). Binary categories are dysfunctional as the differences do not deploy in opposition to each other under two groups but proliferate independently of each other in different contexts (Weedon 1999, 73). In an ethnographic study of drag queens, Rupp and Taylor (2003) show how drag queens performing at a Key West Cabaret describe their profession as a deconstructive social protest that turns upside down the conventional binary sexual categories and heteronormativity (pp. 212-13). Queens use their bodies as a queer gadget that mixes up the set-off categories of gender, creating new identities different from the ones that have been politically defined by an authority. Florence Konstantina Delight, who is an

Istanbulite drag queen, tells how they do not cover their mustache while performing and that it is a game they like to play against people who try to assign a specific gender identity to them. They add that since drag is also fictional, there is a part to it which leaves people questioning, between the devil and the deep blue sea (+90, 2021). These examples demonstrate how identity can be fluid and hold the ability to change into most unidentified forms. Not only identities attested to humans but also things stand away from stability in every sense.

In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing (2015) gives an account of Matsutake mushrooms and their relationship with the people, environment, and cultural and economic values. Mushrooms do not emerge out of a vacuum but through a set of definite and indefinite variables, extending from micro-biotic to industrial processes, that prepare the stage for their existence. The economic value of a Matsutake mushroom continuously changes from being a commodity to being a gift. The cultural value of it is also fluid. When its odor is a desired feature for the Japanese, it is completely the opposite for the Americans. Is it a gift or is it a commodity? Is it palatable or is it repellent? It changes according to where it is and with whom it is. Thus, classification and identification are beyond the fixed limits. The meanings attested to it, bestow it a different identity each time it changes hands. In this sense, its unpredictable, ever-changing identity is very 'queer.' The definitions attested to it do not stay granted, turning the fixed identification into a futile effort. Tsing provides a very extensive "meshwork" (Ingold 2015) for the existence of Matsutake mushrooms. This meshwork is highly interrelated and unpredictable. Each of the elements in this meshwork has its multi-faced effects on the overall outcome that connect and call forth unpredictable means. While deforestation is a serious issue by itself with its direct effects, Matsutake mushrooms that come with deforestation were not one of these direct effects but a 'prank' of nature, which created an economic income source with its collectors. This multi-layered relationality obligates us to think beyond the binaries as there are myriad outcomes of an act, either visible or invisible, major or minor, which cannot be directly classified under a category. There is indeed a "rhizomatic", as Deleuze and Guattari (1980) put it, formation of relations between things. This rhizomatic relationality is different from an explanation like one specific thing has identifiable, specific outcomes. Its existence through deforestation, which is normatively a disastrous issue for the environment, situates it against the norm as this destruction does not reverberate with the same meaning over the totality of the environment.

The canonical works of queer theory, though some of them did not start off as queer, also state how queer theory rejects a stable and knowable subject through radical deconstructionism, and it situates itself against the norms set by the authority. In her seminal work "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Rubin (1984) illustrates how sexuality is socially constructed and not biologically designated. She argues that the body, although having a part in expressing sexuality, does not define one's sexuality. According to her, sexuality is defined in an extremely retributive context in Western societies through the control of formal and informal forces (pp. 149-50). Her essay indicates the social meanings of sexuality can be altered by authoritative power. Her argument does not define sexuality as a transhistorical and non-cultural phenomenon, but as a notion that is open to political intervention, having a changing value according to the prevalent cultural and social conventions. The idea of not only gender but also sex and sexuality as social constructs accelerated the historical and philosophical studies made on this topic in the 90s. In their book *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) shows gender is performative. It maintains and recreates itself through repetitive interactions in society through the "consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (p. 2). For Butler (1990), heterosexual gender identity is constructed upon the imitation of past gendered behavior (p. 180). By questioning the fixed identities positioned in a binary formation like homosexual/heterosexual and masculine/feminine, Butler examines their roots in the nature of human anatomy, which is thought necessarily male or female, and concludes that there is no relation between biological sex and gender. Not only the identity but also biological sex itself as a stable core reflecting the gender identity is also a social construction (Butler 1990, 178-179). The illusion of a sexed body and gender identity is the product of behavioral manifestation, created by repeated bodily performance (Butler 1990, 173). This construction is not naturally given but shaped through repetitive social, cultural, and political norms, by citing the norms conferred by the authority (Butler 1993, 13). Butler accepts the existence of sexual identities like gay, lesbian, etc., however, think that they are unnecessary and constructed through reproduction and repetition under society's assumptions and expectations, allowing for a truth effect. The emphasis on the non-normative qualities in sex and sexuality, along with noteworthy stress on the disability of the identity concept is what makes queer theory distinct. According to them, both sex and gender are always in doing. In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud,* Laqueur (1990) coined the one-sex theory, arguing that until the late-17th century, the body was not sexually categorized using the genitals as the vagina and penis were seen as the same organ, the vagina is being the inverse positioned version of the penis; thus, not allowing for a sex assignment. Moving from these examples, even though gender and sex have been promoted as a dual category, where one dwells on the other, it is better to conceptualize them as distinct entities that are separately shaped through social interactions. The separation of gender and sex, and the fact that they are both constructed through social interaction necessitates not using one of them as the foundational base for the other. In other words, defining 'the female' and assigning it gender roles through its contextual surroundings will end up with reductionist and erroneous accounts.

These accounts demonstrate that the authoritative power that regulates society has an enormous impact on the representation of what is conventionally perceived as biologically essential. The ever-changing, unstable quality, of course, does not represent the sole essence of what is queer by itself. The emphasis on the changing quality of things, meanings, etc. should be better stated as a contribution from a larger theoretical current, namely post-structuralism. Challenging the normal by taking a position against the authoritative power, however, is the essence crystalized in Queer Theory. In this sense, its frame is larger than sexuality as it aims to destabilize each and every social norm.

2.3.2 Feminist and Queer Theories

There is indeed a chronological parallel between how queer theory formed itself throughout the 70s and the 80s through different branches of social study and how feminist discourse reshaped itself starting in the mid-80s. The multiplicity of identities was a dissident point of debate of feminist women of color in the second wave of feminism, which then made its potent progress to the third wave (Snyder 2008, 180). Although the 'multiplicity of identities' argument has a connotation that is prone to be understood in parallel with queer theory, queer theory stands for the fluidity of identities, thus, emphasizing the redundancy of identification. Queer is not an identity but a critique of the concept of identity (Butler 2004).

2.4 Queer Archaeology

As it is a theoretical lens for a variety of social sciences, archaeology has also attempted to hold one end of Queer Theory while examining the past. Feminist archaeology has been groundbreaking with its questioning of androcentric bias. However, making women visible in the archaeological account was insufficient to represent the historical experiences in totality. Instead of challenging the widely contested gender-specific methodological framework that produced androcentric accounts of the past, the risk of feminist archaeology, especially if oriented by a second-wave feminist theoretical framework, is clearly setting the discussion to another normative framework, finding the woman in the archaeological account without distinguishing different identities of race, class, age, religion, language, etc. (Bolger 2013, 9). The reason for this theoretical impasse should be discussed through the unshaken, mono-block binaries of man and woman. Queer Theory could be instrumental in redefining the practice of archaeology and methodologies related to it in order to present an account that challenges binary categorization.

2.4.1 Feminist Archaeology

Taking an impetus from the post-processual turn of the 80s, gender and sexuality studies in archaeology started to advance in the scholarship (Croucher 2012, 155; Voss 2000, 181; e.g., Conkey & Spector 1984; 1987; Conkey & Gero 1991). “Archaeology and the Study of Gender,” written by Conkey and Spector in 1984, constitutes the first manifesto of feminist archaeology, the first work defining the feminist approach in archaeology, and paved the road for further research (Voss 2000, 181). Although the main subject of inquiry was women, many of the scholars who had given work in this archaeological literature did not consider their work as ‘feminist’ yet within the perimeters of ‘womanist’ or ‘gender’ archaeology (Voss 2000, 181; Conkey 2003, 870; e.g., Joyce & Classen 1997; Gilchrist 1999; Nelson 1997; Wright 2000). However, according to Voss (2000), although they did not identify as feminists, their work is clearly feminist-inspired, deriving its theoretical basis from feminist discussions (p. 181). In their study, Conkey and Spector (1984) criticize the androcentric perspective prevalent in the scholarly practice that provides an archaeological account centered around the man (p. 2-6). They called for new approaches, that are gender inclusive not gender specific, to scholarship that would question the universalized understanding of the rigid labor divisions and men's primal stance in several activities, such as hunting, and uncover women's presence in the past. The invisibility of women in the archaeological account was not because of there was a lack of evidence but the lack of social theory which facilitated the implication of presentist notions to the past (Conkey & Williams 1991, 103; Conkey 2003, 868).

The backlash against the androcentric bias in archaeology was also a backlash against the functionalist/structuralist theories that have been prominent in the domain of social and natural sciences starting from the 1960s. Although the features of the past human life are often tried to be contextualized using macro data, like demographic trends, trade networks, and sociopolitical alliances, to microdata, like households and children, the former has always been privileged due to the attention given to macroscale big systems that were introduced by processual archaeology (Conkey 2003, 870). The structural understanding of social life brought models that are fixed (Joyce 2004, 87) and motivated by contemporary values. From a feminist perspective, gender bias - motivated by contemporary gender roles and labor divisions - has been quite influential in making sense of the archaeological data and the production of androcentric accounts.

As the most famous example of androcentric bias in archaeology, the Man-the-Hunter model is criticized by feminist scholars because of its instrumentalization in setting the origins of contemporary sex roles (Conkey & Spector 1984, 7; e.g., Dahlberg 1981, Martin & Voorhies 1975; Morgan 1972; Slocum 1975; Tanner 1981; Zihlman 1978; 1981). As the archaeological remains reflecting technology dominated scholarship as macroscale data, hunting became the pivotal variable, being the primary activity that defined human social life (Conkey & Williams 1991, 109-111). The model is based on the observation of non-human primates, mainly baboons. In the literature, it is stressed that baboon communities are organized by an alpha male who partakes an active role in the continuation of the family line (Sperling 1991, 209). In this sense, the male centrality and hierarchy in the baboon communities were used to explain the evolution that prompted human males as a hunter taking an active position in evolution (Washburn & Lancaster 1968, 301). This perspective overlooks the active behavior of female baboons and portrays them as passive entities. In reality, there are instances where female baboons engage in physical harassment, even targeting pregnant baboons, as a means to eliminate potential rivals. (Sperling 1991, 215-216). This view of females being subordinate, of course, is further developed by a modern androcentric bias that presupposes women were not taking part in labor intense activities since they are restricted by lactation, child caring, and pregnancy (Conkey & Spector 1984, 8).

The way to overcome this essentialist androcentric view is not to turn the narrative from one extreme to the other by saying females also had a pivotal role in evolution by moving back and forth between binaries. According to Conkey and Spector (1984), the main point of investigation should not be archaeological data but the lack of theory highlighting a contemporary gender bias that is instrumental in reconstructing prehistoric social life (p. 8). Thus, feminist archaeology has to be more than just the inclusion of women into the archaeological narrative. Finding women in the archaeological data or revealing its so-called invisibility does not critique the contemporary gender bias. Adding the word 'woman' into the archaeological discourse does not go beyond a Second Wave effort that is obsolete and erroneous as it does not even attempt to reflect the totality of the women's experiences. What should be established is creating the awareness that there is no ahistorical woman identity and historical woman identity does not necessarily represent the same attributes as the contemporary woman identity. In fixing these misconceptions, the significance of theory cannot be denied.

In the 1990s, with the emergence of Third Wave feminism, gender studies in archaeology began to prioritize the exploration of the relationship between gender and other dimensions of social identity (Bolger 2013, 6). Along with the introduction of intersectionality to scholarship, another significant focus of this research is moving beyond the binary understanding of gender categories (Bolger 2013, 6). Using works written in queer studies, some scholars integrated queer theory into the archaeological practice as a theoretical framework that provides a non-binary setting, with a strong critique of essentialized, ahistorical identities and normative practices (Blackmore 2011).

2.4.2 Queer Archaeology: Contributions and Challenges

Queer Theory has been useful in archaeology in challenging the normative explanations given about the past. While taking an impetus from feminist archaeology (Dowson 2007, 90), unfortunately, it has not caused an important crossroads in the practice or shared the same value as the other theories, like New Materialism and Post-Humanism, that circle around similar notions that Queer Theory does. The reason for this underwhelming impact may have been caused by several issues. The first of them is the fact that queer theory is used more to theorize the archaeological frame in the introductory parts of studies, instead of being the methodological tool for the archaeological evaluation (Voss 2000, 186).

According to Dawson (200), Queer Archaeology does not provide a well-defined methodology for its application (p. 163). It is partly because the meaning of 'queer' does not allow for a fixed definition that can be applied to every possible situation (Giffney 2009, 17). In this sense, 'methodology' and 'queer' in the same sentence does not go beyond an oxymoron. Another reason for the lack of methodology and ambiguity in application is caused by the fact that queer as a term is a modern, political stance that cannot easily be applied to a non-modern community (Blackmore 2011, 79). Queer Archaeology, just like Queer Theory, should do more than searching for the "origins of homosexuality" as a non-normative theoretical tool (Dowson 1998). However, in instances where queer archaeology does not prioritize sexuality, there can be a lack of framing and contextualization in the application of the theory. Some works on queer archaeology employ deconstruction to a marginal extent, suggesting the dismissal of chronology as a top-down concept imposed by authority (e.g., Croucher 2005, 611-12). While established categories and identities are necessary for conducting archaeological studies, the level of the establishment becomes a point of inquiry. Challenging normative authority and normalization of categories are central aspects of Queer Theory, but it is important to avoid radical extremism that dismantles all possible categorizations. This extremism can also lead to a static categorization of non-normative. By solely opposing the authority, fluidity, and change between categories and identities are disregarded, confining Queer Theory to a constant opposition within a static framework. It is crucial to recognize that the norms imposed by authority, even the authority itself, are not static but subject to fluctuating power dynamics.

Another problem could be the different interpretations and applications of queer theory in archaeology. Though it is not necessarily a problematic case in itself, especially since the meaning(s) of queer is considered, it may have caused confusion in archaeology circles. Archaeological work most of the time used queer theory in the house of sexuality studies to highlight and underline the performative nature of gender in historic societies while using Butler's concept of performativity (e.g., Joyce 1996, 1998, 1999; Knapp & Meskell 1997; Meskell 1999; Newman 2018). In another conceptualization, queer theory has been mainly understood as a post-modern framework that was used for deconstructing normative identities and categories asserted by an authority (Alberti & Danielsson 2014, 10). This trend is best represented as challenging all the norms embedded in the archaeological practice, including its methodology (Croucher 2005, 611).

As one of the most important contributions of queer archaeology, the idea of epistemological privilege stands most beneficial in making sense of the archaeological data. According to Dowson (2000), archaeology has been a scholarly discipline that is very much centered around a prominent heteronormative narrative (p. 164). There is an epistemological privilege of heterosexual identities, and this privilege has been used to construct heterosexual pasts by ignoring multiple interpretations that will shed light on different possibilities (Dowson 2000, 162-63; 2007, 102). This feature of archaeology, being able to define the past, also turned it into a medium to display what does not fit into heteronormative model as historically pathological and deviant (Dowson 2007, 101). The epistemological privilege is best shown through an example of a discussion between Meskell and Dowson about the work of Reeder (2000) examining an Egyptian mastaba room with its distinct iconography containing two men, reflected as a married couple. By drawing attention to her previous writings where she supports the application of theoretical movements concerning the political struggle of socially radicalized groups (Meskell 1999, 92-93), Dowson criticizes Meskell's response (2002) to Reeder's work, which labels it as an irrespective study that manipulates the ancient data in the service of contemporary sexuality politics (Dowson 2007, 97). What queer archaeology tries to do is not to find the origins of the contemporary marginalized groups but, by asking the questions of these marginalized groups, to widen the horizon of possible answers. While there might be other interpretations as valid as the normatively oriented ones, the epistemological privilege set by the authority, who is white, upper-class, heterosexual, and male, degrades the reliability of these interpretations.

From my perspective, the destructive impact of Queer Archaeology on epistemological privilege, however, does stand out as another reason for Queer Archaeology not to be followed by a larger community. I have expressed that Queer Archaeology does not search for the origins of homosexuality but redefines the archaeological data in a non-normative context. Thus, the answer that will be given to the question of who is benefiting from the norm can reveal the reason for the dismissal of Queer Theory in archaeology. Archaeology, being a male-dominated practice (Heath-

Stout 2023, 153), is one in which the privileged is at the center of knowledge production. Standing away from the norm and queering the knowledge would neutralize the privileged positions given by a larger socio-political authority. The cause of this problem, however, is not academia-related as the problems represented above. The issue about the epistemological privilege of a group and the reluctance to neutralize this privilege concerns gender politics and inequality not only in archaeology but in the wider society.

2.5 Conclusion

Even though it has become the focal point of study in various social sciences and philosophical works, queer theory has never attracted grand attention in archaeology. Major reasons for this lacuna are presumably its vagueness in its application and the socio-politics of a profession that is dominated by men. Queer Theory allows archaeologists to think outside of the circles of contemporary normative narratives defined by the power-holding authority. It legitimizes the existence of multiple identities that never stand inert and static in a binary framework. Although this trait suggests that Queer Theory neglects the existence of identities and categories altogether, without going into such extremes, archaeologists can, and should, scrutinize past material while minding the fact that it has no stable characteristics in terms of identity and category, a topic which will be elaborated in relation to Contextual Archaeology in Chapter 4. In Chapter 3, applying this theory to academic archaeological writing on the Early Neolithic Urfa region, I demonstrate how the narrative of the Neolithic in that region is defined through contemporary binaries that circle around the male identity and hierarchical power, made visible through the static and unchanging interpretation of identities and categories.

Chapter 3:
HIS-STORIES OF EARLY NEOLITHIC URFA REGION AND DECONSTRUCTION OF THE MAINSTREAM NARRATIVE

3.1 Introduction

> Considering the now emerging socio-economic pattern of the early pre-pottery Neolithic communities of the Near East, which implies the presence of a pristine form of "temple-controlled economy," it should not be taken as being too far-fetched to interpret the male figures as representing priests that superintend or control the mode of living, economy, etc. (Özdoğan 2001, 316).

Since the 1990s, the Urfa region has been a pivotal subject of research in the academic community. From domestication to iconography, ubiquitous studies have tried to understand different aspects of the use of the settlements and the historic life in the region. One of the most prevalent arguments proposed for the region was the existence of a male-centered society, in which there was a male elite that controlled the ways of living. Although this has not always been explicitly said, in many of the publications, a reference to the presence of the elite and an observation of the over-dominance of male iconography is evident. The "male-centered society" narrative has not been evaluated thoroughly and the term "male" has been widely accepted and taken place in the writings without being questioned. While questioning the widely accepted existence of a "male-centered society" in the Early Neolithic Urfa context, I will revisit the talks and writings given on the most intriguing sites of the Early Neolithic Urfa region. First, I will introduce the period, region, and selected sites by presenting their excavation history and phasing. Then, I will deconstruct the "male-centered social order" narrative using a non-binary, queer perspective and present why both maleness and centrality are concepts that should be abandoned in the archaeological writings of the Early Neolithic Urfa region (Fig. 1).

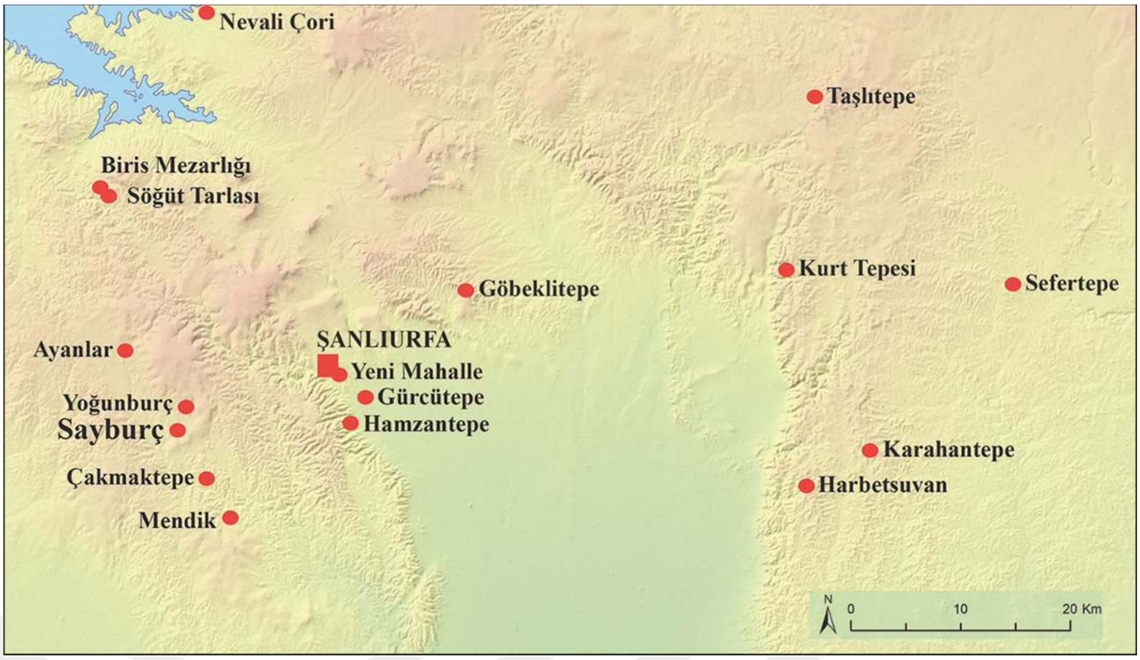

Figure 1: Map showing the Early Neolithic sites of the Urfa Region
(Source: Özdoğan 2019, 1600)

3.2 Setting the Stage: Early Neolithic Urfa Region and Introduction to the Selected Sites

The Neolithic (approximately 12,000 – 8,000 years BP) is often summarized as the period in which humans domesticated plants and animals, fully settled in villages, and developed a form of social complexity. Most of the time, the narrative of the Neolithic contains an evolutionary essence as the time period where the first steps towards becoming a modern society were taken (e.g., White 1959; Sahlins & Service 1960). However, there is either no general explanation that would grasp the full meaning of the terms 'Neolithic' and 'Neolithization,' or the explanation is extremely hard to simplify and self-contradictory in and of itself. Rather than a pivotal turning point in history, a climax of a long process, or a revolution (Childe 1942; Childe 1951), it is better to visualize it as a complex continuous concept that changed its shape according to the region, time, and community.

Even though I emphasize its continual feature, it is also important not to ascribe it to a teleological, progressive character as it did not linearly come into place. Even after the introduction of the first domesticates, humans continued to use wild plants along with domesticated ones and often relied on hunting until the end of the 8th millennium (Ibanez et al. 2018, 229, 231). Instead of a teleological narrative, which places domestication at the end of the line, it is more suitable to take on a narrative that concentrates on the 'ebb and flow' status of this period since these changes in the way of living were neither drastic nor radical (Maher et al. 2012, 69). Moreover, the Neolithic does not follow the same path in every locality, instead containing a variety both in character and chronology (Geber 2004; Çilingiroğlu 2005). All of these features make it difficult to define the Neolithic and come up with a decisive answer. When the Anatolian Neolithic is considered, the various, dissimilar, and distinct faces of the concept of the Neolithic attract attention. Though each geographical region has its own *koiné* of architecture, subsistence patterns, belief systems, etc.,[1] due to the focus of this thesis, I will only concentrate on the Neolithic in the Urfa region.

The Urfa Province, located in Southeastern Turkey in the Euphrates Basin, constitutes a junction point for the Syro-Mesopotamian lowlands and the Anatolian highlands. The province is located in the northern sector of the Arabian Peninsula and, thus, falls in the region of Upper Mesopotamia. Having the Tigris on its West and the Euphrates on its East, the landscape of the Urfa Province varies between densely vegetated mountain plains and hilly limestone formations (Hauptmann 2011, 85).

The Urfa region is watered by the Euphrates and its tributaries, providing a fertile setting for its inhabitants (Hauptmann 2011, 87). With its rich natural sources for the manufacturing of flint tools and strategic position connecting the Syro-Mesopotamian lowlands and the Anatolian highlands, the Urfa region, and Southeastern Turkey in general, stands out as a favorable place for hominid occupation since the Lower Paleolithic (Hauptmann 2011, 87; Taşkıran & Özçelik 2022, 10).

The first excavations were conducted in 1963 in the Bozova district of the Urfa Province, which yielded two Epi-Paleolithic sites, namely, Biris Mezarlığı and Söğüt Tarlası. Today, these settlements still represent proof that Pre-Pottery Neolithic A extends back to the Epi-Paleolithic period in the region, dating to 14,000 – 10,200 BCE (Hauptmann 2011, 88-89). The first Neolithic excavation in the region was done at the site of Nevali Çori between 1983 and 1991 as a salvage excavation because of the construction of the Atatürk Dam. After the Nevali Çori expedition, excavations at Göbeklitepe started in 1995 by the members of the Şanlıurfa Museum and the German Archaeological Institute (Schmidt 2011, 41). The excavations revealed an unprecedented architectural monumentality, not only for the Urfa region but for the

[1] For a general overview of Anatolian Neolithic see, Düring 2011; for Southeastern Anatolia see, Atakuman 2014; for Central Anatolia see, Stiner et al. 2021; Baird et al. 2018; for Aegean see, Horejs et al. 2015; for Cyprus see, Bar-Yosef Mayer et al. 2015; for Marmara see, Özbal & Gerritsen 2019.

wider Middle Eastern Neolithic. The surveys by Bahattin Çelik revealed that multiple Neolithic settlements in the region contain cultural elements similar to Göbeklitepe (Çelik 2015, 358). The density of such settlements especially around the Harran Plain, initiated an extensive joint research project that started in 2021, the Taş Tepeler Project (The Stone Hills), that would investigate the historic use of these settlements and protect the unearthed archaeological material (Karul 2022a, VIII-IX). Before dealing with the mainstream academic narrative about the Taş Tepeler settlements and its deconstruction, I find it valuable to introduce the selected sites of this study, namely Nevali Çori, Göbeklitepe, Karahantepe, and Sayburç.

3.2.1 Nevali Çori

Started to be excavated in 1983 by Harald Hauptmann due to the construction of the Atatürk Dam, the site of Nevali Çori is in the Hilvan District of the Urfa Province. Presumably due to erosion, the eastern section of the settlement is better preserved than the western section (Hauptmann 2011, 90). Phases I-V date to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (EPPNB and MPPNB) (Hauptmann 2011, 103). In these layers, both residential and non-residential units were recovered. The residential units are rectangular, free-standing constructions with inner-space divisions. The general orientation of the buildings (NNW/SSE) was kept as the foundation platforms of the demolished houses were leveled and used again when a new house was erected (Hauptmann 2011, 90). There is the presence of "cult buildings," classified by Hauptmann, as of Level II in the site (Hauptmann 2011, 95).[2] Cult Building II was 13,9 x 13,5 m, covering 188 m^2 with a nearly square plan. The interior was plastered with whitewashed clay, with traces of black and red paint. There is a bench covered with bulky stone slabs with, in total, thirteen T pillars in between. The building entrance was from the southwest with two steps leading downward to the interior, which presumably had two T pillars in the center (Hauptmann 2011, 95). Cult Building III was built within the walls of Cult Building II, covering 155 m^2. Like its predecessor, there were ten built-in T pillars in the benches and two in the center (Hauptmann 2011, 96).

[2] The word cult/cultic is derived from the terminology provided by Hauptmann. Although I recognize his terminology for the moment, whether a building should be called cultic is problematized in the rest of the chapter.

3.2.2 Göbeklitepe

First mentioned for its importance in a field survey by Peter Benedict (1980), Göbeklitepe has unequivocally led to increased interest in the Urfa region as the focus of many scientific and non-scientific discussions due to its rich visual world and monumental stone architecture. Göbeklitepe stands above the Harran Plain at the highest point of the Germuş Mountain range, at a height of 785 m (Schmidt 2012, 917). The excavations in the mound started in 1995 with the cooperation of the German Archaeological Institute and Şanlıurfa Museum under the direction of Klaus Schmidt. The excavations, and naturally the interpretations, focused on the monumental architecture in the site which is mostly called "special buildings" – *Sondergebäude*. The comparison of Göbeklitepe to Çayönü and Nevali Çori, along with the absence of domestic artifacts during excavations, led Schmidt to interpret Göbeklitepe as having a primarily ritualistic function. It is believed that Göbeklitepe could have served as a central gathering place for hunter-gatherer communities in the region, potentially used for cultic and religious purposes (Schmidt 2001; 2007).

The excavations in the mound have concentrated on the southern slope and three main layers are identified by Klaus Schmidt. The post-Neolithic Layer I is obscured by natural erosion and medieval agricultural processes. Layer II contains rectangular rooms with terrazzo floors, dating to the Early-Middle PPNB. Layer III, dating to the PPNA-Early PPNB, consists of megalithic structures, with their height extending from 10 to 13 meters. Both in Layer II and III, the prominent architectural feature is monolithic T pillars (Schmidt 2012, 920-921). The pillars in Layer II are around 1.5 meters, usually having no ornamentation on their surface, whereas the pillars in Layer III attract attention with their monumental height and elaborate animal imagery with a phallic theme (Schmidt 2007, 118). Although there is a stylistic differentiation between Layer II and III, T-pillars for both layers stand out as schematized versions of the human body (Schmidt 2007, 117; Schmidt 2012, 921). The pillars are placed in a circular fashion with two larger, free-standing pillars in the middle, composing what is called 'enclosures' (Schmidt 2007, 74). Despite the fact that the III/II/I model has been used in framing the finds, it is later revealed that there are also modulations and renovations in the buildings, disabling the III/II/I layer model and proposing at least eight layers (Kinzel & Clare 2020).

The excavations are focused on four enclosures, namely A, B, C, and D (Schmidt, 2007, 117). The enclosures are not concentrated in one locality of the settlement but spread over the mound, with at least 20 enclosures apparent from the geophysical survey (Dietrich et al. 2012, 675).

3.2.3 Karahantepe

The site of Karahantepe is located in the Tek Tek Mountains National Park 63 km east of Şanlıurfa city center, on the eastern side of Harran Plain. The site was discovered in 1997 and surveyed in 2000 and 2011 by Bahattin Çelik (Çelik 2011, 241). Excavations at the site focus on the northern sector of the western terrace. In the 2019-2020 seasons, the excavations at Karahantepe exposed four subterranean structures under the direction of Necmi Karul. Three of these structures compose a section of a building complex, dated to Late PPNA – Early PPNB. Structure AD is the largest among the three, with a 23-meter diameter. The western section of the structure is carved into the limestone bedrock, yet the rest of it is enclosed with a free-standing stone wall. Buttresses are carved into the bedrock in the western part of the structure and the lower end of the wall finishes with a two-step bench. In the rest of the structure, the bench continues (Karul 2021, 22-23).

Structure AB abuts Structure AD in its north. Structure AB is a 7 x 6 meter rounded trapezoidal pool-like chamber. In its south, a circular entrance with a diameter of 70 cm opens to the structure through 5-step stairs. The structure is presumably left via another 4-step stairs in the northeastern corner. In Structure AB, there are 10 bedrock-carved pillars between 1,6 – 1,7 meters, one distinct free-standing pillar put into the bedrock as a later addition, and a high relief human head carved to the ridge of the upper western side of the structure (Karul 2021, 23-24). Karul suggests that these pillars are “erected and shaped like a phallus” (Karul 2021, 24). In the northern corner of the structure, a serpent-like canal reaches to the Structure AB. A small passageway in Structure AB opens to Structure AD. If Structure AB is filled with a liquid to a certain level, the liquid will overflow into a pool in Structure AD and fill it. Karul suggests that this indicates that a liquid-related ritual could have taken place in this building complex (Karul 2022b, 6). There is also a connection from Structure AB to Structure AA, making all of these three structures inter-connected as a part of a building complex (Karul 2021, 25).

3.2.4 Sayburç

Located in the Northwestern part of the Harran Plain, Sayburç is 19 km west of Şanlıurfa city center. The excavations were started in 2021 by Eylem Özdoğan. Since the site is under a contemporary village, there are modern intrusions in the stratigraphic sequence. (Özdoğan & Uludağ 2022, 12). The primary prehistoric studies are focused on the northern section of the area. The second area is located 70 m south of the northern area and is called the southern area (Özdoğan & Uludağ 2022, 13). The first structure dated to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in the northern area is called Structure AA, which is carved into the bedrock and is around 11 meters in diameter. There is a bench carved into the bedrock in the corners that rises approximately 60 - 80 cm in height and 50 – 60 cm in width from the bedrock (Özdoğan & Uludağ 2022, 14). In the northern section of the bench, there are high and low reliefs overlooking the chamber. In the southern area, it is thought that the architecture is a product of a transition process from round-planned to rectangular-planned architecture (Özdoğan & Uludağ 2022, 17). The fact that T pillars are found in smaller architectural contexts than usual may indicate that these pillars might have also been used in residential structures (Özdoğan & Uludağ 2022, 16).

3.3 Rethinking the Binary Categories in the Archaeological Narrative

Problematizing binaries in the archaeological narrative has not been a fashionable category of research, at least for Middle Eastern Archaeology. The dichotomies of public/private, nature/culture, men/women, sacred/profane, domestic/wild, etc. have been somehow quite persistent in the archaeological writings. The only substantial theoretical work that problematizes the presence of dichotomies in the archaeological narrative is given by Brian Boyd. Western ontological thought portrays people as isolated from nature, as the opposite of what nature symbolizes, but Boyd (2004) challenges this view and argues that there is no distinction such as nature/culture, but multiple features that interact with each other through continuous relationships. Although substantial anthropological work has criticized these dichotomies since the 1960s (e.g., Glacken 1967; Ortner 1974; MacCormack & Strathern 1980; Descola & Palsson 1996), archaeology, especially the scholarship focusing on the Middle East, has been mainly out of these discussions. The cause of this absence could be roughly divided into two categories: The culture-historical, overly descriptive, archaeological scholarship which has a depreciatory attitude towards the discussions on archaeological theory (e.g., Özdoğan 2001), and the dependence on Western structural dichotomies that were criticized yet still very much in use in the post-processual archaeological practice (Boyd 2004, 129; e.g., Hodder 1990).

Early Neolithic Archaeology in the Urfa region, of course, cannot be set apart from these binary trends. Starting from the beginning of the research in the region, the aforementioned dichotomies have been infused into the archaeological narrative. The first and foremost binary constructed for the Taş Tepeler settlements, for example, is the dualism between *special* and *domestic* buildings. For many, the special buildings were temples with their monumental architecture and "non-domestic" archaeological context (e.g., Hauptmann 1988; 1993; 2011; Schmidt 1998; 2000; 2001; 2006; Özdoğan & Özdoğan 1998; Özdoğan 2001). In his study on PPNB ritual, Verhoeven (2002) refers to "framing" as a concept that is used in the separation of ritual things, whether it is architecture, object, people, or activity, from domestic things (p. 235). However, how he refers to things as cultic or profane has no critical basis, yet is solely dependent on modern conceptions, dwelling on the uniqueness, or oddness, of the subject of inquiry. The only criticism offered for this narrative came from Banning (2011) in the context of Göbeklitepe, indicating the impossibility of such a clear division between the domestic and non-domestic spaces. One of the distinctive elements of this cultural zone is the use of monumental T pillars which have been associated mainly with the monumental encircles (Schmidt 2012, 930). With the new excavations done in the region, it is now revealed that the T pillars were also used as architectural elements not only in monumental structures but also in smaller spaces that were probably made for residential use at Karahantepe and Sayburç (Özdoğan & Uludağ 2022, 16; Karul 2022b, 6; Özdoğan & Karul 2020, 21). The presence of an architectural element in the residential spaces which has been mainly associated with the cult is clearly a prominent feature that further entangles a clear division between domestic and non-domestic; cultic and profane.

Another prevalent duality in the Urfa narrative is the aggressive and peaceful binary, which is completely created through the modern Western conceptions of what is aggressive and what is peaceful. In his narrative, Verhoeven (2002) writes "…wild, dangerous, aggressive dimensions of the domain of nature, where it was the men who hunted, as opposed to the domestic and more peaceful domain of culture, where women were symbolized as giving life and bringing fecundity" (Verhoeven 2002, 252). In his narrative, the grammar he uses to describe PPNB human-animal linkages are derived from contemporary perceptions, as it is not known if the image he calls aggressive was perceived as aggressive by the people of the time. By classifying the archaeological data according to modern dualisms, like wild/domestic, dangerous/peaceful, etc., Verhoeven comes up with a binary narrative that is only valid in our contemporary minds. The same kind of narrative is also apparent in the work of Hodder and Meskell (2011). In their article comparing the imagery of Çatalhöyük and Göbeklitepe, they argue that dangerous parts, such as horns and teeth, of dangerous male wild animals were prominently crafted in the imagery of both settlements. The authors prefer to interpret the animals and their body parts as indicators of violence and aggression (Hodder & Meskell 2011, 242-243; see also Peters & Schmidt 2004). Like Verhoeven, their interpretation is also built upon our modern conceptions of what violence is and what aggression looks like, and eventually with which sex one relates to aggression. Describing animals as aggressive and wild draws a line between "animal nature and human culture," locating animals in a different place than humans (Boyd 2017, 306). Changes in the relationship between humans and nonhumans first started with the domestication process of several species (Marom & Bar-Oz 2013, 1). In the narrative of this process, the domesticated ones, whether animals or plants, were often stated as malleable objects without an agency, shaped through human intentions (Ducos 1978, 54; Alberti et al. 2011, 899). On the other hand, it is recently recognized that the change in domestication is not unidirectional but mutual and symbiotic (Boyd 2017, 306; e.g., Cassidy 2007; Dransart 2002; Orton 2010) proceeding in a complex entanglement. According to Ingold (1994), there is no conceptual distance between humans and nonhumans in the hunting communities as in the Western context where humanity is essentially separated from nature (p. 75). For Descola (1996), although not in the Western tradition, the representation of non-humans does not lean to previously planned schemes, but non-humans exist in daily actions and practices, embedded in the everydayness of life (p. 86). As it is stated before, in the cultural repertoire, T pillars are the schematized versions of humans. In the Göbeklitepe context, animal imagery that was woven into the schematized human forms, representing compositeness between animals and humans in the same texture, can point out the absence of a conceptual difference. In a world where there are no domesticates, a distinction between wild and domestic and several traits assigned to these categories, such as aggressive and peaceful does not function. Would we be able to call a lion pictured in a flanking position upon its prey, as violent or aggressive, if we were not living in such 'hygienic' spaces, stripped away from most common aspects of the 'wild' life? If we did not buy our meat from a butcher yet had to hunt it with our hands, would we redefine what is wild and dangerous? The answers one gives to these questions can reveal how the ways we make sense of the world around us are constructed on modern Western ontologies (Busacca 2013; Fagan 2013), which lead to binary categories. If examined carefully, these and many other dichotomies will stand out in the archaeological narrative. While each of these dualities deserves a study on its own, the theme I problematize in this research is the archaeological narrative that argues for the existence of a male-dominated social order in the Early Neolithic Urfa region and binaries manufactured through male/female and elite/commoner dichotomies.

3.4 Men and the Others: Iconographic and Socio-Economic Basis of the so-called Centrality and their Critique

My aim in this chapter is to show how the male-centered social order narrative is built on dualities and to demonstrate the impossibility of such a social order. To do that, I find it fruitful to question the possibility of identifying someone or something as male in the Early Neolithic Urfa context and the reliability of a model that favors a group's socio-economic centrality, which I will deconstruct through two concepts: "the elite" and "the male" identity, respectively. For Özdoğan (2001), there is a prevalent Father God imagery at the Taş Tepeler sites, with its priests having dominance over society (p. 316). Benz and Bauer (2013) argue that the increasing competition led to a need for authority, and men, who exhibited more dominant behavior than women due to testosterone, claimed their authority through the presence of male elites setting the socio-religious practices through using excessive symbolism (p. 19). Verhoeven (2002) constructs a dualism in the regional context in which male dominance is associated with power and vitality (pp. 251-252). In their comparative study on Çatalhöyük and Göbeklitepe imagery, Hodder and Meskell (2011) call attention to the centrality of maleness in the imagery, which shows a "focus on male sexuality as denoted by penis" and "privileging of maleness." (p. 240). For them, masculinity acted as "a source of power and authority" (Hodder & Meskell 2010, 34). Both Boric (2014, 57) and Peters and Schmidt (2004, 215) describe the T pillars as accommodating only male animals. Clare et al. (2019) interpret the ithyphallic representation of a decapitated figure on

Pillar 43 in Enclosure D at Göbeklitepe as "a sign of male virility and social dominance" (pp. 116-117). In many of his works, Schmidt points out the absence of female imagery and the clear dominance of male symbolism (e.g., 2006; 2010; 2012). Sütterlin and Eibl-Eibesfeldt (2013) claim that regardless of being a human or animal, phallic symbolism indicates that masculinity is located at the center of authority and power (pp. 42-46). According to Özdoğan (2023), the high relief at Sayburç depicts "[a] figure was holding his phallus and looking into the inner space… a scene that reflects the feeling and power of rising human against the power of nature with its confident stance against the wild animals of its environment."[3] Although concluding that the social and economic vertical hierarchy is not a credible narrative for the region, Çilingiroğlu (2023) argues that the cosmology of the Early Neolithic Urfa society is male-centered and the buildings might have been used for male initiation rituals, as men's houses (p. 95). This archaeological narrative is falsifiable in many ways and has no reflection in material evidence.

3.4.1 Centralized Authority and Elite Class in the Urfa Region

The idea of the presence of an elite in the Early Neolithic Urfa Region is usually put forward due to the conception of the supposed impossibility of building such monumental buildings without an organizational medium in the society (e.g., Özdoğan 1997, 10; 1998, 35; 1999, 230; Schmidt 2011, 53). According to Özdoğan (2022), the compilation of architectural remains now allow for "defining the early Neolithic of this region with terms such as stratified social structuring, elite competitiveness, dominant decision-makers, clergy, imposing sanctuaries, innovativeness, settlements set according to predesigned planning denominations" (p. 10). This proposition concerns a larger debate in social archaeology that envisages large-scale buildings as a cursor of a complex society within an evolutionary scheme (e.g., Renfrew 1974, 77; Service 1971, 140; 1975, 96-97; Haas 1987, 32; Pauketat 2000, 117).

The inner organization and regulation of human groups by a selected person or a group of people in many ways is crucial for sustaining the ways of living and building healthy communication lines. When plowing a field or hunting an animal, people get organize in various ways, and some may be heard more than others in the exchange of

[3] Figür bir eliyle fallusunu tutuyordu, mekanın içine bakıyordu…içinde bulunduğu ortamın vahşi hayvanlarına karşı kendinden emin duruşuyla doğanın gücüne karşı yükselen insan hissiyatını ve gücünü yansıtan bir sahne.

ideas in respect of social honor and reverence. The fact that a hunter-gatherer community hunts under the leadership of a prime hunter, though indicating inequality, does not necessarily mean that the community is completely divided within itself in a polar hierarchical sense with the existence of the elites and the commoners.

In his study, Banning (2011) offers evidence that 20 individuals were able to lift all the pillars except for the largest ones using precise calculations (p. 622-623). This challenges the notion of "guesstimates" suggesting that hundreds of people would be required to transport and erect the stones from the quarries to the site. (Banning 2023, 6; e.g., Schmidt 2006, 108-109; 2011, 53; Watkins 2020, 22). In other words, organized human labor, which shows itself through monumental architecture, does not directly indicate the presence of an elite that would motivate hundreds of people. These constructions might have been done by a small group of people in a relatively short time but not necessarily under the conduct of an elite group in a socially segregated society. This point can be exemplified by ethnographic and archaeological accounts, in which the communities manage to organize themselves and build monumental structures without the need for a top-down, vertical hierarchy.

A study made by Hildebrand et al. (2018) on the monumental pillars constructed by mobile herders and hunter gatherers at cemeteries in Kenya, near the Turkana Lake is a good example for the absence of an elite class within the society that used these buildings as the advertise of their power. It is suggested that the absence of spatial and artifactual differentiation between the burials in cemeteries points out to the absence of elite class (Hildebrand et al. 2018, 8945). Almost every burial in the cemeteries had a set of burial gifts that were products of time-intensive and creative workmanship (Hildebrand et al. 2018, 8944). However, as the gifts are not concentrated in a small percentage of the burials but shared almost equally among the deceased, brings the idea that an elite class was not in function in this mobile herder and hunter-gatherer community. In a study on the public buildings in the Central Andes in the Late Archaic Period, Vega-Centeno Sara-Lafosse (2007) argues that an authoritative power that has a grasp of the political and economic power is not needed to build monumental structures, yet, an ephemeral “corporate authority” that does not transfer its power to a state in which the power represents a hold over the political and economic arrangement of the society is visible in the record of the construction of the large-scale structures (Vega-Centeno Sara-Lafosse 2007, 154-155, 168). In addition to that, the construction of a large-scale building does not require the instant erection of the building but may also extend over a long period of time (Ortmann & Kidder 2013, 78). The fact that the construction extends to a long period of time in the selected Taş Tepeler settlements which can be observed through different architectural phases dating to different periods in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, indicates that a top-down organizational force that would motivate hundreds of people might not have been necessary, especially when multiple construction phases are evaluated side by side with Banning's calculations. In their book *The Dawn of Everything* (2021), Graeber and Wengrow talk about the Nambikwara tribe in Brazil. The Nambikwara is a tribe that was studied by Lévi-Strauss in the mid-20th century. According to Lévi-Strauss' study, the Nambikwara live in two different socio-political systems, defined by the dry and the rainy season. In the rainy season, the tribe migrates to the hilltop villages and practices horticulture. When the dry season starts, the horticultural community disbands, and the Nambikwara disperses into small foraging groups. In the dry season, there are chiefs who settle people around the villages and act as mediators in times of conflict. The chiefdom, however, is not hereditary or thought to have a divine connotation. In fact, both the extent of the chiefs' power and the duration for exercising this regulatory power is limited (Graeber & Wengrow 2021, 80-82). This shows that the existence of a balancing, regulatory power whose effects are not rigidly defined in a socially segregated, vertically hierarchical system can be quite ephemeral and non-hegemonic. It should be reminded that, hierarchy as a concept, is volatile and has many different faces on different levels. Thus, the existence of a contextual hierarchy does not necessarily indicate the presence of the elite or any other class-based controlling mechanism that has power over the economic and political framework in a supposed ranked society.

Another line of argumentation to prove the presence of the elite in the Early Neolithic Urfa region comes from the so-called differentiation in domestic units, burial customs, and distribution of wealth (e.g., Özdoğan 1998, 35; 1999, 231). In a presentation that took place in 2020, and featured on the YouTube channel of Bilim Akademisi, Özdoğan (2020) argues, Social classes are difficult to define because we define them by looking at remains. But it is the burials that best define and tell us the social class. So, when you look at the graves of how someone was buried, it is the burials that best reflect the social class.[4]

Claiming the burial and the burial goods reflect the social class is an outdated processual take on mortuary archaeology. Within the perimeters of processual archaeology, grave goods are seen as the direct representation of the social identity that can be used to trace the social complexity of the society (e.g., Binford 1971; Chapman et al. 1981). This approach of recounting the grave material and treating it as a mere commodity outside of its sociocultural context started to be challenged by the post-processual school of thought in archaeology (e.g., Hodder 1986; Shanks and Tilley 1987; Parker Pearson 1999). According to Ekengren (2013), burial does not have a static identity but has to be understood in a transformative stage that does not represent the living yet crystalized in a new identity in the dead (pp. 544-545). Thus, the theoretical basis that Özdoğan provides for his audience for the rest of his talk and narrative is quite contested. Though stating that, I by no means argue that the burial assemblages should be left out in the production of archaeological knowledge but treated with great care and caution. After stating that the burials and burials goods represent the identity of the living, he continues his narrative as,

When we look at some settlements belonging to the Göbeklitepe Culture, such as Körtik Tepe, some of the tombs are incredible, we are still in the Stone Age here, so everything you see here is made of stone and stones. In addition to the graves with tens of thousands of beads, buried with stone containers, there are those buried with nothing or a few tools, buried in different parts of the settlement, and these are the stone containers you see here in Körtik Tepe. Nearly 2,000 stone vessels have been unearthed so far. Körtik Tepe is contemporary with the lowest layer of Göbeklitepe. They are made of chlorite, a raw material that does not exist in that region. And all these stones are decorated. We see that some people's bones are removed, collected, and used. So not everyone is treated the same (Özdoğan 2020).[5]

[4] Sosyal sınıfları biz kalıntılara bakarak tanımladığımız için tanımlaması zordur. Ama en iyi tanımlayan, sosyal sınıfı bize en iyi anlatan ölü gömmeleridir. Yani birinin nasıl gömüldüğü mezarlarına baktığınız zaman sosyal sınıfı en iyi yansıtan ölü gömmelerdir.

[5] Bazı Göbeklitepe kültürüne ait yerleşmelere mesela Körtik Tepe'ye baktığımız zaman bazı mezarlar inanılmaz, hala burada taş devrindeyiz, yani burada gördüğünüz her şey taştan ve taşlan yapılmış şeylerdir. On binlerle boncuğu olan, onlarla taş kapla birlikte gömülen mezarların yanında yanında hiçbir şey olmayan veya birkaç aletle beraber gömülenler çok yerleşimin farklı yerine gömülmüş olanları ve burada gördüğünüz taş kaplar bunlar Körtik Tepe'nin. Şu ana kadar 2000'e yakın taş kap çıkmıştır. Göbeklitepe'nin en alt tabakasıyla çağdaştır Körtik Tepe. Kloritten yapılmışlardır, klorit o bölgede olmayan bir hammaddedir. Ve bu taşların hepsi bezemelidir. Bazı insanların kemiklerinin çıkartıldığını toplandığını ve ayrıca kullanıldığını görüyoruz. Yani herkese aynı muamele yapılmıyor.

Before stating whether there was a differentiation in burial goods and customs, the comparison of Körtik Tepe and Göbeklitepe does not provide a healthy methodological framework for a decisive conclusion or a potent argument. Körtik Tepe is an Epi-Paleolithic site whose earliest levels date back to the 11^{th} millennium (Özkaya & Coşkun 2011, 103). In his speech, although Özdoğan explicitly said the earliest level of Göbeklitepe is contemporary with Körtik Tepe, what he was talking about is Göbeklitepe Culture in general, which is another name given to the cultural interaction zone of Taş Tepeler. Göbeklitepe is the oldest site in this set of settlements and naturally, no other settlement than Göbeklitepe in the Urfa region has a chronological correspondence to Körtik Tepe. Apart from that, there is no organic cultural relationship between Göbeklitepe, or any other Taş Tepeler site, and Körtik Tepe. According to Hauptmann (2011), Göbeklitepe and Nevali Çori cultures do not have a direct forerunner in Upper Mesopotamia (p. 106). The Neolithic of Southeastern Turkey, although conventionally evaluated as a Neolithic core along with other settlements located in Upper Mesopotamia and part of Central Anatolia (e.g., Özdoğan 2014, 36), does not provide homogenous archaeological data. The sites in the wide region of Southeastern Turkey have their own vernacular architecture, burial customs, and visual grammar. Grouping them geographically and claiming they share the same cultural essence, as part of the same spatial core zone for neolithization, does not go beyond a modern conceptualization and categorization.[6] Thus, the comparison does not lead to a firm conclusion. However, even if Körtik Tepe and Taş Tepeler sites shared the same cultural assemblage, it would still not point out the possible existence of a rigid inequality materialized through social differentiation.

In his presentation, Özdoğan states that there are differences in the burial customs and practices, which indicates a social differentiation within the community. However, a physical anthropology study by Erdal (2015) on the bones recovered from the Körtik Tepe burials observes that there is no standardization in the orientation of skeletal remains and no differentiation between skeletal remains of males, females, and infants (p. 6). A carbon, nitrogen, and strontium analysis applied by Benz et al. (2016) further concludes that there was no differentiation between the deceased in terms of mobility or diet (pp. 154-157). Not only for the Urfa region, but for the wider Upper Mesopotamia and the Levant, there is no significant difference between the residential

[6] For the inconvenience of the “core area” hypothesis see; Fuller et al. 2011, 659.

units, burial customs, and distribution of wealth starting from the Epi-Paleolithic until the end of PPNB (Wright 2014; Kuijt 2008; Byrd 1994; Rollefson 2000; Mithen et al. 2018; Finlayson 2020), leaving no convincing evidence for imagining a hierarchical societal plan with the control of a certain group of people over the economy or over the ways of living in general (Atakuman 2014, 4).

Özdoğan emphasizes the use of chlorite as a common raw material in the manufacture of burial goods in Körtik Tepe and implies that the exotica should be related to the presence of elite identity as it would be the only legitimate reason for people to undertake bringing goods from remote places (also see Özdoğan 1999, 230). Even before homo sapiens, hominids were mobile, involved in the circulation of goods that came from remote places, and chose specific raw materials to manufacture (Moncel et al. 2019). Benz et al. argue that these bowls are destroyed at the time of the burial and "effectively withdrawn from inheritance or accumulation" (p. 159). This shows that, instead of the exotica had been hereditarily transferred to the offspring as commodities of customized wealth, the bowls were destroyed and, through that, did not serve a function in creating an elite identity in the commodity circulation. Thus, the presence of exotica should not point out to the immediate existence of a stratified society.

Arguments to prove the elite presence in the region through material findings that cannot be categorized as "utilitarian" with a contemporary mindset have been attempted. According to Özdoğan, "non-utilitarian" objects, found at Early Neolithic sites of Southeastern Turkey such as stone bracelets at Cafer Höyük, pestles at Hallan Çemi, and ornamented stone bowls at Körtik Tepe, stand for the reflection of an elite identity which demonstrates distinction from the domestic sphere with their elaborate artistry (Özdoğan 1997, 10; 1999, 230). For the Körtik Tepe bowls, the study by Benz et al. (2016) shows that the stone bowls were deliberately destroyed as part of a funerary ritual (p. 149, 159). This observation demonstrates that the bowls indeed had a function in prehistoric Körtik Tepe community, but their utilitarian feature is different from our contemporary conceptualization. Framing these "non-utilitarian" materials in contemporary domestic mindset may display them as incongruous or irrelevant in terms of utilization. However, it is crucial to recognize that these materials served a purpose that was intricately connected to the historical context of their respective eras. While their functionality may not align with present-day standards, it is essential to acknowledge that the historical significance and role they played that may not be fully grasped by researchers. This highlights the importance of considering the temporal and cultural dimensions when evaluating the utilitarian value of objects. Apart from that, we also do not know how these human groups divided their domestic and public spheres, if there was a division at all, which would be highly unlikely (for the general feminist debate of public and private spheres see; Chapter 2).

In the continuation of his speech in 2020, Özdoğan makes another comparison with the long-sequenced site of Çayönü in the Tigris Basin. He says that,

> Some graves are opened, and skulls are taken. Sometimes pictures can be made with paint on the skulls. It can be covered with plaster. There are traces of paint on the long bones, which are contemporary with the lowest layers of Göbeklitepe from Hasankeyf Höyük. What does this show us? Like an ancestor cult, the graves of some people, some people in society, are opened, they are exhumed in ceremonies, and their bones are cleaned and re-arranged again and again. In some graves there is nothing. It has no finds inside [shows photos of Çayönü]. The tomb on the upper left belongs to the same period, it has no finds. It is the grave of a woman who died in childbirth, giving birth to twins. Some of them have been deposited for a long time. In other words, graves show us that there are social differences and status differences. It is not possible to read these social status differences clearly, but at least we see that a period was established in which not everyone was equal (Özdoğan 2020).[7]

Just like Körtik Tepe, Çayönü does not show an organic cultural relationship to Göbeklitepe and any other settlement excavated within the Taş Tepeler Project in the Urfa region. Çayönü does not accommodate phallic iconography nor T pillars in its artistry. Besides, the monumentality has a different shape at Çayönü, showing no resemblance to the Taş Tepeler sites. In addition to that, supposed social differentiation at Çayönü started to be visible in the Middle PPNB, which postdates the use of Göbeklitepe (Erim-Özdoğan 2011, 203). However, in the literature, the existence of so-called cult buildings in these settlements is used to group them under one cultural zone (e.g., Özdoğan & Özdoğan 1998, 585; Özdoğan 2022, 14). The so-called cult buildings are defined through their content, monumentality, and difference from the other buildings in the settlements but the difference in visual worlds and the artistic

[7] Bazı mezarlar açılaraktan kafatasları alınıyor. Kafatasların üzerine bazen boyayla resimler yapılabiliyor. Alçıyla kaplanabiliyor. Uzun kemiklerin Hasankeyf Höyük'ten çıkan Göbeklitepe'nin en alt tabakasılan çağdaş olan üzerinde boya izleri vardır. Bu bize neyi gösteriyor, bir ata kültü gibi, bazı insanların, toplumdaki bazı kişilerin mezarları açılıyor, törenlerde çıkartılıyor, kemikleri temizleniyor ve tekrar yeniden diziliyorlar. Bazı mezarlardaysa hiçbir şey yok. İçinde hiç buluntusu olmayan [Çayönü fotoğraflarını gösteriyor]. Sol üstteki mezar aynı döneme aittir, hiçbir buluntusu yok. Doğum sırasında ölen, bir ikiz doğururken ölen bir kadının mezarıdır. Bazıları uzun yatırılmıştır. Yani bize mezarlar, sosyal farkların statü farklarının olduğunu gösteriyor. Bu sosyal statü farklarını tam olarak net olarak okumak mümkün değil ama en azından herkesin eşit olmadığı bir dönemin kurulduğunu görüyoruz.

preferences between these settlements is never mentioned, as if it was enough to culturally link a site to another through the presence of a distinct building that has thick stone walls, without further explaining the distinctness. Monumentality and distinctness have many faces and calling something monumental or distinct does not bring an immediate cultural link. These buildings were indeed distinct in their own archaeological context, however, one ought to see a regional similarity in their distinctiveness in order to draw a cultural link. A Minoan palace and a Mesopotamian ziggurat, although are monumental in their own context, the monumentality is not culturally linked. Even though each of these settlements, namely, Göbeklitepe, Körtik Tepe, and Çayönü, had rather different times of use and were inhabited in different localities, in his talk, Özdoğan chooses to represent these settlements together in the same spatial-temporal context, as if they represent the different kinds of burial traditions of the same culture. However, in reality, the data is very scarce for burials in the Urfa region (Banning 2023, 9; Özdoğan & Karul 2020, 20-21; Gresky et al. 2017, 1) to be contextualized as a medium of investigation for social segregation, and each of these settlements had a different cultural repertoire which showed itself in different localities and times. The temporal and spatial variety, as well as the cultural diversity in Southeastern Turkey, prohibits a homogenous archaeological consideration that evaluates the data coming from various settlements that do not show an organic linkage.

When all the above is considered, instead of a rigidly defined polarized hierarchy, it is important to realize that hierarchy is not a monolithic term but like a pendulum swinging between different tones. Social respect and reverence towards a person or a group of people in the community does not indicate the existence of a domineering, hierarchical power (Çilingiroğlu 2023, 95). Graeber and Wengrow (2021) claim that hierarchical power is not a static norm but a fluid phenomenon that is given, taken away, dissolved, and re-established with various patterns, even within seasons (pp. 204-205). In this sense, arguing the existence of a solid elite group that extended its power over the political and economic spheres of the society, with no substantial archaeological data, is not archaeologically evident. Monumental architecture and its memorial permanency that is transferred across generations can point to the establishment of an elite identity by territorializing the space as property in different contexts (Artursson et al. 2016, 13). However, architectural monumentality by itself should not be used to conclude at such a point. Egalitarian conventions in the burials, equal distribution of wealth, and indifferences in sizes of residential units obligate us to contextualize architectural monumentality through the imagination of a different social system that does not prioritize a hierarchical elite class at its center. The absence of a polarized hierarchy consisting of the elites and the commoners, of course, should not point to a fully egalitarian utopia where there was no inequality in a Rousseauian sense. Inequalities were and are always present in different scales in our lives extending from bodily skills to the sunlight one gets into their house. However, choosing a non-egalitarian social structure built on these inequalities or coming up with equalizer methods to reset the inequalities depends on human choice (Graeber & Wengrow 2021, 157). Inequalities do not directly lead to hierarchical social structures unless they are manipulated by human intentions to serve a particular socio-political purpose which would have most probably displayed itself in the archaeological record.

3.4.2 The Cis-tem: Is Phallus Equal to Maleness?

In many of the accounts given on the iconographic interpretation of the images in the Taş Tepeler settlements, an emphasis on myriad representations of the phallus, and a socially dominating male identity attached to it, is evident. In the archaeological narrative, the assignment of sexual identity is not given in the form of an interpretation but as an essentialist description, as if it is something that is not open to discussion. By doing this, the authors presuppose a binary sex system in the Early Neolithic Urfa region. This presupposition, of course, ignores the historical existence of sex that cannot be classified in a binary system, namely male or female.

Although there is a line of scholarship in archaeology that tries to understand the gender identities in past communities, biological sex most of the time has not become the subject of question as it is taken for granted through several biological features. In these features, genitals play a big part. However, just like sex identities, biology, as a natural science, is also socially constructed (Latour & Woolgar 1979; Latour 1987; Ashmore 1989; Nordbladh & Yates 1990, 224). The reason we hear more about a binary in the sex system is not that there is a binary, but because of the cultural construction of the society that opts for a binary sex identification over a system that accommodates *n* number of sexes.

Although sex has been promoted as a biological feature that is easy to assign by looking at the genitals, the view is more complex (Blackless et al. 2000). Male and female identities are not part of an all-encompassing binary identity system but are two extremes of a spectrum (Ainsworth 2015, 290). Modern medicine has developed several ways to assign sex yet none of them is decisive. Humans have similar bodily features approximately until the age of 10, apart from their external genitalia. Thus, the determination of biological sex based on external genitalia at birth is not definitive and may change during development in response to societal expectations (Caplan 1987). According to Butler (1993), biological sex is not an inherent physical characteristic upon which the concept of gender is artificially imposed, but rather a cultural expectation that influences the physical manifestation of bodies (pp. 2-3). Sex is not a mere factual or fixed state of the body, but rather a dynamic process in which regulatory norms actively shape and materialize the concept of 'sex' through repetitive enforcement. The body is not an ahistorical biological entity, but a canvas interwoven with the systems of meaning and representation (Grosz 1994, 18) and cannot be evaluated without its discursive milieu (Foucault 1972, 157). Furthermore, sex identities that do not align with the traditional categories of male and female may not always be visibly apparent. This is because there can be various combinations of XX and XY chromosomes, as well as cells with different genetic compositions resulting from cellular mosaicism during early embryonic development (Ainsworth 2015, 290). Hormones that are associated with certain sex identities, as testosterone being the male hormone and estrogen being the female hormone, co-exist together in the human body. They take part in forming the external genitalia, which develops out of the same preliminary structure. In a scenario where the male gonads exhibit greater activity in a female body with XX chromosomes, the development of a penis may occur (Nordbladh & Yates 1990, 225; Wisniewski et al. 2019, 1547; Bertelloni et al. 2021, 2). Apart from social and cultural influences, as can be seen, many biological variables affect the definition of sex and demonstrate that a binary sex system cannot be used for classification. It is unclear which variable the historical communities used as a reference point when assigning sex if they did so in the first place (Joyce 2008, 45). Also, one cannot assume that biological sex will be culturally contextualized into two categories, male and female (Meskell 2000, 175). If one tries to investigate whether “a person is male or female, should that sex be assigned by anatomy, hormones, cells or chromosomes, and what should be done if they clash?” (Ainsworth 2015, 291). When all the above is considered, it becomes difficult to assign sex to living people using modern medical methods, let alone mention the possibility of the sex identification of an archaeological iconographic element.

If the binary sex system is historicized, it will be understood that it is actually an artificial phenomenon that entered our lives with Enlightenment in the 17th century. According to Laqueur (1990), prior to the Enlightenment, there was only one sex in which the vulva was perceived as the inverted version of the penis (pp. 4-5). Instead of sex, the cultural category of gender was taken as one of the primary identificatory agents of one's ontological category (Laqueur 1990, 8). Of course, this brings a more intricate take on the identification of sex, obligating the social and cultural factors to be taken into consideration while visualizing it in a spectrum (Fausto-Sterling 1993, 21; 2000). While the perception of sex was more related to the spectrum instead of binary categories until the 17th century, projecting a binary sex system that is very much related to our contemporary society on a 12,000-year-old community based solely on the phallic imagery is extremely reductive, biologically essentialist, and does not encompass the totality of human experience. It is not known whether the Early Neolithic Urfa communities identified in a binary sex system, though with the presented data that do not yield a differentiation in the social structure, it is highly unlikely. The fact that this situation is not usually questioned within the scholarship is also an indication of how cisnormative the academic community is in archaeology.

Although mainstream narratives usually rely on cisnormative characteristics that are defined in binary categories, there are studies that go beyond the sexual binaries to reflect the variety of identities (e.g., Stratton 2016). The main problem is not only the cis/heteronormative worldview of the scholars working in archaeology but the deficiency in methods used in assigning sex to historic individuals. Iconography is presumably the least dependable way to do so. However, physical anthropology, which presents itself with a more 'scientific' outlook, is also quite deceiving. In her study on the burial in Durankulak, Stratton (2016) claims that the anthropological classification of bodies is biased since the unclassified bodies are not included in the interpretation. The mainstream interpretation of the graves in Durankulak proposed that there was gender segregation in the community since females were buried with polishing stones and jewelry and males were buried with axes. However, while doing this interpretation, non-confidently sexed bodies, which make up 25% of the burials in total, were not included in the account. By non-confidently sexed, she does not refer to obscurity in human anatomy but to the fact that the sex of a number of bodies did not match with the presupposed positioning of the body and deposition of grave goods associated with that sex (Stratton 2016, 859-860). In other words, when a male body was buried in a crouching position with polishing stones, the body was not taken into account while drawing a binary division of sex and gender. Although physical anthropology tries to classify the bodies as male and female on an extremely unstable biological framework, it totally misses the socio-cultural variables that shape the human body. The way physical anthropology assigns sex to skeletal remains is mainly motivated by modern expectations about a male or female body (Classen 1992; Geller 2005; 2008; 2009). The human experience is simply larger than a pelvic bone. While there needs to be a change in the mindsets of people, there also have to be appropriate methodologies that will accompany these changes.

3.4.3 The Use of the so-called Elite Male Identity in the Archaeological Narrative

In the archaeological narrative, themes of male identity and hierarchical centrality are used as concepts imminent to each other. Both of the themes are used to contextualize the archaeological record by defining certain dualities that set boundaries of the social life, the presence of a supposed clergy and a Father God image, and the overall function of the monumental buildings.

Although it remains more local, there is literature and talks that go beyond assigning sex through genitals by interpreting the archaeological data to build historical worlds on a dualistic framework. According to Özdoğan (2001), moving from the distribution of female figurines in Nevali Çori, female identity is more related to the domestic units while the male identity is defined through the cult as it is more visible in the cultic buildings (pp. 315-316). Two decades later, he holds the same argument of this spatial division in terms of the representation of sex in the artistry (Özdoğan 2022, 16). I have emphasized that a structural binary between domestic and public is a contested phenomenon since both of these identifications were most presumably related to each other. In an archaeological context in which we cannot fully define the domestic and cultic, a distributional study of figurines and contextualization of a so-called male identity as public is futile. His speech in 2021 follows as,

> The symbols are more or less the same in all settlements belonging to that culture. Let me put it this way, in temples, sacred buildings, whatever you call them, the main motif is male. There is no female. It was male. Phallus culture. It is based on the phallus. The phallus, discovered 2-3 years ago in Göbeklitepe, is 63 cm long. There is also a nature thing. In other words, it is the symbol and symbolism of living creatures in nature and moving creatures. So, in a way, like shamanism, there are moving creatures such as insects, snakes, lions, and tigers. But the main motif is man and phallus. When you

get down to where the normal people live in the settlement, that is, in the residential areas, it is female. In other words, there appears to be a dualism between an elite class and society. There are small, simple female figurines in houses and residences where people live. There are female figurines, all of them pregnant. There are no women in the temple. There is only one woman so far. In Göbeklitepe, there is a horizontal scene of a woman lying down, most likely giving birth, and other than that, there is no other female. Animals are also male. If you pay attention, most animals also have phalli (Özdoğan 2021).[8]

In this speech, Özdoğan uses the data given only for Nevali Çori, however, he presents it as a cultural convention that is apparent in each of the settlements in the Urfa region. Beyond assigning a sex identity through iconography and small finds, he also genders the male identity as the power holder and the elite. In the Göbeklitepe context, in a non-monumental room, there is an anthropomorphic sculpture that can be identified as male if the mainstream sense of evaluation is applied (Dietrich et al. 2019, 4). Thus, the presupposition that the male/phallic figurines are unique to the sanctuaries and that female figurines are found in the domestic quarters does not represent the true spatial position of the archaeological findings.

As one of the most famous findings of the Early Neolithic Urfa region, The Urfa Man and Adıyaman-Kilisik statues are proper examples to trace the applications of sexual conventions. The Urfa Man statue was found in Yeni Mahalle district of Urfa province in four broken pieces (Hauptmann & Schmidt 2007). The statue is depicted naked with a shoulder strap. The oval shape of the low end of the statue indicates that it was not free-standing but either rested horizontally or with its bottom buried in the ground. The statue is depicted with its hands joining at the groin area, with testicles appearing under the hands. According to Hodder and Meskell (2011), the hands are either covering the erect penis or the penis is missing (p. 238). Though it can also be read as hermaphroditism (Hodder & Meskell 2011, 238), from my perspective, the penis is not missing yet depicted faintly between two testicles in the middle of the hands. Under that, there is a slight protrusion (labia majora) with a wide slit that was colored with red ochre (Hodder &

[8] Bütün o kültüre ait yerleşmelerde simgeler aşağı yukarı aynı. Şöyle söyleyeyim, tapınaklarda, kutsal binalarda, adını ne koyarsanız koyun ana motif erkektir. Dişi yok. Erkekti. Fallus kültürü. Fallusa dayalıdır. Göbeklitepe'de 2-3 sene evvel çıkan fallus 63 cm boyunda. Aynı zamanda bir doğa şeysi var. Yani doğadaki canlıların, hareket eden canlıların simgesi, sembolizmi. Yani bir nevi şamanizm gibi hareketli canlıların böcek olabilir, yılan olabilir, aslan kaplan hepsi var. Ama ana motif erkektir ve fallustur. Yerleşmede normal halkın yaşadığı yere indiğiniz zaman, yani konut alanlarında ise dişi. Yani bir elit sınıf ile toplum arasında bir dualizm gözüküyor. Halkın yaşadığı yerlerde, evlerde konutlarda küçük basit yapılmış kadın figürinleri vardır. Kadın heykelcikleri vardır, hepsi hamiledir. Tapınakta ise hiç kadın yok. Bir tane kadın var şimdiye kadar. Göbeklitepe'de yatan yatay bir, büyük bir olasılıkla doğum yapan bir kadın sahnesi, onun dışında başka dişi yoktur. Hayvanlar da erkektir. Hayvanların çoğunda da falluslar var dikkat ederseniz.

Meskell 2010, 37), most presumably defining vulva. I am reluctant to call that the statue is depicting a biological condition or, more generally, represent a realistic human as the mouth is not sculpted on the head.

The Adıyaman-Kilisik statue, is a composite composition housing two bodies, in which the larger one puts its hands together on the head of the smaller one that is standing on a large hole. The hole might have been externally penetrated, mimicking sexual intercourse (Hodder & Meskell 2011, 238). The smaller one is interpreted as having a phallic character, overlain by the larger body (Hodder & Meskell 2011, 238). What is very apparent in these examples is that there is an imminence of both penis and vulva in both figures which is probably depicting a larger-than-life experience instead of indicating a biological condition (for both of the interpretations see; Hodder & Meskell 2011, 238). Through a close inspection, it can be realized that the sex identity is black and white neither for the contemporary nor for the historic communities.

When the totality of the "male" figures is considered, they are also called the material reflections of priests, having control over society (Özdoğan 2001, 316). According to this narrative, these priests should be understood as worldly extensions of a Father God image. A Mother Goddess cult, especially described through figurines classified as female, has a significant place in the archaeological literature (e.g., Mellaart 1967; Gimbutas 1974; 1989). Marija Gimbutas, who was the pioneer of the Mother Goddess studies, argues that until the Indo-European invasions, Old Europe was matriarchal with a Mother Goddess connotating fertility at its center. With the invasions of Indo-European people from Asia, Old Europe was redesigned around patriarchy through the destruction of Old European values which also constitute the foundations of the modern Western world (Gimbutas 1974, 238). However, the ubiquitous presence of "female" figurines does not refer to a matriarchal society. Refuting Gimbutas' theory, Lynn Meskell (1995) states that to elevate the status of women in the social realm, Gimbutas reversed the sexism that historically favored men over women by setting the debate to another extreme, reinforcing the legitimacy of the women's position by giving a historical reference to the presence of a female-centered society (p. 75). Although there are male and sexless figurine examples found along with the female figurines, Gimbutas argues that the central importance is only given to the female ones (Meskell 1995, 76). Moreover, none of the figurines were elaborated in their archaeological contexts yet assigned an encompassing sacred identity, although, they may have had different meanings attached to them in their manufacture, use, and disposal stages (Meskell 1995, 76). At the expense of the positive feminist connotations of the Goddess movement, the Mother Goddess cult limits women in Cartesian categories (Meskell 1998, 149). Instead of acting as a liberating medium for women, Meskell argues that the Mother Goddess cult projects essentialist roles on people who identify as women, such as the definition of womanhood through fertility. Especially within the context of Çatalhöyük, these figurines have been placed in a disparate context in which they do not form a gender-based binary yet stand for the symbolic representations of maturity and longevity (Nakamura & Meskell 2009; Pearson & Meskell 2014). Although the Mother Goddess cult has been a controversial topic, Özdoğan takes the female figurines at Çatalhöyük and Hacılar as the representational forms of the Mother Goddess (Özdoğan 2001, 313-314) and states that in the Urfa region "system of belief was not simply based on the idea of fertility and thus to the figure of Mother Goddess" (Özdoğan 2001, 318). He constructs his argument on the absence of female representation in, what he calls, temples (Özdoğan 2001, 315). In his narrative of the Early Neolithic Urfa Region, an institutionalized religion, with its temples, clergy, temple-based economy, and a father god icon was at the center of administration and governance as he states that "today, when we talk about Neolithic, especially the beginning of the Neolithic, there is a Father God"[9] (Özdoğan 2020). What he proposes is the reversed version of what Gimbutas once argued for the Old Europe. Contextualizing the so-called male identity around the presence of an institutionalized religion does not go beyond setting the decades of debate to another extreme while ignoring all the critiques on the issue. In this sense, everything that was said for the Mother Goddess cult can be said against a supposed Father God cult. In both discussions on the possible existence of a divinity that is characterized by a certain sex, different stages constituting the manufacture, use, and disposal phases of the figurines were not questioned. The totality of the figurines is not taken into account, yet only a certain kind of figurine is given attention as part of the sacred. Besides, notions such as social domination, and economic and political power connote with the notions that are assigned to the essentialist masculine identity of contemporary society. While limiting the male identity in a culturally fixed state, these notions may not relate to the historical reality. Furthermore, one needs to question who was benefiting from this ubiquity of the "male figurines." In their study, Knapp and Meskell (1997) argue that the extensive range of female figurines in prehistoric Cyprus should not necessarily indicate female domination

[9] Bugün neolitik dediğimiz zaman özellikle neolitiğin başları dediğimiz zaman bir Baba Tanrı var.

over the society, but a male hold might have been more prominent as they did not even feel obliged to represent themselves.

Another domain in which the so-called male identity is used within the archaeological narrative relates to the function and use of the monumental buildings. In her doctoral dissertation, Doğan (2023) states that the excessive emphasis on "symbols of masculinity," in the form of reliefs or sculptures found in the "special" buildings of the Urfa region, indicates that these buildings were used for male initiation rituals (pp. 294-295). In the Sayburç relief, the human figure facing the bull in the low relief holds an item that was identified as either a snake or a rattle (Özdoğan 2022, 1601). Refusing this identification, Doğan claims that this item is a bullroarer. (Doğan 2023, 182). It appears the bullroarer is designed to align with the purpose of serving as a site for male initiation ceremonies based on the provided context, suggesting that it is likely intended to be exclusive to men, a men's house, based on ethnographic data gathered globally (Doğan 2023, 182, 215)[10]. Although she states that the "ethnographic data gathered globally" provides the information that the bull-roarer is used in the male initiation rituals and both touching or even having a look at this item and entering the buildings where the initiation rituals take place are taboos for non-initiated and female individuals (Doğan 2023, 254), she only uses the ethnographic studies done on the Aboriginal communities of Australia.

It is indeed true that the bullroarer is used in the male initiation rituals in many cultures and is a taboo for non-initiated and female individuals (Frazer 1901, 308). However, what is apparent in the Aboriginal communities, which she uses as ethnographic evidence, is a severe form of social segregation in terms of gender which is clearly visible from the burial data where the number of male burials is greater than the female burials, where the deceased females have fewer communal mourning, and buried in a non-elaborated and evasive manner (Littleton 2007, 107). On the other hand, the Early Neolithic Urfa region does not provide enough burial data to trace such a segregation yet the burial data, along with other data that may indicate the presence of a segregation, coming from the periphery sites extending from Upper Mesopotamia to the Levant does not indicate a social differentiation in terms of class or gender, as it is represented above.

Also, being a globally used item, the bullroarer has myriad functions from being a toy, a communication tool, or a vessel that channels the voice of a deity (Dundes 1976,

[10] For other works interpreting the buildings as complexes where the male initiation rituals took place; see Karul 2022c; Çilingiroğlu 2023.

221), representing multiple identities. Another issue with the bullroarer is that it is not always directly related to masculinity even in the male initiation rituals where it is used as an active medium. In the initiation rituals of the Nandi people of East Africa, before a boy is circumcised, the boy is dressed as a girl which is changed to a woman's garment after the circumcision (Hollis 1909, 53-55). Dundes (1976) highlights the psychoanalytic perspective on the bullroarer, which involves concepts such as male pregnancy envy, anal eroticism, and ritual homosexuality that contribute to the intriguing aspects of the bullroarer complex (p. 236). Thus, stating an iconographically contested image is a bullroarer by contextualizing it with excessive use of "symbolic masculinity" does not provide a comprehensive account as it does not offer other evidence defending the presence of gender segregation in the society and overlooks the almost two-centuries-old ethnographic studies made on bullroarers and their ambivalent relationship with "masculinity."

3.5 Conclusion

As shown, both the narrative that presents the existence of male domination in the iconography of Urfa region and the existence of an elite class feed on the contemporary explanations that we ascribe to these notions. In other words, without historicizing the available data, scholars chose to evaluate them through the lens of modern concepts. Whereas there is not enough evidence for the presence of an elite-male class, the ubiquity of phallic themes prepared a basis to put forward such an interpretation. While doing so, some did not rely on the available archaeological evidence but overlooked the data and constructed an imaginary his-story that is built on dualities. Understandably, archaeologists bring their cultural backgrounds into their interpretations (Gadamer 1975). Yet, this causes more than a glitch in the academic narrative. It must be considered that by going that far into the past, we deal with the origins debate one way or another. Creating an account that presents an origin to the existence of the male-centered society that we, unfortunately, live in today, justifies the place of man as 'the superior by its nature'. Also, the fact that many of these writings are provided by senior and influential archaeologists potentially legitimizes for misogynistic circles within academia to express their thoughts openly by giving references to these scholars. In order to inhibit these misunderstandings, two options exist. Instead of using decisive sex identities to refer to an image or a body, we can classify them just through their physical properties without assigning them an identity of which we will never be sure whether the assigned identity corresponds to the historical one. Another thing would be to remain self-conscious about the impossibility of ahistorical, static identities while evaluating material (Geller 2017, 17). Even if one calls out a skeletal remaining male, knowing and explicitly expressing that this is just a definition for the contemporary world is enough to change the way that we construct the past, not his-stories. In short, by providing the obstacles and prejudices in sex identification and presenting the archaeological evidence that does not indicate a class segregation in the Early Neolithic Urfa society, I conclude that the narrative supporting the existence of a male-centered society is motivated by a binary line of thought without any substantial archaeological data supporting it. Thus, it is crucial to recontextualize the phallic imagery in a framework that does not rely on contemporary symbolical meanings and dualities. In Chapter 4, I offer a theoretical lens for making sense of the phallic imagery and evaluate it as a thing that had agency in ritual by focusing on its material properties.

Chapter 4:
PHALLUS IN PLAY: CONTEXT AND QUEER ACTION

4.1 Introduction

The phallus, which has a prominent iconographical place in the Upper Mesopotamian Early Neolithic, has been evaluated in the archaeological literature through the themes it connotates in the modern world rather than its material assets. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 3, the phallus is examined in the context of small finds, iconography, and architecture of the Early Neolithic period producing the perception that the Early Neolithic Upper Mesopotamian society had a male-dominated social order. While phallic iconography has been interpreted in such a way, there has been no attempt to situate it within the cultic assemblage, prioritizing its sexual functions. To do that, I will first revisit phenomenological literature and trace its relations to archaeological theory. In the attempt to evaluate the phallus with a queer perspective, I will also question whether Contextual Archaeology, a post-processual archaeological theory and methodology, can be queered. Methodologically, I will use Contextual Archaeology to search for a queer interpretation of the phallus in the Early Neolithic Urfa Region in order to situate the phallus in a queer action.

4.2 Phenomenology

In his book Critique of Pure Reason, Kant (1781/2003) coins the term, transcendental idealism. According to transcendental idealism, all empirical objects exist but they are at the same time mind-dependent. Kant aimed to separate transcendental idealism from, what he calls, problematic and dogmatic idealism. What he refers to as problematic, is the idealism of Descartes, in which the existence of a thing is restricted by the skepticism of the human mind. In his Meditations, Descartes (1641/2008) discusses the reliability of the existence of an object. His thoughts are constructed on a very skeptical foundation that permits him to blur the difference between the corporeal and imaginary. His first meditation starts with a self-notice that everything known should be reconstructed. Since it is nearly impossible to revisit every known thing and consider its existence, he attempts to find a common point that everything is constructed on, which is the presupposition that everything exists. However, we also experience things with our senses in our dreams. The things we experience in our dreams are not real, yet we still sense them, as we do while we are awake. Thus, our senses could not be the measure of a thing's existence. Instead of depending on our imagination or senses, we depend on ideas in our intellect, the reflection of things in our minds. We have a certain understanding of how things came to be, and this is not all the time in compliance with what really exists. So, if nothing exists, also does not it mean that "I" do not exist? According to Descartes, if one thinks, then he exists. Even if he is deceived and tricked into false thoughts, as long as one thinks one exists. Cartesian dualism defines the borders of mind and matter, arguing that they are two separate entities. While the mind is active, the matter is inert and perceived through the mind.

On the other hand, what Kant means by dogmatic idealism is the system of thought that supposes no material thing can exist in the external world, and that the existence of things is only mind-dependent. Kant's idealism is in between dogmatic and problematic, coining a new perspective to the understanding of things. According to Kant, humans come to the world with a set of a priori categories of space and time. Space and time are not a part of something else in the external world, but they are intuitions of the human mind, layered onto the thing-in-itself through human perception. When we look at an object, we sense the appearance of an object (phenomena). However, that object occupies space and exists through time in our minds. The mind gets the raw data of the object from what Kant describes as a thing-in-itself (noumena), meaning that it also exists in an external world that has no space and time. When one looks at an object, the intuitions organize the data so that we can intuit them in time and space. The objects in the noumena do exist, however, the observer has no force to penetrate the noumena and envisage the thing-in-itself on its own. We see the thing with its form, exclusively created in our minds (Andersson 2001, 81-93 as cited in Olsen 2010, 65). The matter is rooted in the noumena, standing away from total human comprehension. We can only see the things in terms of their appearance that are built upon their internal constitutions and, therefore, the essence of noumena is inaccessible.

The transcendental idealism of Kant is followed by Husserl. According to Husserl (1976), conscious awareness of the object is intentional and does not need to correspond to a real object. The essential meaning of the object can be revealed through the suspension of entanglements and its ordinary existence in the real world. He calls this procedure as *epoché*. He does not deny the existence of the external world but thinks that it is crucial to suspend, to bracket, the external in order to achieve the essence. His methodology sieves out each and every content of human experience to find out the thing that is essential and structural in the raw data of human being. According to him, there is a priori cogito about what it is like to be a human being that comes before the known. In this sense, his thought is in parallel with the idealist tradition that prioritizes the internal to make sense of the external. To fully grasp the meaning of an object, Husserl proposes that, what matters is the ideal object that appears in the human mind. He gives his famous example of a tree, as even if the tree is burned down or collapsed, it remains as the tree in the mind (Husserl 1982, 187). The essence of the tree is in mind regardless of the conceptions that the external world ascribes to it and can be only acquired through the phenomenological deduction of what is not the essential. In his later works, Husserl reformed his ideas and introduced the concept of *Lebenswelt*, (lifeworld) (Husserl 1954/1970, 127-128). His idea opts the personal experience as opposed to impersonal experience gotten from the natural sciences. His phenomenology determines the human mind as the only secure basis of knowledge yet with the introduction of the concept of lifeworld, our daily experience also became a layer that takes part in our understanding of the world. Departing from the idealist tradition that is best represented by Descartes and Kant, Husserl includes the social and cultural variables that affect the way one perceives the external. In other words, what is perceived also becomes contextual (Husserl 1954/1970, 132, 139).

Heidegger's phenomenology emphasizes the methodological paradox of trying the understand the essence of the objects unrelated to their stance in the real world. The difference between Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology is that while the distinction between subject and object is still apparent in Husserl's, Heidegger proposes that subject and object are inseparable. By stating this, he is challenging the Cartesian dualism. Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* (being in the world) is important as it highlights our existence as subjects entangled with other things in the world and this existence cannot be grasped without minding the relations one constructs with the other (Heidegger 1927/2011, 152). In other words, a thing has to be conceived in a relational phenomenon, constituting a part of the whole (Heidegger 1927/2011, 79). In this sense, the Husserlian bracketing is a futile effort that would dismantle the thing from its connections that bestow it a meaning (Heidegger 1927/2011, 38). From dwelling on an unattainable truth about the essence of things, phenomenology has come to a point where it prioritizes the active experience (Olsen 2010, 66). This switch from human beings not being the sole active participant in a Cartesian framework brings the idea that humans conduct continuous relationships with things to function in their lives (Olsen 2010, 69). So, there is no exclusive positionality set in a 'hygienic' domain. Things do not stand by themselves but get used by other things. According to Heidegger, what defines the thingness of a thing is its "serviceability, conduciveness, usability, (and) manipulability." (Heidegger 1962, 97). The cavity of a jug, which allows it to pour the liquid out is what defines its thingness. However, the relationship between a thing and a human in Heidegger is constructed on the "ready-to-hand" status of a thing, expressing a dependence on human activity. Things are there and "ready-to-hand" to be used by humans. In his book *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) takes the human body as the pivotal thing that allows interaction with the world (pp. 138-139). Things are perceived through bodily experience. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the world is there only through bodily experience. The body stays constant, though the interacted realm is continuously changed through perception (Merleau-Ponty 1945/1962, 317). The body defines the limits, extends, and facilities of the action; thus, taking a pivotal role in how one relates to things (Olsen 2010, 79).

In phenomenology studies, the majority of the works try to understand the experience by singularizing the mind as the sole receptor for the external. Though this traditional idealist view that tries to explain things in a Cartesian framework was abandoned in the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and in the later works of Husserl, the given accounts were still anthropocentric, prioritizing human agency. Thus, a non-symmetry is evident in these writings. It is through Bruno Latour and his Actor-Network Theory that we can see the accounts that establish equal agency between things and humans by presenting a symmetrical framework.

4.3 Latour and Actor-Network Theory

Coined by the philosopher Bruno Latour, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is against all essentialist dualisms set by nature/culture, human/non-human, and mind/matter oppositions. By providing a symmetrical framework, Latour argues that instead of a single agency, agency is co-shared among actors in a big system, which he calls network, in relation to other actors (Latour 2005, 71-72). In other words, instead of a dual framework where the human is the active agent and non-humans are the passive, Latour proposes a web in which every 'thing' is in relation to each other and takes a part in the operation of this particular web, just like a motor engine composed by myriad mechanical fragments. Instead of an elaboration on causality, like one caused the other, as Latour points out we need to see the world as "concatenations of mediators," meaning each point works as a mediator and influences each other, triggering new and different actors to act. The outcomes are unpredictable, and the effect is not linear but very intertwined and entangled (Latour 2005, 75). This switch changes the course of action from linear to a very complex abstract form, whose shape cannot be defined since there is a myriad of agents that may or may not be grasped.

Modernism attempts to categorize every 'thing' in two strict categories, opposing each other, in which the existence of one necessitates the existence of the inverse other. However, this separation, or as the Latourian terminology coins "purification," is not possible since what can be defined as dual categories are always intermingled or "hybridized" (Latour 1991, 11). When a violinist plays on the stage, the talent and fitness of the violinist, the quality of the violin, the tension of the bow, the comfort of the shoulder rest, and the acoustic of the concert room all affect the produced sound. It is not only the violinist who produces the sound but every single "actor" that takes place in this production. This hybridization sets purification as an unavailing attempt that never projects the complexity of the relations one constructs with the others. The impossibility of describing the experience in a dual/binary framework answers the question of why "we have never been modern."

Although there is a symmetry in ANT, according to Latour, things may authorize, show their affordances, influence, and forbid the action yet non-human subjects do not act by themselves, unrelated to human subjects. Because of their nature, they are prone to turn into intermediaries instead of being mediators (Latour 2005, 72). He adds "objects are never assembled together to form some other realm anyhow" (Latour 2005, 85). So, although there is a non-dual framework, which has a queer essence in it, ANT emphasizes the mixing of human/object categories but does not focus on instances where humans are not apparent. Although ANT defends symmetry, symmetry is always built by human intervention, bringing up a human-originated account that does not center the human, as in the classical idealist canon, but emerges by the inclusion of humans. In other words, there is a network as long as there is a human. Going back to the violinist example, the violin, used in the concert by the violinist, was made by a luthier. Although the overall quality of the violin depends on the craftsmanship and experience of the luthier there are also other "actors" that take place in setting the quality of the violin. For example, the weather conditions that the tree was exposed to, directly affect the quality of the wood, thus, the quality of the sound. Something like weather, which has nothing to do with the violinist nor the luthier, has an agency to affect the experience of the audience listening to the Dvořák Violin Concerto.

4.4 Symmetrical Archaeology

The emphasis placed on the relational symmetry between things and humans in ANT has been very influential in archaeology circles, as archaeology is a practice defined through things and humans. Among them, Symmetrical Archaeology attracts attention as it not only provides a symmetrical framework for the archaeological record to be evaluated but also challenges the post-processual practice of reading things through "their social and cultural meaning their role as signs, metaphors, symbols" (Olsen 2010, 25).

Actor-Network theory stands as a reference point for Olsen, who is the pioneer of Symmetrical Archaeology, and in general, for Symmetrical Archaeology, from where he derives a problem that ontology has always been human-centered (Olsen 2010, 84). Even though there are examples of situating humans in a relational context, the primary agent in this context has always been humans. In contrast, Symmetrical Archaeology originates from a flat ontology, assuming every 'thing,' living and non-living, shares the same ontological nature (McGuire 2021, 4). This of course should not bring the idea that flatness is the sole way to define the network, where the actors share the same level of agency regardless of the context, in which they are situated. According to Olsen and Wittmore (2015), flatness is a provisional notion of the capacity of non-living things to have an agency as much as humans (p. 194). However, this provisional notion does not mean that every relational network is constructed upon flatness in terms of agency. Yet this provisional character is only mentioned in their response to critiques and does not take a part in their previous writings, in which they emphasize how the world is co-produced in a relatively egalitarian manner by the things and humans and the post-humanist aspect of their methodology (Olsen 2012, 27-29). The flatness, in terms of agency, between the actors in a network is not a rational claim since there are actors lying in plain sight that are more responsible for the outcome than the others. There is a hierarchy between the actors (Hodder 2012, 19). However, this hierarchy is not static but always changing. Every 'thing' is an actor and set in a hierarchical network yet this hierarchy also has a queerness in its essence, as it is volatile. To exemplify this claim, I would like to discuss my point with the causes of global warming. Enteric fermentation is a biological process that takes place in the digestive system of ruminant animals. Microbes hosting the digestive system of ruminant animals expose methane gas while they are breaking down carbohydrates. Because farming policies have come to the marginal point of sustaining larger communities, methane gas that is produced through enteric fermentation has become an actor in global warming. I find it valuable to examine this fact from two sides. If we assume the network is flat, then we also have to accept that a cow and the owner of a meat industry company are equally responsible for global warming. However, the owner is not only responsible for global warming because of the animals under his possession, but also because of the flue gas emanating from his trucks that deliver the meat from his factories. Moreover, eventually, he is the one who pioneered the breeding of so many animals for profit. Another way to look at the same situation would be to assume we are living in a world, where there is no meat industry. Ruminant animals that are not dependent on humans as commercial commodities will continue to produce methane gas through enteric fermentation, and this will still have a small impact on global warming. On the other hand, although the methane gas they produce affects global warming, it will not be as radical as the contribution of people to global warming working in industries other than the meat industry. Therefore, to argue that a network is flat is not true given the facts. Everything has agency, but the agencies of things are hierarchical in terms of their relationships with each other. A cow is not as responsible as a human for global warming. Whereas a factory worker is not as responsible as a factory boss. Here, the hierarchy does not always have to position the human as the primary agent. If we experience many volcanic eruptions and wildfires from natural causes at the same time, humans will most likely not be the first actors in global warming anymore.

Moving from Heidegger, Olsen critiques the archaeological circle that assigns a hermeneutic value to things (Olsen 2010, 86) . He asks, why “a boat is never a boat; a reindeer is never a reindeer; a river is always a “cosmic” river.” (Olsen 2010, 86). His intervention does not completely dismiss the possible symbolic value of things. Rightfully, however, he points out why there is always a proclivity for thinking of things symbolically instead of for their initial function as all things mean something with their own selves. (Olsen 2010, 89). Though Olsen has stressed that his intervention does not dismiss the possibility of symbolic action in the archaeological record, when his other works are considered, it would be fair to state that he is against the symbolic reading of things (e.g., Olsen 2012).

Symmetrical Archaeology highly depends on things-in-themselves, instead of their symbolic reflection. The methodology offers an objection to interpretation. Olsen saliently accuses the post-processual tradition because of its dependence on interpretation. He criticizes that there is an urge to ignore the quotidian aspect of things, as everydayness brings about less interesting accounts than a symbolic meaning hidden behind (Olsen 2012, 22). To him, things should be evaluated through their functionalities, not through their symbolic meanings. This functionality in the thing itself is utilized in everyday life through capacities and qualities. For example, a boat is meaningful for its capacities embodied in fishing, cruising, and transporting, and its qualities are defined by its speed, stability, and reliability (Olsen 2012, 23). So, functionality is embedded in a thing, and it is ahistorical. For Olsen, things are outside of history, having their own "positivistic manner" that is distinct from the historical continuum (Olsen 2012, 25). I think the "positivistic manner" in Olsen's account could be stated as the static functionality of a thing that affords the same service in different contexts. Even though the cooperative communication between things and humans is directly derived from Latour, Symmetrical Archaeology's turn to thing-in-itself and its emphasis on everydayness should be searched for in the phenomenological tradition, mainly in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

For Symmetrical Archaeology, the dismissal of the symbolic reading of a thing brings out an evaluation based on a thing's historically non-contingent functions, which are embedded in the thing itself. However, the division between symbolism and functionality cannot be represented in a dual framework yet should be evaluated on a spectrum as intertwined phenomena. I would like to exemplify my point with a supra-historical example. Mummification had a pivotal role in the Ancient Egyptian religion in antiquity as a technique that assures eternal life (Shaw 2004, 120). The mummy constituted the body where the ka, life force, returns back for sustenance. The body had to be recognizable for the ka to make the body reach the afterlife (Shaw 2004, 123). However, in the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods, they were used as medicine. Mummies were carried from Ottoman Egypt and dispersed to the West as medical remedies, whose traces can be still found in well-established pharmacies in Europe. The powdered mummy, known as *mumia*, was consumed by people, from the French royal court to the English nobility, as a cure-all, the remedy to everything (Dawson 1927, 35;

Gorini 2005, 285). In the 19th century, the same mummies were treated as art objects to be exhibited in the museums of modern Europe. Today, their status is utterly ambivalent as on the one hand, they have clearly a cultural heritage value (Agai 2020) yet, on the other hand, their exhibition in museums is contested since they are eventually human remains that should be treated in an ethical manner (Brier 1998). Besides, they also have a symbolic value as they constitute an image that represents a large segment of Ancient Egyptian culture and history in popular culture (Day 2005).

If one looks at a mummy through a Symmetrical Archaeology lens, what will they see? Will they evaluate mummy as a functional body that accommodates the ka in the journey to the afterlife or as a metaphor for eternal life in the Ancient Egyptian religion? Will it be categorized as a medicine that has wide-spectrum effects on the human body as a cure-all, or will the belief that it was a cure-all possessed by the consumers be taken into account? Through its different faces, the mummy example not only shows that it is simply impossible to situate a thing in a non-historical context, having its own "positivistic manner," but also the impossibility of a strict division between the functional and symbolical. Even the most functional cancer drug that has an indispensable role in cancer treatment is used by a person because of the set of beliefs that the cancer drug will cure the disease. Thus, symbolism and functionalism cannot be separated with a binary division, yet they have to be accepted as composite phenomena whose extent changes according to the historical context they are situated.

4.5 Contextual Archaeology and Interpretation

Introduced by Ian Hodder in the 1980s, Contextual Archaeology can be used as a critique for Symmetrical Archaeology. Especially in Chapter 3, even though I object to symbolic readings of things in producing knowledge, the resolution of this problem does not dwell on ignoring the symbolic and reading everything as things in themselves, possessing a specific functional affordance in their nature. Taking an impetus from the linguistic turn of the post-modern current, Hodder argues that what he defines as Contextual Archaeology employs all three meaning components assigned to a thing, namely, action, structure, and content, "in relation to the symbolism of objects" (Hodder 1987, 1). Con-text (with text) provides the methodological milieu, in which a thing constitutes a part of the 'text' (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 164, 204; Hodder 1987, 2). Action stands for the production and the use of an object, emphasizing the functionality of a thing; for example, an axe that is used for cutting a tree (Hodder 1987, 2). Structural refers to the systems and relations, in which a thing can get placed. The identity of a thing is defined through its existence in a system (Hodder 1987, 3). Historical content stands for the thing's positionality through history. There are changing ideas about an object and different associations related to it through time, which make its usage non-arbitrary (Hodder 1987, 1-2). The 'context' includes all three of these meanings (Hodder 1987, 5) and the meanings are changeable according to the context they are searched in (Hodder 1987, 4). Different than Symmetrical Archaeology, the difference between the symbolic and functional is blurred in Contextual Archaeology. The function of an object, which is also changeable according to the intention (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 157-158), constitutes a part of the symbolic meaning (Hodder 1987, 5). The meaning, on the other hand, is relational and changes according to the perception of the subject (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 157). According to Hodder, "an object has to be perceived culturally in order to be used in a certain way to achieve an end which is itself culturally chosen" (Hodder 1987, 5).

The aim of Contextual Archaeology is to evaluate the archaeological finding in a context where the finding creates harmony with the attested meaning when considered all together with the other things in the context (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 248). While doing that, using only one symbolic meaning of an object is not sufficient to situate it in a context (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 187). There are multiple meanings that are formed through the interpretative take of the archaeologist that mainly consists of the contemporary context shaped by the "archaeo-politics" of the time (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 166).

As it may be seen, Contextual Archaeology is mainly an interpretative effort. However, while interpreting the past, the "guarded objectivity" of the past has to be retained so it can be utilized by subordinate groups to reflect and differentiate their claims from "ungrounded archaeologies" (Hodder 1991, 10). The past needs to be understood in its own terms, revealing meanings that the historical people made sense of the world and the interpretation needs to be self-reflexive, having a dialogue between the producer of the knowledge and the subjects in the knowledge (Hodder 1991, 13). In this sense, Contextual Archaeology is utterly post-modern as it does not have a potent claim on representing the sole truth yet aims to tell stories (Hodder 1991, 13). Instead of a direct representation of the past with its full reliability and truth, the interpretative aim should be read as fiction created through the steps mentioned above.

For Contextual Archaeology the “meaning is fluid, flexible, and multiple” (Hodder & Hutson 1986, 158) and this fluidity is revealed through an interpretative process (Hodder 1991). I have already shown that the distinction between the symbolic and functional meaning of a thing is blurry for Contextual Archaeology. The functionality of a thing is multi-faceted and can change according to the context. Every ‘thing’ has its capacities defined by the sets of facilities it affords. A made-up word coined by Gibson (1979), the founder of affordances theory, affordances suggest that a goal-oriented individual perceives an object based on its potential usefulness or how it can help them achieve their specific objective. Rather than concentrating on the object's inherent characteristics or features, the individual evaluates how it can be utilized to meet their desired outcome. This viewpoint highlights the significance of the individual's goals and intentions in shaping how they perceive and interact with the object. Affordances exist regardless of the perception of the human actor, and they do not require a cognitive analysis to be perceived. In other words, a chair affords sitting, even when a Bedouin, who has not seen a chair before, sees a chair in the middle of a desert. However, different than Gibson, I do not see the affordance as a unique feature embedded in a thing. There are many things that a ‘thing’ can afford. A chair does not only afford sitting but many other things that is only limited by its physical restraints and the intentions of the user. Beyond that, I argue that it is the thing’s affordances that allow us to identify it. If a fork is used at a dinner table, its capacity to stick into something and lift it up is utilized. It is this capacity that allows us to identify the fork as a utensil used for eating. However, classifying the actor based on an identity, which is defined by its affordance, will also not provide a solid statement. Some things are functional and/or fulfilling their own affordance without bearing a hidden meaning. But this does not change the fact that there are also things that establish their existence through their symbolic meanings. Moreover, what defines the thingness of a thing does not dwell on a static basis. When we look at a pencil, we would see its tip creating a frictional force on the paper, thus embodying bodily movement, as a feature defining its thingness. However, a pencil could also be used as a weapon with its pointy tip or for many other things that depend on creativity. Can one assign a fixed identity and category for a pencil moving from its functions? I assume, not. The pencil is reidentified and recategorized at the moment when it changes hand and intention according to its own multiple capacities. How we identify the pencil is different in each context. It can be a thing to write or to wound. It can also be a thing that stands as a symbol for a concept such as wisdom, design, creativity, and writing. A thing can be functional and symbolic even at the same time, what Mitchell calls a hyper-icon, like Locke's tabula rasa or Plato's cave as they are themselves analogies but at the same time images (Mitchell 1987, 162). Yet assigning it a fixed identity will not encompass its past and future, even its contemporary meaning.

These examples not only show us that there is a hierarchy in the network and identities and capacities embedded in a thing related to its context but also show that these notions are volatile. Classifying an actor as a primary agent with a fixed identity and category, that has a specific way of ahistorical use does not show us the absolute nature of this thing in a network, because agency can always decrease, increase, or even disappear and identity can always shift to a different definition. What must be accepted is that the network and its actors are indefinable and unpredictable phenomena that are ever-changing and continuously evolving. The best thing to do is to freeze the network momentarily and, while considering the changing nature, not assign universal identities and affordances to the actors in the network and their relations but examine them within the relationality they have established with each other with their momentary formation. How one identifies and categorizes a thing is mostly dependent on interpretation as one needs to mind its relations in totality to decide why and how it was used.

If we return back to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter; Contextual Archaeology can be considered queer because of two reasons, namely, the emphasis on flexibility, multiplicity, and fluidity of identities and the non-normative situations where a thing is utilized. The fluidity, flexibility, and multiplicity of identities, although constitute a major part of Queer Theory, do not directly merge out of Queer Theory itself. Since both Contextual Archaeology and Queer Theory feed from the same grand theoretical current, namely post-structuralism, the identity critique should be seen as related more to the post-structuralist agenda in general, rather than to specific theories. Still, for Judith Butler (2004), 'queer' is not an identity but an identity critique. And this critique comprises an influential point of queer studies. Although it is not plausible to encompass and represent identities assigned to a thing all at once, it is still important to work with what is available to us in the present moment (Butler 1993, 223-242). What Butler argues for the term 'queer' is clearly parallel with what Contextual Archaeology stands for. However, what really defines queerness in Contextual Archaeology is the possibility that a thing is contextualized in a non-normative framework. According to Judith Halberstam (2005), the term 'queer' encompasses non-normative ways of thinking and organizing communities, sexual identities, physical experiences, and the concept of movement within specific periods and locations (p. 6). For Sara Ahmed (2006), for a thing to be considered as ‘queer,’ the contributor’s relationship to it must be unconventional and must disrupt the very foundation of knowledge attested to it. Instructions are provided to ensure the proper (normative) maintenance of both physical and social boundaries at the time of use and improper use of something is queer use that deviates from the ‘correct’ path (Ahmed 2019, 199, 201). In her book, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), Ahmed demonstrates that the history of the word woman has roots in the compound of *wif* (wife) and *man* (human) which defines woman as *wife-man*, as the servant of the man. Citing Wittig’s (1992) statement, “Lesbians are not women,” Ahmed expresses that woman is a heterosexual category defined through orientation to man, and by orienting towards women, lesbian woman deviates from the path of being a woman (p. 224). The queer stance of lesbian women does not come from their sexual identity, but from the non-normative path that they took against the normative obligation that confines women in relation to men.

In this sense, imagining a pencil used as a weapon queers the identity of the pencil. A cow as a malice actor worsening global warming places it into a queer state as a queer actor. All of these are queer examples, positioned in a non-normative framework. The norm, on the other hand, identifies the pencil as a writing gadget and the cow as a livestock. Having said this, I, by no means, have an intention to forcefully push the contributors of Contextual Archaeology to redefine their work as queer. However, I strongly argue that Contextual Archaeology provides an extension to the practice of Queer Archaeology, and the queerness in its essence may be instrumental in setting Contextual Archaeology on a political fundament.

I think that the queerness of a material assemblage is revealed by the interpretation done in a contextual framework. In Chapter 2, I stressed that ‘queer’ can most simply be explained as a theoretical lens that situates itself against the norm without the need for identities and categories. So rather than the methodology, it is the non-normative interpretation that makes something queer. I will use Contextual Archaeology as my methodological body and try to search for a non-binary/non-normative interpretation of the phallus in the Early Neolithic Urfa Region in order to situate the phallus in a queer framework.

4.5.1 What Does a Phallus Do?

In Chapter 3, I argued why phallic iconography could not be a symbol for a male-centered society since there is no archaeological evidence that supports the existence of a binary gender system and labor segregation in terms of gender. This negation makes it mandatory to think of phallus iconography in a different context.

Before delving into the phallus, I would like to express my interpretative position on the use of the monumental spaces in question. As I have shown in Chapter 3, strict divisions between a set of latterly made-up binaries are no longer plausible scholarly categorizations. Moving from the monumentality, the rich symbolism, and their logistic convenience for crowds to gather, I do think that monumental spaces have a possibility to serve a special ‘larger-than-life’ purpose. This does not mean that the ritual aspect of life was constrained by these spaces. On the contrary, while the ritual aspect of life is embedded in the everyday experience as it is evident from the T-shaped pillars used in the residential units, there was an agglomeration of ritualistic connotations in these spaces. Instead of “framing” these monumental buildings from the so-called domestic ones, I think, it is crucial to see what is called ritual is embedded into the social life, on a changing spectrum. In other words, the activities that took place in these monumental spaces would not be separated from the so-called domestic activities, as they were infused into the modes of living as an integral component of everyday life (Banning 2011).

As is presented by Hodder above, the meaning components start with the functional analysis of a thing (Hodder 1987, 6). So, the question first to be revealed is “what can a phallus do.” As its most straightforward capacities, a bodily spot giving pleasure, an intermediary in urination, and/or an organ fertilizing the egg, the thingness of the phallus is redefined through each of these activities and beyond. Among these and many more, what could be the functionality of the phallus that turned it into a prominent iconographical feature in the context of the Early Neolithic Urfa region?

With its unique positionality in the greater narrative scene, the wall relief found at Sayburç constitutes one and only example to untangle the questions about the favored affordance of the phallus within the ritual context of the Early Neolithic Urfa region (Fig. 2). In Chapter 3, I have shown how the scene is examined as an iconographic representation of the so-called male power and dominance over nature. By providing a close reading of the high relief’s physical traits, it is possible to assign the most favored affordance of the phallus in the historical context through the concept of meta-picture coined by Mitchell.

Figure 2: The Sayburç Relief
(Source: Özdoğan 2022, 1602)

In his book Picture Theory, Mitchell (1994) explains meta-picture as "a picture that shows what a picture is" (p. 36). According to Mitchell, any picture has the capacity to be a metapicture, revealing the use and context, and reflecting the nature of the picture itself (Mitchell 1994, 56). Thus, it is possible to examine the Sayburç relief as a meta-picture, which reflects its ontological nature to its audience.

Though the whole scene will be contextualized through its narrative and technical qualities in Chapter 5, for revealing the favored capacity of the phallus in the Early Neolithic context, I only focus on the high relief figure that holds its phallus in this chapter. Although Eylem Özdoğan, the director of Sayburç Excavations, has not written about the action and only proposed a static reading, in which the phallus is held by the individual (Özdoğan 2022, 1601), the relief can also be read as a human figure holding its erect phallus, masturbating with one hand and placing its other forearm around its belly while probably sitting since the knees are slightly bent. The position of the figure gives clues on the use of phallus in its context. The figure is holding and, through that, stimulating the erect phallus with its hand. The stimulation causes friction and should allow for an orgasmic experience as an end result of masturbation. The figure refers to the performative ontology of the phallus and demonstrates how it was used in ritual action. The facial expression of the figure reveals furrowing eyebrows placed on glazed-up eyes, most presumably indicating a channeled concentration, an altered state of consciousness (Fig. 3). I argue that the ontological presence of phallus is constituted through its bodily stimulation. This shows that the contextual functionality of the phallus was not to reproduce, as the scene depicts a singular figure, or urination, as the phalli in the iconographical *koiné* are all erected, but to engage in an autoerotic activity.

Figure 3: The high relief figure
(Source: Özdoğan 2022, 1603)

4.6 The Phallus in Queer Action

My interpretative take on the phallus iconography in the Early Neolithic Urfa context suggests that the phallus was used for masturbation[12], and I argue that this is a contextual take that queers the phallus by reestablishing it in a queer action. Especially starting with the 19th century, after the publication of the well-known book *Onania* (Hunt 1998, 578-579), masturbation had been considered as a dreadful activity, constituting the source of all sorts of mental and physical deviance taking an impetus from the social purity movement of the late 19th century (Herzog 2011, 29; Hunt 1998, 580). Teenagers who were practicing masturbation and at the same time suffering from a certain level of depression were sent to asylums to be treated since masturbation was seen as the source of the mental illness (Laqueur 2003, 252). The heinous connotation of it was also apparent in Enlightenment thought since it was stated against healthy sex by Voltaire (Laqueur 2003, 253). The secrecy of it, as it is practiced in the closet, also placed it near to homosexuality. Because homosexuality was condemned by the law, masturbation was seen as a major deviance practiced by homosexuals, who could not freely experience their sexuality (Laqueur 2003, 255). In addition to that, both masturbation and homosexuality were considered sodomy in Victorian England since

[12] To my knowledge, the figure is interpreted as masturbating only in several public blogs (e.g., ekşi sözlük) and in one article that talks about the male initiation rituals in the region (e.g., Ayaz 2023).

both were non-reproductive sexual actions. Masturbation was regarded as the loss of semen, and in this way seen as the loss of virility and male power which was eventually considered an unmanning activity (Duffy, 2001, 332-333). In the Victorian context, masturbation was not the only sexual act that was deemed to be self-polluting. Also, sexuality in a marital context had to be reduced if it did not aim for procreation (Hunt 1998, 578). In the 1950s, children were still being told that there were costs of masturbation, extending from paralysis to blindness (Laqueur 2003, 359-360). Instead of a physical or mental illness, the connotation of moral failure was lying behind the practice (Laqueur 2003, 374-375).

The non-reproductive, liberating nature of masturbation can be considered as one of the main elements that characterized it as harmful and evil. Although these notions were mainly overcome by the sexual liberation movements in the Western public conception, it would not be correct to think that it has been understood in the same way all over the world as the negative notions attached to it are still pervasive. This situation shows that sexuality conforms to modern social and cultural norms only if it is done for reproduction, and all other sexual practices that are non-procreative are non-normative (Elias 2008, 63-64). In other words, all sexual behavior is bad unless there is a reason to excuse its practice (Rubin 1984, 278). On this basis, reproduction, as a heteronormative social norm, can be stated as the most potent justification for practicing sexuality. The queer position gained through one's opposition to normativity is not confined to LGBTQ+ themes. For example, even though the marital institution involving a post-menopausal heterosexual woman and a young heterosexual man fits into the socially accepted script for heteronormative marriage, it is a non-normative, thus, a queer marriage, due to the defining reproductive ethos of the institution of marriage (Seidman 1991). Masturbation, in this sense, is an unsettling queer action which disturbs and disrupts the normative notions attested to sexuality and its public display.

In the production of archaeological knowledge, the use of the normative reproductive element to morally legitimize the existence of findings related to sexuality is the *de facto* practice. According to Voss and Schmidt (2005), unless there is a specific reason to exempt it, themes related to sex and sexuality are mainly avoided by archaeologists due to a certain level of sex-negativity in the scholarship, caused either by personal reluctance or concern for their careers (p. 4). This explains why various sexual themes are constantly associated with reproduction in archaeology and how the ghost of sexuality still haunts archaeology.

4.7 Conclusion

To conclude, starting from the phenomenological canon and following the traces of this canon in archaeology, I observed that identities change in an endless movement. Changes in identities or meanings have also been examined within the scope of Contextual archeology, which was introduced in the 1980s. By framing Contextual Archeology with queer theory, I have demonstrated how Contextual Archeology creates a methodological opportunity for Queer Archaeology and how this opportunity can be utilized in placing Contextual Archeology on a political basis. If we follow the methodological plan offered by Hodder for Contextual Archaeology, we can see how the Sayburç Relief can be read from a queer perspective that opposes socially accepted norms of sexuality when the contemporary politics of archaeology is considered. In this context, instead of reading the relief as representing a man who has proven his strength against nature by standing confidently out of a queer embracement resulted in the reluctance in naming the activity, reading it as an individual masturbating and, thus, taking part in a queer action, queers the interpretation by interpreting sexuality in a non-normative framework and challenges the sex negativity within the archaeological community. In Chapter 5, I will trace this interpretation of material culture by examining what masturbation meant within the ritual and how it could have been used in the Early Neolithic Urfa context.

Chapter 5:
SPIRITS, ECSTACY, AND THE PHALLUS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, by using Queer Theory, I have attempted to deconstruct the mainstream narrative on the Early Neolithic Urfa region that envisages the prehistoric Urfa community as a male-dominated society in which social segregation through the presence of an elite class was visible. From my perspective, the ubiquity of phallic imagery in creating such an account has been most instrumental in academia. While emphasis has been given to the suggestion of a male-centered, socially segregated society, the sexual use of phallus is ignored, and the imagery is given modern symbolic meanings. The contemporary moral motivations behind these interpretations and their impasse oblige the recontextualization of the phallic imagery in a new framework that does not prioritize phallus as a symbolic icon, as a precursor of a male-centered society, in which the male identity intersected with elite identity. In this chapter, I will situate masturbation, which is the functional use of the phallus that I have reached by using Hodder's methodology, in the wider cultic context of the region and trace its meaning in the material culture recovered from the selected sites. To do that, I find it fruitful to first look at what kind of a belief system that the Early Neolithic Urfa people cosmologically placed themselves in and what this belief system entailed to.

5.2 Finding the Mental Model and Constructing a Belief System

In Chapter 3, I briefly mentioned the non-oppositionality between animals and humans in hunter-gatherer societies by giving an example from Göbeklitepe. According to Descola (1996), the extent and character that the non-humans take place in the life of humans can, indeed, point out the principles of the mental models in community (p. 86). Descola calls these models the *schemata of praxis* (p. 87). He, by no means, argues that these schemes encompass each and every aspect of social life belonging to different communities and an indefinite number of practices that exist in different circumstances. What he means by *schemata of praxis* is the schemes or rough plans that ordinate the very general boundaries of how things are operated. Although there are differences in the character of these practices and cultural traits, the pattern would be similar, which he divides into three modes, namely, animism, totemism, and naturalism (Descola 1996, 87). According to Descola (1996), in totemic systems which are encountered exclusively in socially segmented communities, non-humans are treated as signs, whereas in the animist systems, non-humans are part of the relational web along with humans (p. 88). According to Ingold (2000), in totemic systems, animal imagery is static and does not have a narrative quality (pp. 111-131). Naturalism, on the other hand, corresponds to the contemporary mental model, in which everything is ordered in a causal relationality whether originates in God or in the general mechanism of everyday life (Descola 1996, 88).

In his study on the ontological relationality between humans and non-humans in the Göbeklitepe context, Busacca (2017) argues that the arrangement of depictions in the encircles and the performative nature of the images that was reflected on the image, which allows for an animated motion, highlights the encounter between humans and non-humans, thus, points out to an animist model. Images are not mere symbols, but active agents embodied by the animal spirits (Borić 2013, 54; Busacca 2017, 316). In order to demonstrate the in-motion quality, animals are depicted mainly in oblique poses with bent legs or with wavy lines that convey the notion of motion (Busacca 2017, 322). The other technique that serves the same purpose is what Busacca calls split-action, which he derives from Franco-Cantabrian Upper Paleolithic rock art literature (Busacca 2017, 322). This technique is most visible in the so-called image "ducks in a net" on Pillar 12 in Enclosure C (Schmidt 2012, 141) (Fig. 4), which depicts five duck-like birds depicted in a curved trajectory, most presumably depicting the jumping stages of one bird (Busacca 2017, 323).

Fig. 4 Pillar 12 in Enclosure C
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:G%C3%B6beklitepe_Building_C_3143.jpg)

In this sense, motion should not be seen as an aesthetic choice that is reflected in the stylistic representation of an object but as a feature that provides important insight about the ontological nature of a thing. Because of the limiting nature of the evidence in the Early Neolithic Urfa context, it is hard to provide a definite answer as to whether the prehistoric community of the region was identified with an animist model. However, the motion and dynamism in the visual grammar constitute the foremost clue for arguing the community was animist and believed that every thing surrounding them was animated. Still, concluding with the Early Neolithic Urfa people positioned themselves in an animist model, though tells many things about human/non-human relations, it does not particularly elaborate on the nature of these relations in the community in question. If every thing was animated, were there people who undertook the duty to act as mediators between humans and non-humans? If so, how and under which conditions did this mediation take place?

People taking part in mediation between the spiritual and the material world is a widely accepted phenomenon for the Early Neolithic of the Middle East (Benz and Bauer 2015; Grosman et al. 2008; Kolankaya-Bostanci 2014). This supra-regional phenomenon should not indicate a regional monoculture but should be seen as a representation of the relationship that the Early Neolithic communities constructed with their environmental settings. In their study on the Neolithic cults of the Middle East, Hodder and Meskell (2010) point out that a trickster-like figure, who is mainly called a shaman in the literature, might have acted as an intermediary between the spirit world and the material world for Çatalhöyük and beyond (pp. 61, 63). Giving a comparative account of Göbeklitepe, Jerf el Ahmar, and Tell ‘Abra 3, Benz and Bauer (2015) argue that there are common ideological concepts related to shamanism in Upper Mesopotamia in the Epipaleolithic and Early Neolithic (p. 13). In his study on the shamanic sacra recovered in WF16 in Southern Jordon, Mithen (2022) attempts to categorize the regional shamanic sacra by building analogies from ethnographic studies. According to his ethnographic categorization, the existence of bird imagery as the helpers of the shaman, shamanic artifacts like a staff, zoomorphic figurines as tutelary creatures, masks, sexual themes, portable charms, and buildings that acted “as a living membrane between the human and spirit world” constitute the material relics of shamanic activities in the WF16 context and in the greater Middle Eastern Early Neolithic, including the Taş Tepeler sites (pp. 163-175).

5.3 Mediators

Constituting a valuable source of visual evidence for the existence of mediators between the spiritual and the material worlds, composite statues are noteworthy within the Early Neolithic Urfa context (Yakar 2009, 311-313). As it was mentioned above, Busacca (2017) concludes that the imagery of Göbeklitepe demonstrates an encounter between humans and non-humans. The visual analysis of this encounter, which is materialized in composite statues, may allow us to define the nature of this encounter.

In the Early Neolithic Urfa context, composite statues that show the hybridization of humans and animals in the same sculptural program are recovered from Nevali Çori, Göbeklitepe, and Karahantepe. The absence of these composite statues in Sayburç most presumably should be related to the fact that the excavations on the site are relatively new. A limestone statue that is 1.64 cm in height recovered from Karahantepe (Fig. 5), depicts a human with a predator on their back. With its blazing teeth and upright head, the animal statue is far away from being dead. On the contrary, it looks exceptionally lively and animate. Because of the impossibility of holding and carrying an alive predator, I think the statue has to be evaluated differently than its literal visual display. Instead of a man carrying a leopard, the statue can be interpreted as a human mediator interacting with an animal spirit. This encounter by no means happened in an isolated, sheltered manner, but was established in a framework that is intertwined and enmeshed. The bodily boundaries of the human and the animal figures are vague, creating a visual illusion as if the human is coming out from the animal's body.

Figure 5: Human-Animal (Leopard?) Statue from Karahantepe
(Source: Author)

These kinds of examples can be multiplied. The human head statue with a snake at the back recovered from Nevali Çori (Fig. 6), the human-headed snake in Structure AB in Karahantepe (Karul 2021, 23-24), a limestone statue, which is 23 cm in height recovered from Nevali Çori, depicting a human-headed bird with its wings at its sides (Fig. 7), and the so-called totem pole (Fig. 8), which depicts amalgamation of humans and non-humans recovered from Göbeklitepe can be given as striking examples to the entangled encounter of the human and non-human in the Early Neolithic Urfa context. If I go back to the question about the nature of these encounters, through the evaluation of composite statues, I argue that the encounter between humans and non-humans was hybridizing and indicates the existence of therianthropy.

Figure 6: Human-Snake from Nevali Çori
(Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urfa_museum_Head_with_snake_Neval%C4%B1_%C3%87ori_-_Neolithic_age_-_4859.jpg)

Figure 7: Human-headed bird from Nevali Çori
(Source:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/86/Urfa_museum_Human_Statuette_Neval%C4%B1_%C3%87ori_-_Neolithic_age_4783.jpg)

Figure 8: Totem Pole from Göbeklitepe
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urfa_museum_Totem_sept_2019_4814.jpg)

Therianthropy is a compound word derived from the Greek for beast (*thero*) and human (*anthro*) (Robertson 2013, 8). The term is used for identifying the bodily forms containing both human and non-human features (Cowie 1989, 611). In the San mythology, the hybrid themes of human/non-human bodies are visually evident (Jolly 2002). Therianthropic themes, which have a central place in San Rock Art, exist in visual repertoires of different San communities and understood in the same way, conveyed the same meaning (Jolly 2002, 85). The therianthropes were generally depicted in antelope-human hybrid form, but rather than a specific antelope species, different bodily features belong to different antelope species were used together with human body parts in the same bodily composition (Jolly 2002, 86). So, instead of a direct reference to a specific antelope species, there was the understanding of an antelope in a more schematic way. According to Lewis-Williams (1981), through a trance state, the San shaman fuses with the animal of power, with whom the shaman has a ritual relationship. By using the power coming from the animal spirit, the San shaman is able to transcend into the spiritual world as part of an ecstatic out-of-body experience.

5.4 Trance and Ecstasy

The trance state and the ecstatic experience are the most essential characteristics of shamanic practices. According to Eliade (1951), “The specific element of shamanism is not the incorporation of spirits by the shaman, but the ecstasy provoked by the ascension to the sky or by the descent to Hell: the incorporation of spirits and possession by them are universally distributed phenomena, but they do not belong necessarily to shamanism in the strict sense” (p. 434). According to Eliade (1951), possession or incorporation of spirits can be stated as innovations in shamanic practices whereas the descent of the soul represents the true essence of what shamanism is (p. 438). The meaning of the Tungus word *shaman* is the one who is excited, moved, or raised (Lewis 2003a, 45). According to Lewis (2003a), a shaman is someone who is able to call spirits and control their manifestation in trance states (p. 45). The spiritual world is opened to the mediator through trance, and ecstatic techniques are instrumental in getting into such a state to provide services to the community (Singh 2017, 4). Ecstatic elements ranging from rhythmic drumming to the use of hallucinogens help the mediator in altering the state of consciousness and eventually lead them into a transcendent status (Block 1979; von Gernet 1995, 67; Winkelman 2000; 2002; Lewis 2003b; Vait et al. 2005). Lewis (2003b) observes two main categories of inducing trance. One of them concerns sensory deprivation like isolation and fasting, while the other includes sensory overloading like monotonous drumming, use of hallucinogens, and strobe lighting effects (Lewis 2003b, 24). The techniques to alter the consciousness are used to have an out-of-body experience, in which the mediator goes into a soul-flight experience that leads to the spiritual world (Winkelman 2019, 137).

!Kung bushmen of South Africa routinely practice a healing dance, in which they alter their state of consciousness without using any substances, and through that, release healing energy to the universe (Garfinkel 2003, 67; Lewis 2003a, 42). According to Richard Katz who carried out these observations in Botswana in the 1970s, *!kia*, an altered state of consciousness, constitutes the core of the dancing practice. As individuals in the group go into *!kia*, others also get affected by this feature in the ritual's contagious atmosphere and get into a trance state on various levels (Katz 1976, 286; Garfinkel 2003, 68). Deriving information from his ethnographic observations, Garfinkel (2003) proposes that dance is an ecstatic event that leads its practitioners into a "deep spiritual experience" (p. 73). The ecstatic element in dance is not only symbolic/cultural but also circular and rhythmic movement, which creates dizziness and exhilaration and may have physical effects on one's body (Garfinkel 2003, 63-64).

In the !Kung society, although not in use today, the use of psychoactive plants in the journey to *!kia* was also apparent (de Rios & Winkelman 1989). Almost half of the plants that were used for their medical properties were psychoactive and used in trance-induction activities (de Rios & Winkelman 1989, 55). The high percentage of psychoactive plants in medical use is also compatible with ethnographic accounts where the trance-induced states are highlighted (de Rios & Winkelman 1989, 56). Although psychoactive plants do not constitute a part of the !Kung botanic assemblage anymore, their absence is thought to be related to modernization and acculturation of the !Kung society (de Rios & Winkelman 1989, 56). In another regional context, recent studies on tobacco show that, prehistoric communities of Eastern Northern America favored *N.rustica*, which is a tobacco species that creates a shift in the level of consciousness and leads to hallucinations when it is used in the right doses. According to von Gernet (1995), the gradual selection and, eventually, domestication process of this species may have links with its effect as the user manifests great strength or spiritual power (p. 67).

As much as trance is a neuro-physical process, it is also psychological and social, with a cultural meaning lying behind it (Lewis 2003, 24). As in the mummy example I have shown in Chapter 4, the symbolic and functional are imminent into each other and even the most functional thing has a symbolical belief that makes it utilized for the desired purpose. While a mediator transcends into the spiritual world, apart from all of the ecstatic features, the cultural belief that assumes the mediator will surely transcend is what makes this transcendence possible. So, instead of following observations that label these spiritual practices as charlatanism (e.g., Diderot 1765/2001) or a product of a psychopathological condition (e.g., Devereux 1961), their practices are products of their own cultural structure, valid, and make sense in their own context (Singh 2017).

So, until now, I concluded that there was indeed the presence of people who mediated between the material and the spiritual worlds. The nature of this mediation was immensely interwind as two or more distinct bodies got interwoven into each other as a part of a therianthropic culture. In order to step into the process of this mediation, studies on shamanism suggest that the mediator has to alter their state of consciousness through several ecstatic techniques. Tracing the archaeological signs for the induction of mental state may reveal how and under which conditions this mediation took place. I would like to examine the elements that contribute to the ecstatic experience in the Early Neolithic Urfa region under four main headings: use of space, dance and music, mind-altering substances, and sexuality.

5.4.1 Use of Space

In her study, Anne Porter (2022) argues that the Early Neolithic subterranean buildings allow for an ecstatic sensation by putting Göbeklitepe at the center of the discussion. There is a sensory difference between entering an above-ground building and an underground building. The coldness, humidity, and unique rotten smell of the soil must have created a different kind of sensation than above ground (Porter 2022, 194). The fact that the buildings had narrow passages and entering these buildings by crawling through these passages might have meant to create the feeling of entering a new world (Porter 2022, 196). This feeling should be no less than the feeling you get when you are trying to find your favorite work of art with your map in the Louvre and that work of art suddenly appears before you. While you are walking in a relatively ordinary place with expectations, a differentiated scene you suddenly encounter creates excitement. Narrow passages and the fact that these structures are subterranean are factors that contribute to ecstatic excitement. When the inside of these buildings is concerned, roofed or unroofed, the spaces would have been enlightened by fire. Porter (2022) draws attention to the burning and tearing sensation caused by fire. She also adds that the shadows of human bodies formed by the light of the fire would have been elongated on the ground in strange shapes and would have created a different sensation (p. 206).

5.4.2 Dance and Music

Although both dance and music are features that embody multisensorial capacities in themselves as part of a religious practice (Hanna 1987, 203), tracing it on a material element introduces difficulties as the dynamism and movement in dancing is hard to visually reflect due to several technical concerns (Garfinkel 2003, 18). Apart from the ones that are displayed by Busacca above, the use of round objects, like pottery vessels or cylinder seals, to impose an endlessness of movement are used in the representation of dancing scenes, with identical, dynamic bodily figures engraved on the material (Garfinkel 2003, 19, 22). Within the repertoire of the selected sites, there is a limestone bowl recovered from Nevali Çori, that may help to prove at least the existence of dance (Fig. 9). On the fragment of the stone bowl, there is the depiction of two humans with raised elongated arms with a mild facial expression. In the middle of them, there is a non-human, turtle-like figure, standing vertically (Yakar 2009, 320). Since the turtle-like figure in the middle is standing on two legs, which is a human feature, there is a high chance that the figure is depicting a therianthrope. When considered together, the imagery on the bowl most probably depicts two humans dancing (Garfinkel 2003, 114; Yakar 2009, 320), with an animal-human therianthrope in the middle. If the bowl is contextualized as a material impression of an ecstatic practice that allowed communication with an animal spirit, then it is possible to argue that dancing was instrumental in inducing such a state. In a visual scene where dancing is evident, imagining the existence of music should not be a far-fetched argument.

Figure 9: Limestone bowl with engraving from Nevali Çori
(Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urfa_museum_Fragment_of_stone_vessel_Neval%C4%B1_%C3%87ori_-_Neolithic_age_4795.jpg)

5.4.3 Mind-Altering Substances

Due to the questions that reflect relatively major thresholds in prehistory, paleobotany studies are focused on topics such as domestication and diet, especially in the Middle Eastern Neolithic studies. On the other hand, the use of botanic hallucinogens, which would have taken part in the everydayness of social life but would not truly concern a larger topic such as sedentism or agriculturalization, has not been a subject of study. Although the archaeological evidence for the consumption of hallucinogenic substances is not available due to the academic orientation of paleobotany, the production and presumable consumption of beer in Göbeklitepe is archaeologically attested. In their study, Dietrich et al. (2012) demonstrate that there is calcium-oxalate, which is a by-product of beer production, residues on the large stone container recovered in Göbeklitepe in a PPNB context (p. 687). Although the percentage of alcohol would be low in these beers, an opioid effect, caused by opioid peptides called exorphins, from consuming even the unfermented barley and wheat beverages is evident (Wadley & Martin 1993). Technical equipment related to beer production is also attested in the Natufian context among other sites in the

Epipaleolithic Middle East, like Jerf el Ahmar and Tell ‘Abr 3 (Hayden et al. 2013, 103). Although the brewing evidence in Göbeklitepe dates to a PPNB context, the possible predating of beer brewing makes it feasible to contextualize beer consumption in Göbeklitepe’s earlier contexts, along with other Taş Tepeler sites.

5.4.4 Sexuality

Sexuality has rarely been a subject of discussion for the Early Neolithic Urfa region, as it is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In her study, Porter (2022) justifiably states that “performance of sex acts constitutes at least part of what happens in the Göbeklitepe enclosures” (p. 203). In his study, Mithen (2002) proposes that the phallic imagery and sexual themes have to be contextualized within the perimeters of shamanism (p. 172). Although these two authors stated a different point of view than the mainstream narrative that took the phallic imagery as a symbol of male domination, they did not elaborate on the nature of sexuality within the regional context due to the extent of their works. As the second step of Hodder’s contextual methodology, I will attempt to define the role of the phallus in its archaeological context, using the visual data coming from Sayburç, Karahantepe, and Göbeklitepe.

5.5 Phallus as a Shamanic Sacra

In Chapter 4, I introduced an interpretation of the functionality of the phallus in the Early Neolithic Urfa context and explained why it is a queer interpretation in our own contemporary society. In this section, using the same iconographic data, the Sayburç Relief, I will attempt to explain how this function constitutes a part of the larger context. Sexuality can be an instrumental element in spiritual transcendence as it can provide an ecstatic experience through rhythmic stimulation (Wade 2000; Safron 2016; Costa et al. 2016; Elfers & Offringa 2019). According to Scnarch (2009), sexual ecstasy is not a product of a special technique or position, but the meaning of the experience held by the participants. I argue that masturbation was one of the ecstatic elements that helped the mediator to transcend into the spiritual world, among use of space, dance and music, and mind-altering substances and phallus had an agency in the transcending the mediator into the spiritual world.

The Sayburç Relief is composed of two different kinds of relief techniques, namely low and high (Fig. 10). Also, the relief scene can be divided into two, as part A and part B. In the part B, a masturbating figure with flanking feline predators at its sides welcomes the audience. In the part A, a human figure who faces a bull catches attention. The masturbating human constitutes the only figure that is crafted in high relief technique in the full scene. I argue that the difference in relief technique was neither a coincidence nor an action that was taken out of an aesthetic concern. From my point of view, the high-relief figure corresponds to the mediator in the material world. The figure indeed stays materially solid and presents a clear and sharp outer look, especially when compared to other figures situated in the same visual context. Through masturbating, thus using the ecstatic element of sexuality, the mediator transcends into the spiritual world and gets into interaction with non-human spirits. It is, thus, natural that all the other visual elements in the relief are depicted in the low relief technique, which is more abstract, vaporous, and indefinite. Instead of a sequential narrative, in which the narrative is being told through a horizontal visual plan, the relief scene shows both worlds, material and spiritual, at the same time within a single relief project.

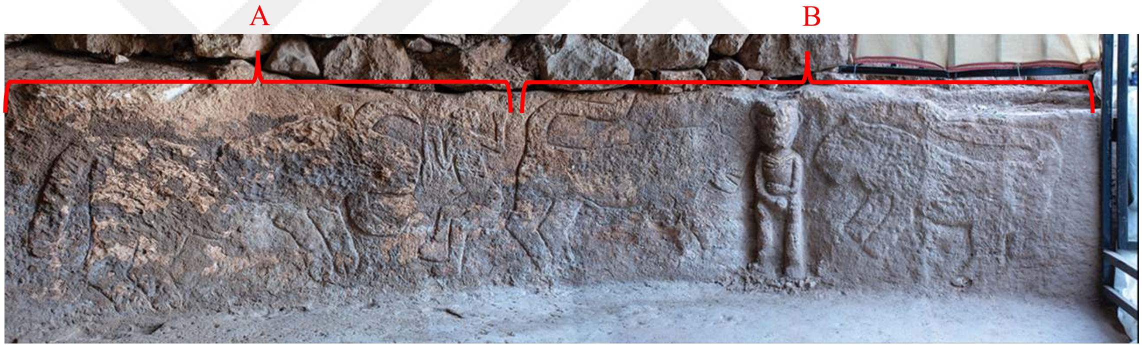

Figure 10: Annotated Sayburç Relief
(Source: Özdoğan 2022, 1602; annotated by the author)

In Göbeklitepe, Pillar 43, the so-called Vulture Stone (Fig. 11), has been contextualized as the material reflection of a death cult because of the decapitated body (Schmidt 2006, 40). The pillar contains many visual elements but three of them has an explicit visual relation. On the upper register of the pillar, a vulture holds a round object. When the lower right side of the pillar is considered, an ithyphallic, decapitated human body attracts attention, whose head is probably carried away by the vulture at the upper register. Near to the decapitated human body, there is a large bird, whose body was not engraved but only the neck and the head is visible, with a prominent eye and a beak. The bird is giving the impression as if the decapitated, ithyphallic human body is sitting on it. There is two possibility that may justify the existence of a death erection. First, if the body left vertical after death, then blood starts to collect at the lowermost part of the body and the accumulation of blood may cause the enlargement of the penis. Second, if the body waits in room temperature for few days, the gases trapped inside of the body because of the decomposition process, may lead to swelling of the penis, along with the whole body, that will visually mimic an erection (Clare et al. 2019, 117). The body in the image, on the other hand, is not swollen. The erection in the image looks deliberate, as it was not a biproduct of post-mortem swelling. In this regard, the scene should be contextualized in a more ‘symbolic’ manner (Claire et al. 2019, 117). According to Benz and Bauer (2015), the image depicts a human riding a waterfowl and travelling to the spiritual world (p.10). According to them, the image may symbolize a rite of passage, a healing ceremony, or a ceremony for the death (Benz & Bauer 2015, 117). I also think that the image depicts a larger-than-life experience and does not simply refer to a human whose head is carried away by a vulture. I argue that, through the ecstatic agency of the phallus, the human figure experiences a soul flight to the spiritual world with the courtesy of two spirits, one carrying the body, the other carrying the head.

Figure 11: Pillar 43
(Source:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4d/G%C3%B6beklitepe_Building_D_5391.jpg)

Both the phallus and ribs are prominent visual elements in the visual world of Göbeklitepe (Clare et al. 2019, 115). In the Siberian and North American Shamanism, skin and skeleton outlast the soft flesh of the human body. Thus, both skin and skeleton are perceived as the seat of the soul and related to life instead of death (Anawalt 2014, 80; Mithen 2022, 170). In the Paleo-Inuit belief, there was a spiritual importance given to the skeleton as not a remnant of the dead animal but as the container of the soul (Pavlinskaya 1994). Inuit and Siberian shamans were symbolically reducing themselves to skeletal forms in order to experience a soul flight and act in intercession between the material and spiritual (Sutherland 2001, 140). In the Göbeklitepe imagery, myriad forms of animals are shown with erect phalli and prominent bodily features that do not easily decompose through time, such as teeth, ribs, horns, tusks, etc. Even though the mainstream narrative labels them as aggressive animals that were used as fear symbols to consolidate political power (e.g., Benz & Bauer 2013, 19) or symbols for the power centered around masculinity (e.g., Hodder & Meskell 2011, 237) out of the issues I raised in Chapter 3, I am not convinced that these arguments are reliable. Instead of depending on direct visual interpretative assumptions, a gradual deconstruction of the visual elements in the site may reveal a similar theme was also apparent in the Göbeklitepe context.

I suggest that the so-called animal imagery in Göbeklitepe actually stands for human mediators amalgamated with their non-human spiritual counterparts. I would like to exemplify and prove my point through an image found on Pillar 12 in Enclosure C in Göbeklitepe. On the pillar, under the above-mentioned "ducks in a net" image, a boar stands out with its prominent tusks and erect penis that does not deviate from the general visual theme of Göbeklitepe (Fig. 12). Although it is harder, and maybe impossible to point out such a feature in fox or lion images, it is definite that the erect penis of the boar is not actually a boar penis but a human one. If one looks at the boar anatomy, what will catch attention is that the penis and testicles are not placed side to side but there is a gap between the two (Fig. 13). While testicles are placed under the tail at the back of the animal, penis, which looks totally unrelated to what was depicted in Göbeklitepe, is placed under the abdomen and has a curly tip (Fig. 14). As a community who lived side-by-side with the now so-called wildlife, it is completely impossible that they did not know, or they misrepresented what the boar penis looks like. The artisan(s) who made this low relief knew that it was not the correct image of a boar's penis yet still preferred to engrave it as such. Instead of a boar's penis, the image is depicted with a human penis attached to a boar's body, displaying the therianthropic, united form of a human with a non-human spirit. This brings the interpretation that, at least for the erect animals that were depicted with prominent, hard-to-decay bodily features, the visual world of Göbeklitepe opens a window to the animate spiritual world perceived by the spiritual mediators of the time, instead of depicting the wildlife the humans of the time were surrounded with.

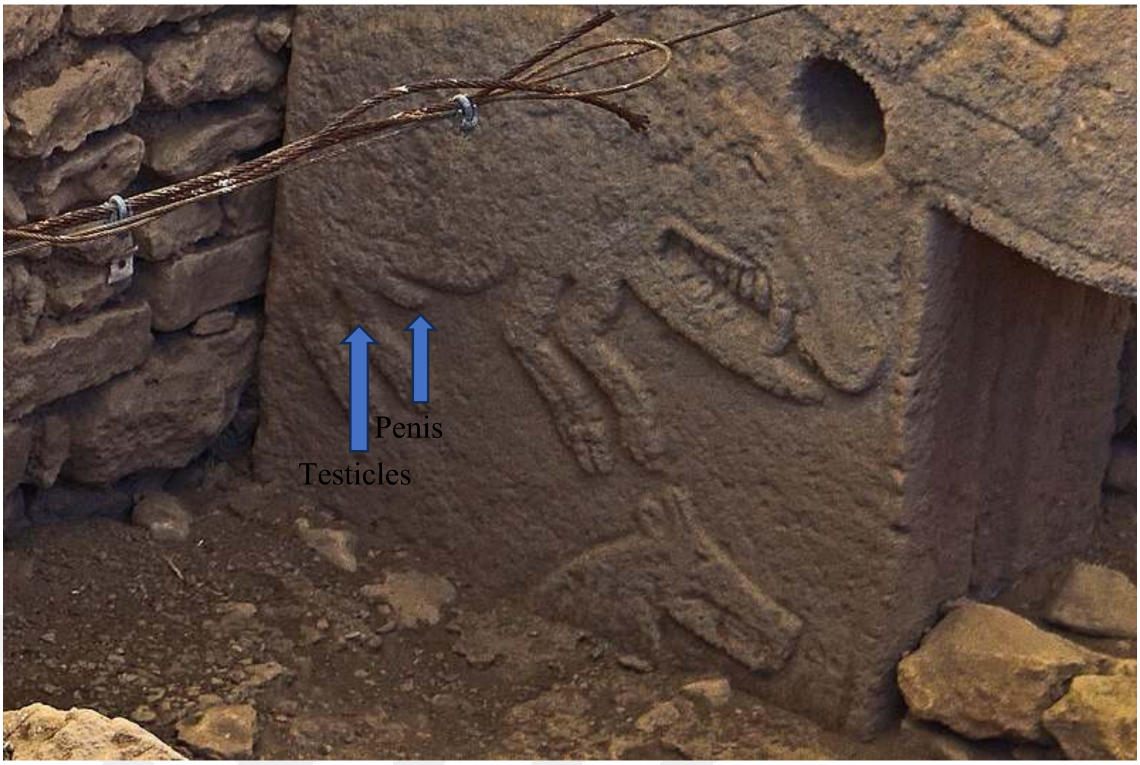

Figure 12: Boar on Pillar 12 from Göbeklitepe
(Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:G%C3%B6beklitepe_Building_C_sept_2019_5376crop.jpg)

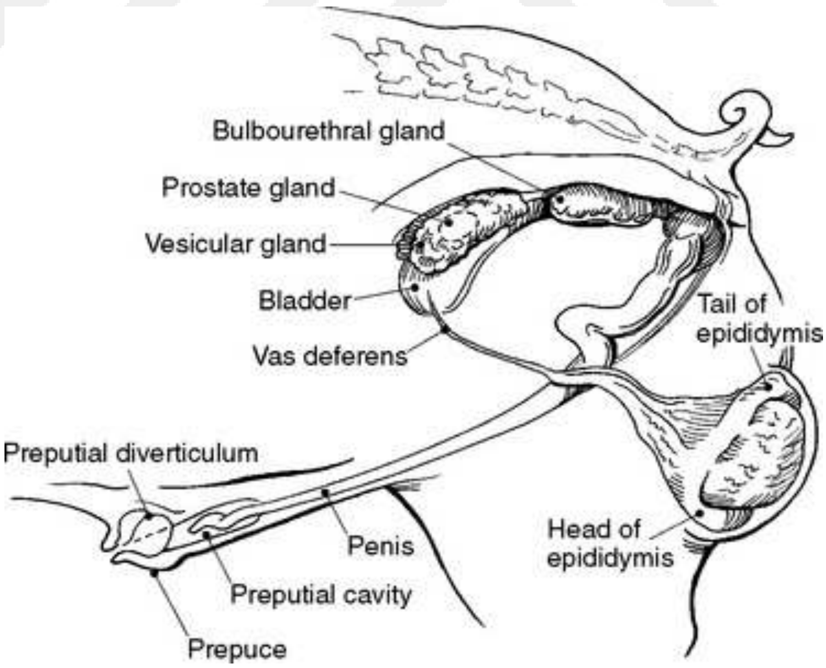

Figure 13: Boar anatomy
(Source: https://www.thepigsite.com/genetics-and-reproduction/insemination/anatomy-and-physiology-1)

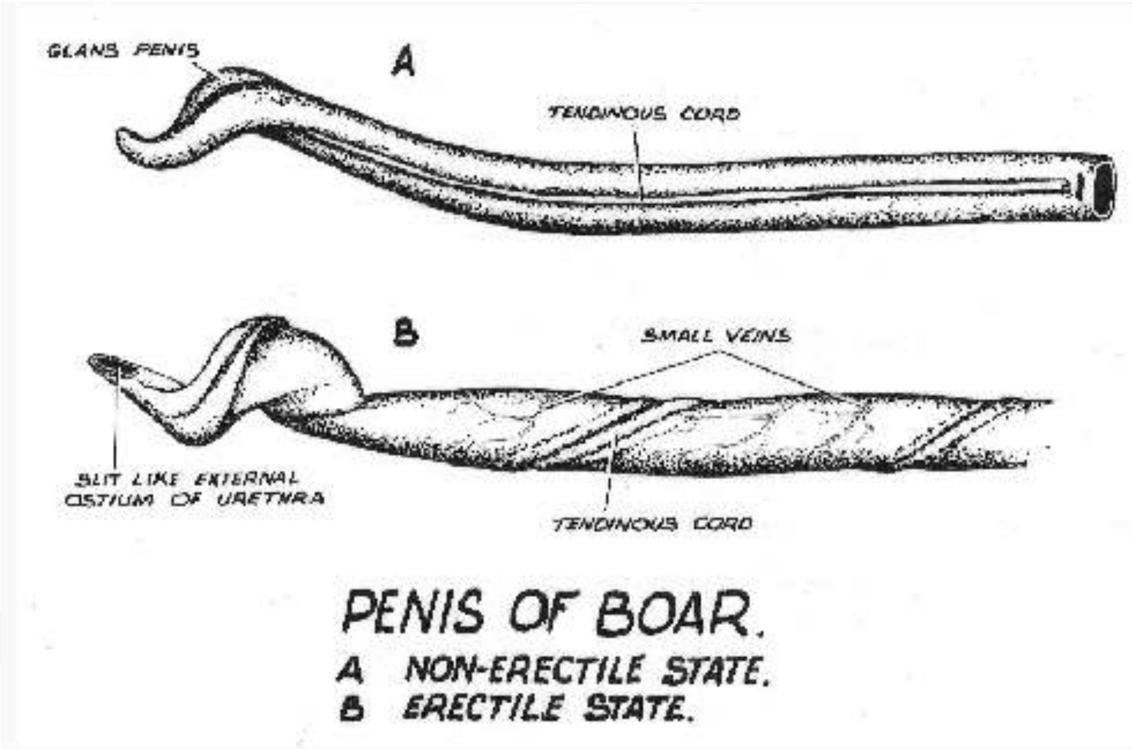

Figure 14: Boar penis
(Source: https://www.minipiginfo.com/pig-anatomy-and-terminology.html)

When the totality of the visual evidence is considered, I am confident to state that we see the local visual variations of the same theme produced by different communities living in the same cultural zone. The shared theme is not violence or masculinity but the transcendence of the mediator and mediator's encounter with non-human spirits in a different realm. In this process, physical stimulation of the phallus was only an element that added up the one's overall ecstatic experience as a sexual practice. Thus, instead of a claim of phallocentrism (Hodder & Meskell 2011, 237-241), it is more credible to argue that the phallus was only an ecstatic agent in the ritual network.

5.6 Ontic Reality of the Archaeological Material

Although my account has dealt with the actual phallus and its capacities until now, the phallic iconography is apparent in the stonework. If the human phallus, by itself, was a cultic paraphernalia and had an agency in the ritual, why there is this iconography on the stones anyway? Weren't the actual phalli enough for this 'larger than life' experience and how did the phallic iconography contribute to the ritual? Instead of being symbolic cursors for a specific type of social organization, or mimesis of the environment that the people of the time were surrounded with, I take the materials adorned with phallic imagery as having an ontic reality. I argue that the functions and agency of the actual phallus are embodied in these phallic finds, as continuous hubs of sexual power, taking a part in the ritual network.

Though they have not been integrated into the Early Neolithic narrative of the Urfa region, there are global examples that can exemplify and recontextualize the ontic reality of stonework with phallic imagery in the Urfa region. One of them is the Yanesha people of Amazon. In Yanesha society, most things have an animacy that transcends their agency as objects (Santos-Granero 2009, 106-109). Santos-Granero narrates a story of a shaman cleaning the pipe with certain 'detersives.' Cleaning is a part of the ritual actions to awaken the soul inside of the pipes. Manioc beer, tobacco, and coca leaves are substances of this awakening ritual. This practice shows how the object is perceived as an entity that bares a soul, which can be awakened through a series of actions (pp. 112-114). In his account of San shamanic rock art, Lewis-Williams (2001) contextualizes rock art as "long-term 'reservoirs' that could be tapped for power and insight" (p. 28). Moving from the light of these examples, it is sensible to envisage the phallic scenes on T-pillars and wall reliefs as 'reservoirs' or 'hubs,' amalgamated with the capacities of the phallus.

The presence of stones that embody the notions that the phallus affords, allows us to speculate whether the people having a phallus were the only ones who could participate in such rituals. If a phallic object or a relief depicting a phallus reserves the power, which allows oneself to transfer into a sexually induced, ecstatic state, wouldn't a person without a phallus take part in the ritual, not using the phallus itself but the power coming from the ontic reflections of the phallus? Though my aim is not to answer such a question, this probability further problematizes the mainstream narrative on the ritual margins of the Early Neolithic Urfa region.

5.8 Conclusion

To conclude, when the in-motion quality of the images is considered, it is plausible to argue that the Early Neolithic Urfa society lived with an animist mental model, in which the mediators took the responsibility to communicate with the spiritual world. This mediation is best represented by composite statues, referring to the existence of therianthropes. To transcend into the spiritual realm, among many things, the mediator was engaging in an auto-erotic activity and using the ecstatic sensation gained through sexuality. Thus, it is feasible to argue that the phallus was only an ecstatic agent that helped the mediator to transcend into the spiritual world and merge with the spirit bodies in a therianthropic fashion. The fusion between the human and the spirit constituted the main theme of the visual culture of the Early Neolithic Urfa region. This common theme was utilized differently by different communities living in the same region.

Chapter 6:
CONCLUSION

This thesis initially aimed to investigate the possibility of the existence of a male-centered society in the Early Neolithic Urfa region, whose power extends over society in terms of economic, social, cultural, and political control. Through a study framed by Queer Theory, it is revealed that using contemporary notions and binaries about past identities does not encompass historical experience but only provides an inorganic origin for the contemporary state of society, in which male control at the top of the social hierarchy is present. Queer Theory, on the other hand, motivates the subject to think about the volatile and ever-changing status of the notion of identity. In the thesis, the rebuttal of the mainstream narrative does not only stay on the theoretical level. Through the study of archaeological material, it is revealed that the proposed findings thought to point to the existence of an elite identity do not seem to correlate with archaeological and ethnographic studies done on the Urfa region and in greater Upper Mesopotamia and Levant. In a framework where the current archaeological material does not conclude with the existence of a male-centered society, it is hard to understand, and quite worrying, why there is an emphasis given to the existence of such a societal formation.

The deconstruction of the mainstream narrative obligated the phallic iconography to be situated in a new context, not related to concepts such as maleness, socio-economic potency, hierarchy, male virility, etc. In this attempt, applying the methodological milieu drawn by Contextual Archaeology that was put forward by Ian Hodder in the 1980s on the archaeological material unearthed from the selected sites promises a new way of contextualizing, and through that understanding, the material evidence and what it entails. Before applying Hodder's methodology to the archaeological material, I found it fruitful to queer Contextual Archaeology and show how both Queer Theory and Contextual Archaeology feed from the same source of theoretical current, namely post-structuralism, highlighted by the importance given to the ever-changing, fluid, and flexible status of things. Beyond that, Contextual Archaeology provides an extension to the application of Queer Archaeology by constituting its methodological framework in contextualizing archaeological materials in a non-normative way of thought. In the application of Contextual Archaeology to the Sayburç Relief, with a mindset motivated by Queer Theory, I found out that instead of explaining the relief as demonstrating the rising power of men against nature, it is more plausible to contextualize the high relief figure as masturbating, thus, engaging in a queer action because of masturbation's non-normativity embedded into the socially accepted script of practicing 'healthy' sexuality. The queer interpretation of the scene explains why this interpretation has not been put forward as it queers the normative ways of practicing sexuality and has the capacity to bring about a queer embracement. I later explained the physical stimulation of the phallus, masturbation, as providing an ecstatic sensation that the mediator experienced as part of the trance. In addition to that, I also argued, along with masturbation, the use of mind-altering substances, space use, and dance and music also provided another layer to the ecstatic state one got in a trance. In other words, instead of centering the phallus as a poignant, symbolic feature that indicated a male-centered society, I recontextualized it as an agent that took part in the ritual network. I argued, instead of the phallus, that what was at the center of the culture was the spiritual human-animal linkage that materialized itself on stone, demonstrating itself in a therianthropic form. This relationship was articulated with different artistic applications yet always protected its main theme.

In my thesis, I used Queer Theory on many different layers. In Chapter 3, I used Queer Theory to deconstruct the binary narrative especially put forward for the ahistorical existence of two sexes. In this sense, it was rather a conventional use of Queer Theory, where it is more related to themes of sex and sexuality. However, in Chapter 4, I took 'queer' as something that deviates from the norm, and through that, demonstrated the queered forms of identities and uses of things, mostly using the theoretical framework provided by Sara Ahmed as my background. Later on, I contextualized this queer interpretation as an ecstatic agent within the cultural repertoire of the Early Neolithic Urfa region. Contextualization of a sexual element beyond the boundaries of reproduction is another queer layer added to the thesis. Since the normative way to practice sexuality is always defined through reproductive aims, defining the sexual themes in a non-reproductive sexual context queers the interpretation for the contemporary audience.

In conclusion, this thesis has offered a transformative reevaluation of the Early Neolithic Urfa region, challenging prevailing narratives of a male-centered society through the nuanced application of Queer Theory and Contextual Archaeology. By deconstructing traditional interpretations of phallic iconography and recontextualizing it within a broader ritual framework, this study has revealed the fluidity and complexity of identity dynamics in prehistoric cultures. Through the exploration of diverse theoretical perspectives, from the deconstruction of binary narratives to the queering of normative sexual interpretations, this research has provided a new understanding of the cultural landscape of the region. Moving forward, it is imperative for archaeologists to continue embracing multiple, theoretically informed approaches to interpretation, thereby enriching our understanding of past societies and challenging entrenched narratives of power and identity. By doing so, we can strive towards a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of our shared human history.

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