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Golden Age, Stone Age, Iron Age, Axial Age: The Significance of Archaic Civilization for the Modern World

by

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Introduction

Concerning the theme of the conference, from the perspective of the social sciences it seems to me that there are – and indeed can only be – two quite radically different positions. According to one, which is certainly the majority position today, the theme lacks any relevance, as the interest of the social sciences is and should be directed towards the present. According to other, this question is of vital relevance for the social sciences, and for just as obvious reasons: in any science one needs more than one case in order to study a phenomenon properly. If the question concerns not just a particular aspect of modern societies, but the modern world itself, then we must find some reference points outside modernity in order to be able to see it – to see ourselves – from some distance. This can only be done if we compare the main characteristics of the modern world to some other civilizations.

This simple idea was a common currency of social scientists and philosophers up to very recently. Vico, Montesquieu, Weber, or Voegelin are only some of those classic figures who considered this question, and a civilizational perspective, as central for the understanding of our own world. In fact, it might not be risky to assume that the time will come, and soon, in which we as social scientists will have to give an account about the way we managed to ignore such basic truths and let our disciplines be carried away by such intellectual and socio-political fads as American modernization theory, Marxism, rational choice theory, postmodernism, and various new social movements.

The matter is not restricted to questions of 'scientific method' and 'number of cases', but goes into the heart of substance. This includes first of all the hubris of modernism; the arrogant claim, to be traced back to the Enlightenment, that we, moderns are somehow completely different from and better than all other periods in human history; a claim that is not contradicted but complemented by its opposite, according to which the modern, 'bourgeois' or 'Eurocentric' Western world is so radically corrupt that it must be completely destroyed.

The central reason for needing a long-term civilisational perspective on the modern world, going even beyond the axial age, to Archaic civilizations – and here I refer to Johann Arnason – is that beyond rhetoric and excess, we already experience a civilizational crisis. The first point to note here is that talking about a civilizational crisis is almost the same thing as talking about globalization. Globalization is widely considered as the increasing removal of boundary-lines preventing the free circulation of goods, money and human beings. As Bernd Giesen makes it evident in a recent paper, this is a direct continuation of the project of modernity pursued since centuries (Giesen forthcoming). As I argue in my discussion paper (Szakolczai forthcoming), taking the idea further, such a situation corresponds to a paradoxical state of 'permanent liminality' (see also Szakolczai 2000), which threatens the destruction of the very possibility of a meaningful life, while at the same time promoting ecological disaster.

Talking about a civilizational crisis also implies that the comparative analysis cannot remain at a purely descriptive level, but must try to give an answer to fundamental questions of meaning, value and direction as well. Such considerations should be as much outcomes of a comparative historical study as guiding its direction, following the principle of simultaneity, in opposition to the methodological perspective of simply testing alternative hypotheses. In particular, such a study must break both with the utilitarian-functionalist-rational choice perspective, which simply imposes the special social logic guiding human action in the modern world (and which is at the root of the current crisis) into the past; just as it cannot accept the perspective of radical critique as the starting point. Instead, I suggest to depart from considerations of harmony, beauty and grace, not simply as a merely 'aesthetic' perspective, but as a measure that not just

should but for long periods actually did guide social action; a perspective which is necessary in order to distinguish between societies, cultures and civilizations which managed to secure their population a dignified and decent human existence, and which did not. Far from being 'Romantic', such a perspective is genuinely realistic, departing from the real characteristics of nature and life, and not the Romantic illusion of individuals following their own fancy, imprisoned into their own 'preferences' – which are mostly products of social imitation and 'image-magic' (Szakolczai 2007c), as techniques of advertising, commercials and marketing demonstrate it, beyond the comprehension of rational choice theory and neoclassical economics.

Starting from the perspective of harmony, beauty and grace has two further advantages. First, instead of opposing culture and nature, or animals and humans, it can focus on their relationship, implying gradual differentiation, instead of theoretical opposition and the ensuing dualism.[i] The second point concerns our own long-term historical identity. The question of 'European identity' today is usually posed in the context of the 'primordialism' vs. 'constructivism' debate – one of the many dualistic debates dominating social science, a legacy – among others – of neo-Kantianism, which simply render a meaningful exchange of ideas impossible. From the perspective of the values of harmony, beauty and grace, the question becomes rather which are those civilizations which not only effectively promoted these concerns – as originally all cultures and civilizations did so; but which managed to show particular resilience to rise up, again and again, once their own culture or civilization collapsed and fell into the abyss of an abusive or corrupted form. It is in this perspective that the problem of the continuities and discontinuities of European identity can be meaningfully posed – beyond apology and self-flagellation.

Still, apart from this general principle, a comparative research into archaic civilizations needs some further concrete guidelines. First of all, we need a model that genuinely breaks with the simple linear vision of history. While such an idea is accepted in principle without opposition, the very rise of globalization reinforced this fundamental modernist presupposition.[ii] In contrast, and offering a different take on globalization, I suggest a very simple cyclical model, which still goes beyond the simple repetition of rise and fall, and also helps to incorporate a movement forward. It also starts by some processes of rise, growth, or improvement, which for a time are perceived as a genuine, unmixed blessing. At a second stage, however, these improvements start to threaten some previously taken from granted boundaries (natural or human), setting off processes that can be called 'globalizing'. As such tendencies cannot be maintained in the long run, they soon lead into the crisis and eventual collapse of the globalizing culture or civilization. Such a collapse is ensued by a 'Dark Age', which represents a drastic 'de-globalization', cultural or civilization decline, population decline, and a marked loss of living standards. The next question concerns whether, and how, after such a period, a given culture or civilization manages to stage a comeback; or, in technical terminology, whether it leads to a new Renaissance.

Even at a first look it is evident that, beyond the collapse of the Roman Empire, or the 'axial age' as a single period, the past offers us a number of examples concerning such a dynamics. There is the well known case of the Trojan War, whose 'kernel of truth' has been repeatedly reconfirmed by archaeological excavations, documenting the destruction of well over 30 major cities in a period of a few decades around 1200 BC. But similar dynamics took place around 2000 BC in Egypt and Mesopotamia; around 3000 BC in Southeastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia; and experts even talk about the 'Neolithic crisis' of about 7000 BC.

Such developments imply that the social sciences, imprisoned into narrow theoretical horizons and constrained by requirements of 'policy relevance', must open up

to new evidence unearthed about civilizational dynamics. At the same time, research in these areas needs new theoretical perspectives. The following passages suggest a few general methodological guiding principles.

Archeology

It goes without saying that archaeological discoveries offer the single most important new evidence to be incorporated into current theorizing about the dynamics of civilizations. However, in my view to state this does not go far enough; as what is necessary is that the very frameworks that guided our approach to the history of Antiquity and civilization must be reoriented at their fundamentals, in light of these archaeological findings. The main issue concerns the centrality of Egypt and Mesopotamia; a basic perspective on the study of ancient civilization that has never been altered. However, in light of recent discoveries the centre of focus should significantly shift to Northern Syria and South-Eastern Anatolia (the Urfa and Malatya regions). Furthermore, archaeologists increasingly recognize the vital importance of anthropology.

Anthropology

While the question of using anthropological evidence for social research has been recognized at least since the times Durkheim, Mauss, and also Max Weber, there is still potential for further improvement. In particular, while in the past the evidence from anthropological research was integrated into the framework of concepts and concerns developed in sociological theory, based on 'modern' approaches (positivism, evolutionism, structuralism, functionalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, etc.), it is better to take concepts developed by anthropologists on the basis of their fieldwork in order to re-think the very foundations of modern social theory. I particular, I suggest the use of terms like liminality, Trickster, gift relations, home-world relations, spiraling imitative crises, and schismogenesis; terms that for long were considered as marginal even in anthropology, but that seem to have particular relevance for reconstructing the long-term process of cultural and civilizational dynamics.[iii]

Linguistics

Apart from written sources and the material evidence recovered, there are important complementary developments in linguistics as well. In particular, I would like to emphasis the work of Mario Alinei (1996, 2000) and his 'Continuity Theory', which casts a new light on the link between the Neolithic and Indo-European languages (see also Olender 1992); and the related question of the agglutinating languages (see also Malherbe 1983).

Mythology

The between comparative archaeology and comparative mythology is a central concern at least since Schliemann's discovery of the remains of Troy; just as the question of the primacy of ritual or myth preoccupied anthropologists since Frazer and Robertson Smith. I will only make two points here, both concerning the links between myths and actual events. The first is about the role of experience. While the actual historical content of a particular myth can probably never be fully ascertained, myths are never simple products of the imagination, rather are always rooted in *experiences*; and the proper, truly imaginative analysis of myths can go a long way in intuiting and reconstructing these

experiences. The second concerns the question of 'Greek exceptionalism'. Without going into details, it should be noted that mythology always played a major role here. Greek mythology was always recognised as having an enchanting quality, quite different from the other indo-European mythologies. Even further, what was particularly unique was the combination of a highly literate and historical society which nevertheless still maintained a strong belief in the factual foundations of the events told in myths; in the words of Peter Green, there was 'a deep-rooted and well-nigh universal faith in the *actuality* of mythic narrative. These things, the Greeks were convinced, really *happened*' (Green 1997: xi; emphasis in original).

The myth of the Golden Age

I start my overview from one of the most influential and best known myths, characteristic especially of Greek mythology, told by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*, but also present in Hindu and Old Norse mythology, and in different forms elsewhere in the world, especially if we consider the parallels with the Garden of Eden. While in our age such an idea is a matter of derision in intellectual circles, such an important figure for modern socialism and positivism like Saint-Simon, thus a 'founding father' of two main sources of modernist dogmatism, claimed to have lifted the golden age from the past into the future, generating a powerful combination of secularized Jewish and Joachimite eschatology and Greek mythology. The question is the possible experiential content of the myth.

It is considerable importance that archaeological discoveries confirmed Hesiod's periodisation, in two senses. First, the four metals singled out for attention are actually the only four metals that indeed are available in a pure state, mostly from meteoric sources, and were actually used since well over 10.000 years ago. Second, Hesiod's last two ages are actually correspond to two periods recognized by archaeologists, the Bronze Age (c.3300-1200 BC), and the Iron Age (c.1200-500 BC), and even Hesiod's 'Age of the Heroes' fits in perfectly with the cataclysmic events usually identified with the Trojan War, or the age of heroes like Achilles and Agamemnon. Still, and in contrast, terms like golden age or silver age are thought to be purely metaphorical (Griffiths 1956; Koenen 1994).

Still, it seems worthy to pose the question whether we could give any experiential meaning to the symbols 'golden age' and 'silver age'. The issue is not whether 'the' Golden Age has once existed; but whether some people, somewhere in prehistory, well before the melting of bronze, had experienced their own age, or rather the age that had just passed, as a kind of 'golden age'. In this sense the answer is certainly affirmative, with Classical Athens and Renaissance Florence serving as almost trivial examples. So the question is simple: could we find a place and time in the Neolithic that for some reason could be meaningfully identified as the 'garden of Eden' in the Golden Age – meaningfully in the sense of having a still relevant message for us, both in the sense of how it came into existence, and due to what kind of reasons did it collapse?

As a path that looks promising but yet hardly tried before, let me suggest a look into the 'silver age'.

Silver age

The comparative lack of attention to the question of the 'silver age' is certainly due to the combination that it is both less attractive than the 'golden age' and less easy to identify historically than the bronze and iron ages. Yet, perhaps it holds the key to all. In order to

understand what the 'Silver age' could have meant to the Greeks, we need to start with the meaning of the word 'silver' in Greek, with all its potential connotations.

The Greek word for silver is *argouron*, closely linked to Latin *argentum*, from which modern terms like French 'argent' or Italian 'argento' are derived. Its etymological root is **arg*, which means white or whitish, with the specific sense of shining. Thus, at the level of symbolic meaning, the 'golden' and 'silver' ages are indeed closely connected, rendering the same sense of shining brightness, the difference being that the brilliance of gold is much more attractive, overwhelming, and enchanting.[iv]

Looking further into etymology and semantics, there are other Greek words derived from the same root **arg*, including *argilla* 'underground dwelling', and most importantly *argilos*, which means 'potter's earth' or 'white clay'. The similarity between the two materials, so different according to our science, is that they indeed look quite similar, especially under the shining Mediterranean sun, where they were lying in some abundance near the coastline, not an experience we can easily have in the contemporary world, despoiled of free mineral resources. But 'white clay' has further relevant characteristics: it is volcanic, providing a particularly fertile soil; it was used for healing, recognized in contemporary 'alternative medicine'; and, just as importantly, it is the primary material for pottery. Taken together, this implies that 'white clay' as a material does have particular affinity with a very important historical-archaeological period: the so-called Ceramic Neolithic, or a second stage in the rise of agriculture, associated with the discovery of pottery. This suggests the idea that the 'silver age' might have some connection to this particular historical period.

I'll pursue this suggestion in two directions. The first is connected to the primary use of pottery, which was the keep, store and preserve material. In his classic work on the origin of the city Lewis Mumford has suggested that this function was central in that period of human history, even closely connected to the both real and symbolic function of the city as a reserve and retreat, and that it was closely connected to the female side, and in particular the womb as a gestating place (Mumford 1961). As an idea one could even add that one of the most perplexing characteristics of the silver age according to Hesiod is that the children grow for a century but die young, fits perfectly with such an emphasis on preservation, conservation, gestation, and the maternal womb. If the silver age has to do not simply with agriculture, but in particular with ceramics and storing, this would assume a strong shift of emphasis to the female side in this period – a shift which is indeed documented in the long-standing discussion about the Great Goddess, focusing on Anatolia. Seen from this Mumfordian perspective, the early city had no political, centralizing or colonizing role, but functioned primarily as a place of *preservation*: preserving the produce, in large terracotta container jars (*pithoi*), the primary function of pottery in the period, and which was used for exchange in the early period in a purely ceremonial way, according to the logic of gift exchange and not commerce; and a place of defense from the incursion of predatory nomads.

The second road follows indications provided by linguistics. Words, especially names – of persons and places – that seem to be derived from the same root *argos* are quite prominent in Ancient Greece and – especially in light of recent research – seem to centre on a particular area. Argos, first of all, is a name of several Greek heroes, associated with a distant mythological time of early Hellenic history, before the times of the Trojan War, in particular the myth of the Argonauts, whose very name contains the root, derived from the name of their ship, Argo. Argos was also the name of a region and a city in the Peloponnesus, while Argoura or Argissa was a city in Thessaly. Argos in the Argolide was considered as one of the oldest and most prestigious cities in Greece, a long-standing rival to Athens, located close to Mycene and Tyrins, the two most important cities of the Mycenean civilization. Even further, the name 'Argive' was

associated with the Greeks, especially in the *Iliade*, and in particular connected to Achilles and his men. Can these pieces of information be connected together, and linked to the 'silver age'?

Archaeology is not a magical key that opens every door, but is the eye of the needle, taking up a metaphor from Christian Meier (1996: 28), through which everything must pass, so we must again turn to archaeological evidence. At a first sight it gives a purely negative result, as the city of Argos turns out to have been founded only in the 8th century – though its Acropolis, the Larissa, contains earlier ruins that are difficult to date (Drews 1979). However, Argissa is in Thessaly, and the term 'Argive', referring both to inhabitants of a region in Thessaly, or in general to the Greeks, open up a question which goes well beyond the question of the 'silver age', and which poses the question of the role played by Thessaly in early history, and where, combining new archaeological evidence with new work by mythologists and philologists, we can gain new insights concerning the earliest history of European culture.

Thessaly, Pelasgiotis, Hestiaiotis

Since the Archaic period, meaning Homer and Hesiod, or the period of revival after the 'Dark Age' that followed the Trojan War, Thessaly was considered as remote and backward. Pausanias does not even have a section on Thessaly. Yet, a combination of literary, mythological, philological and archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates that Thessaly was the birthplace of not just Greek but European culture; so much so that we must revisit the meaning of these very words.[v]

This becomes evident by a review of broad geographic and cultural denominations. Apart from the term 'Argive', applied both to the Greeks in general and to a specific region in Thessaly, there is a series of important names sharing this characteristic (Drews 1979). There is Hellas, a term most widely used for Greece in Antiquity as in the present, and which denoted a small region in Southern Thessaly, North of the Malia Bay. There is the adjective 'Achaean', used in particular for a part of Phthiotis, but also a most widely used expression for the Greeks in general, present in the form of Ahhiyawa in c.1500 BC inscriptions in Hattusas, capital of the Hittite Empire (Boghazköy in Turkey). And there is the term Danaus, used for the Greeks in Latin, especially in the sense of Argives, again denoting an area of Thessaly. Apart from these four general expressions, there are two further place-names, identifying major regions in Thessaly that have particularly evident connotations with the oldest layers of Greek history, as surviving in myths and legends: Hestiaiotis and Pelasgiotis.[vi] Hestia is goddess of the hearth, one of the most basic and oldest Greek deities, and one that nevertheless shows some uncomfortable characteristics: it is the same as Latin Vestia, so ties particularly closely together the oldest layers of both Greek and Latin mythology, though not present in other indo-European myths, so indicating some common origins, beyond the later borrowing of Greek deities in Rome; and, though first offspring of Rhea and Cronos (Hesiod, *Theogony* 453-7), thus oldest sister of Demeter, Hera, Hades and Zeus, she is much less prominent than her siblings. Still, a region called Hestiaiotis must carry connotations of great antiquity already for the ancient Greeks; and indeed, it is in this region, near the ancient city of Trikka, that archaeologists discovered in Theopetra cave a continuity between Mesolithic and Neolithic occupation, leading some even to propose this finding as proof for the internal development of agriculture in Greece, in opposition to its spread by migrant colonists from Anatolia, with the possible mediation of Cyprus. While this certainly seems exaggerated, the importance of this finding is confirmed by recent philological research which argues that Thessaly was the home-place of another most important and highly enigmatic Greek deity, Asclepius, who later played

such an important role both in Athens and for Socrates, and connects his cult to an underground cave sanctuary, comparable to the Boeotian cult of Trophonius (Aston 2004). Given that one of the two cities in Thessaly with which Asclepius is associated is Trikka, one might conjecture that the sanctuary of Asclepius in Trikka, not found so far, might be connected to the Theopetra cave.

The other Thessalian city named as home of Asclepius is Lakereia, in Pelasgiotis. The term denotes the land of the Pelasgians, and classical sources, including Homer, Hesiod, Herorotus, Thucydides and a series of poets all agree that the Pelasgians were the original inhabitants of Hellas, before the Greeks. Needless to say, modern criticism dealt severely with such 'childish tales', playing the usual game of doubting and doubling, destroying such beliefs or dissolving them into infinity. Thus, for Eduard Meyer, the term can only be applied to the ancient inhabitants of Pelasgiotis; while Wilamowitz, as usual, was even more radical, and in a gesture so typical of 19th century scholarship, known for us from Thomas Mann, he simply forbid the use of the name. Modern scholarship simply claims that the name could mean any and all inhabitants before the rise of classical Greek culture, thus it again became meaningless.

However, using recent archaeological evidence, and with a proper integration of mythological, linguistic and literary information, we can do better than that. This must start from the most important archaeological finding: the floodplains of Thessaly, or Pelasgiotis, was indeed the region where agriculture started in Europe, so it was not just the birthplace of Greece, but of European Neolithic culture (Perlès 2001); this culture was not simply brought over from the Near East, but has particular affinities with the Central and Southern regions of Anatolia; and this culture arrived in Thessaly not through the seemingly simpler road, the Bosporus and Dardanelle straits, and the South-Eastern Balkans, rather through an 'island hopping' method, navigating across the Northern Aegean, and spreading from Thessaly to other regions in Greece, in particular the Argolide in the Peloponnesus and Knossos in Crete, and then to Italy, through Puglia. In my reading this particular modality of arrival highly conditioned the culture to which it gave birth, in particular its long-standing concern with harmony, beauty and grace.

Lakereia was never a major town, but neighbouring Larissa was the historical capital of Pelasgiotis, and still today, bearing the same name, is capital of the region. This name has always exerted a fascination, both concerning its meaning – clearly pre-Greek, and by some feat of imagination translated as 'island-home', using the fact that the Etruscan-Roman deities of the home are called the 'Lares', and that there are islands called 'Issa', a term recalling the old Celtic word for island, 'isla'; and its namesakes – as around the Eastern Mediterranean there are no less than seventeen Archaic cities called by that name, ranging from Greece (where only in Thessaly there are two others, including Larissa Kremasta in the region called Hellas) through Italy (especially the so-called 'Pelasgian' part of central Italy, being for e.g. an old name for the town Sutri, considered by some as the Southern-most Etruscan town) and Ionia, up to Cappadocia and Northern Syria (Clinton 1834).[vii] But city names even around the capital of Pelasgiotis are most intriguing, with Argissa lying just ten km-s West, Chalkai and Mopsion lying just 15-25 km-s South and North,[viii] while other significant town names include Armenion (a city with remains of huge polygonal walls, recalling both Armenia and the rivers Armine in Tuscany and Lazio), Gyrton (see Gortyn in Crete, also called Larissa earlier), Skotoussa, or Pharsalus.

The centrality of Thessaly becomes evident even if we simply take seriously fundamental aspects of Greek mythology and tradition. The Olympian gods are seated in mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece, in Thessaly, just North of Pelasgiotis; a bit further North-West is Pieria, seat of the Muses; while Skotoussa is the town from

which the priestesses of Dodona, the oldest Greek sanctuary originate. The Argonauts embarked their ship, the Argo, in Pagasai, the port closest to the capital Iolkos, the only Mycenean palace found in Thessaly; and recent research also warmed up the hypothesis that Thessaly played a central role in the expedition which gave rise to the event associated with the Trojan War (Drews 1979).

The connection between old legends linked to the Pelasgians and contemporary archaeological research, however, is not restricted to Thessaly, and definitely refutes the theses of Wilamowitz (arche-rival of Nietzsche) and Eduard Meyer (against whom Max Weber wrote one of his most important methodological essays). Since Homeric times, the Pelasgians were primarily associated with three geographical locations: Thessaly, the Argolide in the Peloponnesus, and Knossos in Crete. Archaeological research confirmed that these were exactly the three places where Neolithic culture originates in Greece, and in Europe: the plain around Larissa; the area around the Franchthi cave in the Argolide (Jacobsen 1981); and Knossos. There could be no better confirmation of the old tradition, against the excesses of the critical revisionism.

With these considerations on the historical reality of a 'silver age' we can return with new vigour to the question of the reality of the golden age.

The Golden Age

If the silver age can be connected to a stage in the rise of Neolithic culture, related to the shift of the 'Neolithic package' to Greece, then the experience of having lived in a past 'golden age' must be connected to the region from which agriculture shifted to Greece. Here again recent archaeological research unearthed fundamental and quite stunningly new evidence, which renders imperative a quite radical change of perspective in understanding the sources of our own culture: a shift of emphasis from Egypt, Mesopotamia and Palestine to South-Eastern Anatolia. I have in mind in particular the discoveries in South-Eastern Turkey, close to the Syrian border (Çayönü, Nevali Çori, and especially Göbekli Tepe, near Urfa and Harran, with Biblical associations, also near Mt Nimrod); in the Konya plain, just south of Cappadocia (Çatalhöyük, near Hasan Dag, a volcano); and in Malatya, close to the Iraqi border (Arslantepe, Hittite Meliddu, Greek Melitene).

Göbekli Tepe

This archaeological site was discovered in 1994, and is dated to the earliest Neolithic period, called PPNA (Pre-Pottery Neolithic A), with its use dated between 9500 and 8000 BC. Together with the discovery of the Chauvet cave, also in 1994, where cave paintings of stunning grace and beauty were found and dated to 30.000 to 26.000 BC, an antiquity previously considered unthinkable, it represents the most important archeological discoveries of the last decades. Its location is of particular historical significance, given both its classical, religious and mythological associations, and aspects that were only rendered evident in the modern age. As it is about 20 km-s from the historical city of Urfa (called Edessa in the Hellenistic period), and is about 60 km-s from the Biblical city of Harran, it is a candidate for being the place of origin of Abraham. But it is also only about 20 miles from the Karacadag Mountain, on the slopes of which both einkorn and emmer, the two wild plants from which wheat is derived, were domesticated (Heun *et al*, 1997), and just a 60 miles away from Çayönü, where the wild pig was first domesticated.

Practically everything we know about the site radically alters our understanding of prehistory, even though still only about 5% of the area is excavated, and a proper

completion of work might take another half a century or so (Schmidt 2000a, 2000b; Peters and Schmidt 2004). The site contains huge stone temples, of which four has so far been excavated. Such enormous megalithic constructs, which stone statues and building blocks occasionally weighting 50 tons, previously were thought impossible to have been built at that early stage, before the rise of agriculture and sedentary life. Apart from sheer size, the quality and character of the artwork is also stunning: the stones, in particular the enormous T-shaped pillars – which average 3.5 to 5 meters, but some are as high as 7 meters – are carved with beautiful and graceful animals, with no picture showing signs of violence, whether in the sense of sacrifice or hunting. Human representation is practically absent.

The site simply has no parallels – the earliest occupation of Jericho is from the same period, but does not contain anything of significant artistic merit; nearby sites, like Nevali Çori and Çayönü are later and less significant; while Çatalhöyük is 2000 years younger. In spite of its huge significance, knowledge about the site is still limited, and even highly rated experts fail to recognize its significance and the need to change their own frame of reference. This highlighted by a Harvard professor of archaeology who suspects slave work behind the monuments – as if slavery in Egypt (as it has been reconstructed from late and probably corrupt evidence) were the necessary measuring rod for any megalithic construction, and as if slavery as a practice made sense for a not yet settled hunter gatherer population.[ix] The excavator, Klaus Schmidt ventures two tentative hypotheses about the site. The first is a paradigmatic statement, concerned with the temporal ordering between Temple and city, or between ritual and utilitarian activities. In both counts, we must radically revise our entire perspective: the temple came before the city; and rituals have chronological and logical priority over technological advance.

The second question is about trying to make sense why and how such a genuinely revolutionary change took place at that place and time. Even here, Schmidt makes a series of most interesting suggestions, arguing that the rise of agriculture was due to a much higher degree of interchange and mobility than it was previously thought. The Temple was not simply a site of worship for people living nearby, but a site of pilgrimage. This helped to bring people together, demonstrating – as evidenced from the site – a much higher degree of social organization. Thus, the rise of the 'Neolithic package', which includes, beyond agriculture as a technology, elements of social, political and cultural organization, immediately took place at a large as opposed to a small, village scale; or, using contemporary terminology, it was immediately a kind of 'global' development.

This change was not due to technological improvements and the rise of agriculture, rather sparked by migration and exchange, for e.g. the exchange of obsidian, another material of volcanic origins and great use. As material for tools, and also objects for ceremonial use, obsidian is much better than flint, and even most metal, but is much rarer, as it does not solely require volcanic deposits, but a very special kind of cooling down. In the entire Aegean area only two islands, Melos and Giali (a very small island near Cos) had obsidian, while in the entire area of Western Europe obsidian was only localized in four volcanic complexes in Italy, in the islands of Lipari, Palmarola, Pantelleria, and Sardinia (Bigazzi, Oddone and Radi 2005). A central implication of the discovery of maritime trade in obsidian, well before the 'agricultural revolution', is that navigation must have been quite advanced by that stage, and it must have had some knowledge about magnetism, as otherwise orientation on the open sea would have been impossible. Anatolia, however, is literally littered with obsidian sources, around Ephesus, Galatea, Cappadocia, and in particular the lake Van and the Transcaucasian areas. Thus, obsidian trade might have been an important factor contributing to the setting up of the

Göbekli Tepe pilgrimage sanctuary.

The innovative character of Schmidt's thinking, and its move beyond the limits of neo-Kantian thought, can be illustrated by anthropologically based concepts like liminality. The regions between Turkey, Syria and Iraq, in the present just like in the past, were in a typically liminal position. The unique character of Göbekli Tepe was therefore not due to a kind of Hobbesian situation, necessitating the setting up of an 'original contract', rather to a spark produced by an encounter between migrants from quite different places of the world – Egypt, Palestine and Syria from the South; India, Iran and Mesopotamia from the East, the Caucasus and inland Asia and Siberia from the North, and Anatolia and South-Eastern Europe from the West. The concept only renders even more tightly coherent the ideas expressed by Schmidt, as pilgrimage was one of the main areas studied by the Turners (Turner and Turner 1978).

Just as important are the possible reasons for pilgrimage and the character of the religious ceremonies performed. According to Schmidt, the sanctuary – inside of which no trace of domesticated grain or animal bones was found – was not related to the rise of agriculture, rather was a celebration of the old, hunter-gatherer life-style, a mode of existence in harmony with nature, being part of a shamanistic type of religion. Paradoxically, it was evidently out of this spirit of encounter and celebration that the new, Neolithic civilization was born in Southern Anatolia – in radical contrast to the kind of developments that took place around Jericho and the neighboring areas. The quality of artwork is extremely high, with most of it representing animals, in particular snakes (28%), foxes (15%), boars (9%) and cranes (6%).[x]

The last question concerns the end of the Temple complex. The facts are again stunning: after having been in use for about one and a half millennia, the site was suddenly abandoned and covered with about 400-500 cubic meters of land. Some of the carved stones show traces of smashing, but otherwise there was no sign of violence. Those who used the site for a very long time were closing it down purposefully, burying it forever, with an enormous expenditure of energy; and we can again only speculate at the reasons. The suggestion is that by that time the erosion generated by extensive agriculture and the resulting over-population was visible: the idyllic countryside, so well visible from the slightly elevated site of Göbekli Tepe, was increasingly eroded and gradually replaced by the arid landscape that still today dominates the area – the agricultural equivalent of the desolate industrial decay created in places like Manchester and Liverpool, or Chicago and Detroit. Göbekli Tepe therefore not only instructs us about the origins of civilization – of *our* civilization – but also about the crisis any civilization faces if it fails to respect certain limits.

Çatalhöyük

This site, situated in South-Central Turkey separated from Göbekli Tepe by the Taurus Mountains, also called as the Silver Mountains, was used between 7500 and 5700 BC (Hodder 2005; Mellaart 1967), so occupation started about half a millennia after the mound of Göbekli Tepe was covered; and while it was not a direct heir, the continuities are evident. Its significance has also been immediately recognized, after its discovery in 1961: previously the rise of Neolithic culture was considered as possible only in the Fertile Crescent area at such an early date (Matthews 2003: 36). The site also played a major role in spreading the Neolithic to Europe, which previously was thought to have come directly from the Fertile Crescent. Research in and knowledge about the site was hampered by the fact that the Turkish authorities charged the original excavator with improper conduct related to the commerce of objects of arts, due to which the site was closed for excavations from 1965 until 1993.

The prolonged continuity of the site – though with a break and displacement from the larger to the smaller mound around 6000 BC – is particularly interesting, given that it was thus unaffected with the 'crisis of the Neolithic' around 7000 BC, an event that might have been foreseen by those who closed down the great sanctuary complex of Göbekli Tepe about a millennia earlier. Around 7000 BC all the other megalithic monuments were abandoned in the area, and socio-economic life was transformed. Due to the negative effects on the environment, provoked by early agriculture, animal husbandry gained importance, in contrast to land cultivation; there was even a marked change in religion (Frangipane 2004: 22), coinciding with the start of economic specialization. The most important change, however, was the appearance of pottery, connected to the emergence of large storage places, and the new emphasis on hoarding food.

While Çatalhöyük is often considered as the 'first city', it is rather a large village, and a very particular kind: it has no *plaza* and no streets, with individual houses built very close to each other, yet each having their own walls, with a very small gap between them, which was used not for communication but for storing garbage, as the houses were accessed from above. It had therefore a beehive like character, corresponding to a highly communitarian social structure, without signs of centralization or social stratification.

Just like Göbekli Tepe, Çatalhöyük was a ceremonial and not economic centre. While the houses were lived in, by individual households, they also served ceremonial functions: there were no specific cultic buildings, rather each house had its own room used for ceremonial purposes, which even more strikingly was a cemetery as well, as the dead were buried under the floor of the houses. As some of the agricultural fields cultivated by the inhabitants were quite distant, the site could not have been built due to economic convenience; even more perplexingly, obsidian was obtained not from the region of the Hasan Dag volcano, visible from the site and arguably reproduced, alongside a kind of map of the village, in a famous wall painting, rather from more distant Southern Cappadocia.

The most important information about the rituals performed there is negative: there was no sign of sacrifice, human or animal, and no altar was found, so material communication of the divine was restricted to the offering of gifts. The character of the wall-painting suggests that, just as in Göbekli Tepe, we might have to do with a shamanistic type of religiosity. Positively, the most amazing aspect of the site is the quantity and quality of works of art: houses were regularly filled with decorations, wall paintings, or *ex voto* objects, often attached to the walls. Scenes of mundane life were not represented: the most preferred theme was rather the depiction of animals, in particular bulls, goats and stags, but especially leopards (quite possibly snow leopards), which constitute at least 40% of the total (Russell and Meece 2005: 211). The first excavator, Sir James Mellaart found a large quantity of female figurines, which he identified with the Great Goddess, the central Anatolian deity of later times, so concluded that the site shows evidence of matriarchy. The recent excavator, Ian Hodder questions this idea, ruling out a matriarchic society, and arguing that social relations were rather equalitarian, with no hierarchical distinction.

Still, the particular significance of the female component is evident from the site, and its character can be best seen from a particularly stunning work of art: a stone plaque, depicting in bold relief – according to Mellaart – the first *hieros gamos*. It contains two scenes: on the left side a gracefully depicted man and woman are embracing each other, alluding not directly to sexual union but to close intimacy; while the right hand signs shows a mother embracing a child, alluding to the fruit of the union, and recalling the Italian Renaissance Madonna with child motive.

A last point to be mentioned concerns the closeness between Çatalhöyük and Cappadocia, particularly relevant in the context of the extremely peculiar, beehive like structure of the houses in Çatalhöyük. Apart from being the site of some of the oldest Christian churches, traced as far back as the 2nd century AD, and certainly using more ancient sanctuaries, Cappadocia is also site of the most unique cave-cut civilization (*civiltà rupestre*) of the world, highlighted by enormous subterranean structures that can be considered as genuine cities. The two greatest of these, around Derinkuyu and Kaymakli, go as far a hundred meters below ground level, and could have hosted as much as 20.000 people at a time each. Concerning the time and the purpose of their construction, even experts are completely at a loss, and can only point out that while similar structures exist elsewhere, most notably in the Near East (Petra in Syria, and in Israel), in Northern Africa (in Libya and in Tunis), in Malta, and most notably in Italy (Matera and the catacombs in Rome), such a concentration as found in Cappadocia is unique in the world (Bertucci 1995; see also Elford 1992).

In this context it is important to add some linguistic and philological evidence to the archaeological record. First, Cappadocia is widely identified as being central for the domestication of the horse. Representations of horses can be traced back to 2000 BC (Buck 1926: 13); a horse-training manual, attributed to a certain Kikkuli, survived in the Hittite archives; and the term Cappadocia itself has been interpreted, already in classical times, as 'land of the beautiful horses'. Second, in another attempt to explain the name, this was approached to Biblical Kaphtorim, a term also often applied to Crete, called Kephtiu in Egypt (Wainwright 1956). Apart from linking Cappadocia and Creta in this way, Kaphtorim has the further significance of being close to Latin *capisterium* 'wooden chest', connected both to German *Käfter* 'chamber, booth', and Hungarian *kaptár* 'beehive'. The Hungarian word has no Finno-Ugric etymology, and even its Latin and German tracing is problematic; however, in light of new linguistic research which challenges the dominance of the Finno-Ugric theory and increasingly brings Hungarian closer to Turkish and other ancient Anatolian languages, the links to Anatolia and the idea of a 'beehive', so closely describing some housing structures at Çatalhöyük, seem to confirm the previous hypothesis – all the more so as the Hungarian words both for honey (*méz*) and bee (*méh*) are close to related Greek and Indo-European terms; and as the Hungarian word for the womb (*méh*) is identical with the word for bee, which – due to the closeness recognized by beehive structures and the womb – only increases the attractiveness of this research path. Apart from Anatolia, beehive like structures are widespread in Greece, especially related to major Neolithic sites like Orchomenos (Gla), associated with the Graces, and Sesklo, the single most important Neolithic site in Thessaly, closely recalling the location and orientation of Göbekli Tepe; but also with one of the Skellig Islands in Kerry, Ireland, considered since time immemorial as a 'womb' in the sense of a 'king-making place'.

Arslantepe

The third site giving highly significant new insights about prehistory that is bound to change significantly the view concerning our own origins is Arslantepe in Malatya, the remote and relatively backward Southeastern corner of Turkey, near the Iraqi border. It is a hundred kilometers north of Göbekli Tepe, and is close to the Hill of Nimrod (Nemrut) – another place with significant archaic and Biblical connotations. This site was also affected by the general 'curse' on the excavation of Anatolian sites, and the dissemination of information about them: here excavations were started in the 1930s by a

French team, but had no luck (Frangipane 2004:15). In 1961 a group of Italian scholars, the hittologist Piero Meriggi and the archaeologist Salvatore M. Puglisi continued the work; however, as work for a long time failed to show up significant results, it was left to then younger scholar Alba Palmieri. Palmieri was evidently a scholar of great determination and independence of mind, free from the dominant ideological and political currents of the times, having even a charismatic personality, and managed to unearth breakthrough findings, but died in the middle of the work (Frangipane 1993). Its continuation was entrusted to her student, Marcella Frangipane, who started to publish the results in the 1990s, but mostly in Italian, or in ways that were difficult to access, with proper English publication of the findings only underway in recent years.

A proper appreciation of the locality again requires familiarity with the concept liminality. Since millennia Malatya is a remote borderline region, falling in between classical empires as well as modern nation states, so was considered to be of marginal significance. However, in a non-imperial or non-nationalistic setting such a region might fulfill – and in the past it actually did fulfill – a liminal, mediating, relay or transmission role, for which Frangipane uses the evocative word *cerniera* (hinge) (Frangipane 1993: 31). The excavation led to a truly radical discovery: the origins of the state lay not in Southern Mesopotamia, near the Persian Bay, at the delta of the Euphrates, but in the North, in the Upper Euphrates, in the city which the Greeks and Romans called Melitene, which is present in Hittite documents by the name Meliddu, and whose region still today preserves in its name the same word in the form of Malatya; just as the contemporary Turkish city Sanliurfa still preserves the root 'Ur'. The recognition of such significance requires an at once theoretically informed and imaginative archaeological work, of which Pugliesi, Palmieri and Frangipane were pioneers, realizing that the problem of the origins of the state, considered as intractable by Burckhardt, was reopened with the help of this new method, archaeology – one only had to develop the proper approach to the findings, going beyond the dusty paradigms of evolutionism and positivism, and their focus on material culture (Puglisi, quoted in Frangipane 2004: 16), using rather the most important ingredients of significant research: imagination and love (Frangipane 2004: 16).

The enormous, 40 meters high mound of Arslantepe (Frangipane 1993: 31) shows signs of continuous use for at least five millennia, with the bottom of occupation still not reached. Apart from its socio-cultural location as a liminal place of transit, the physical characteristics of the area are also unique. This includes the lush, oasis-like landscape, still mostly preserved, in contrast to the serious depletion, due to millennial agricultural use, characterizing much of the Near East; the abundance of water, including both the source of at least three great rivers, the Tigris, Euphrates, and Ceyhan (historically Pyramos) rivers, with even the sources of the Halys (Turkish Kizilirmak, or Red River), one of the most important rivers of early history, being close.[xi] It is also abundant in springs, while the character of the landscape excludes the danger of floods (Frangipane 1993), and other natural resources, especially timber and metals.

Such a combination of natural and cultural factors gave rise to a highly developed civilization that flourished in the 5th and 4th millennia BC, showing unique characteristics, especially in the early stages of this period (Frangipane 1993, 1996, 2004). In terms of its agriculture, and in contrast to Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, it was based on gardening, and not irrigation. In terms of social structure, it showed no signs of social stratification, yet it managed to organize specialized work. The most stunning originality, however, lay in the combination of socio-economic organization, material culture and art, visible in particular in the high importance attributed to storage places. Such places are not only prominent in both houses and later palaces, but were extensively decorated with high quality wall paintings as well, showing a marked preference for animals, but also representing women. While talking about a 'matriarchy' would again be misleading,

women clearly enjoyed a special esteem in this culture as well, which is well compatible with the importance attributed to huge and nicely shaped jars (*pithoi*), which allude both to graceful female shape and its aspect, emphasized so well by Mumford (1961), as a receptacle and reservoir. Research has shown that the enormous quantities of such *pithoi*, used for the storage and exchange of grain, but also oil and wine, found all around the Mediterranean, indicated not extensive commercial links, but a system of trade organized according to the principles of gift-giving. Purely utilitarian trade, involving solely money and pecuniary interest, then as well as now was sign of corruption and decay. In the Archaic period, this was only proliferated through the Phoenician merchants, themselves symptoms of decay, after the 'Trojan War', or the great cataclysm of 1200 BC.

Yet, as always, exactly this graceful and unique flourishing gave rise to a new type of culture, the Ubaid culture which, according to Frangipane, was the first global culture (Frangipane 1993: 73, 75; see also Matthews 2003: 102-8) – though such a denomination might be excessive, as Göbekli Tepe was already a 'global centre'. Two aspects of this culture are worth emphasizing. The first is the presence of a huge number of clay sealings, used for the closing of the jars, signs of the first centralized state bureaucracy (Frangipane 2004: 77-9). The second is connected to the rise of metallurgy, a phenomenon in which the primacy of Anatolia has always been recognized, and which implies a definite break with the Egypt-Mesopotamia centered chronology. Metals were used in the broad region before the rise of agriculture, for hunting and for ceremonial purposes, based on pure metals gained from meteorites, found on the surface, a practice dating back to the 8th millennia BC. The most important developments, centrally involving the Malatya region, however, took place in the 4th millennia BC, due to major experiments with fusion (alloy) (Frangipane 1993: 62). The objects thus produced, including even the melting of swords, first had ceremonial use, for e.g. in the traditional sword dance, of which traces have survived, in rituals performed in Hercegovina, up to the 1950s (see Wenzel 1962, 1967). Soon, however, forging became linked to the mass production of weapons with a military purpose, which gave rise to one of the 'most extraordinary developments' in human history, in the second part of the 4th millennia, the rise of the first state around 3500 BC, a development that paralleled the rise of the Uruk culture in Southern Mesopotamia (Frangipane 1993: 59-60, 2004: 77-9; Matthews 2003: 108-26).

This was accompanied by fundamental changes at every aspect of culture, highlighted by the symbolic shift from the Temple complex to a Palace society. The wall decorations in the palace, even the representation of animals, came to be dominated by geometric designs (Frangipane 1993: 61-2), where a particular importance was placed on spirals.[xii] The shift in metal use from ceremonial to military gave rise to the first homogenization into a mass society, championed in particular in the South, where Mesopotamia arguably became site of the first global world system.[xiii]

This new cultural entity, emerging in the second half of the 4th millennium BC, represented a radical novelty, as it broke the harmony with nature, so carefully preserved and maintained in the previous garden culture (Frangipane 2004: 25). The direct outcome was striking florescence, socio-economic, political and cultural at the same time, visible in the first palace complex is general, but especially in what is considered as the most striking finding of all, a set of twenty-one high quality melted metal objects, nine swords and twelve spears, found in the same deposit, and dated 3300-3000 BC: the oldest known weapons in the world, and of striking artistic quality (in Frangipane 1993: 62, 65; 2004: 66-7). The dating is secure as the palace complex and the entire city was burnt down by migrants from the Transcaucasus area. For about a century only semi-nomadic settlements existed over the ruins of the palaces, while in 2900 BC an attempt was made to return the city to its former glory. The effort, however, was not successful as around

2700 BC another destruction took place, as a result of which the region lost its liminal or 'hinge' role, the links with Mesopotamia were broken, and Malatya became exclusively oriented toward the inner Anatolia region. Around 2500 BC a great work of fortification took place, including an acropolis surrounded by huge polygonal walls, but the city only had local importance, and in 1700 BC was integrated into the Hittite Empire as the province of Meliddu.

Given the limitations of space, it is only possible to give further indications about the research path that can be taken from here, from these supposed 'Golden' and 'Silver' Age developments, before the onset of Bronze Age massification and militarization, which also started in and radiated from Arslantepe, Malatya.

Melite/ Malta/ Miletus

The first path will be linguistic, and based on the strange persistence of the old name of the Arslantepe site. The name Meliddu in the past has been explained through the Hittite term for honey, *Melit* (Archi 2004: 173), a root also present in Greek terms like *meli* 'honey' or *melissa* 'bee'. Such an idea is dismissed in our days as merely popular etymology – but perhaps there is more to such an age-old tradition, and we have rather to do again with a case of 'hyper-criticism'.

At any rate, Meliddu/ Melitene/ Malatya is by no means the only place whose name can be traced to such a root. There is first of all Malta, in Greek Melite, showing striking analogies both in its historical and contemporary name. Malta is also the site of some of the most impressive megalithic structures, including both underground churches, in particular the Hal Saflieni hypogeum, cut ten meters below ground level and showing manifold similarities with Cappadocian structures, and the monumental outdoor temples, some of which have been traced back up to the fourth millennia BC, and were considered as the oldest megalithic structures before the discovery of Göbekli Tepe. But Melite was also the Greek name of an island in the Adriatic, still today called Mljet, near to two other islands with particularly significant names: Greek Issa (today Vis), and Greek Cercyra (today Korcula); the former contains the root present in the place-name Larissa, while the latter is practically identical with the old name of Corfu, the island in which one of the most significant Greek Mesolithic sites was located, near Sidari – a name again of particular significance for its association with metallurgy; an area which was also strongly involved in the Neolithic Greek colonization of Italy, which followed the same island-hopping road from Greece to Italy as from Anatolia to Greece, and which started from the island of Corfu, near Sidari, to Puglia.

Melite was also one of the four historical quarters of Athens, at the most important Southwestern part of the city, close to Phaleros, the old port of Athens, before the development of Piraeus in classical times; close to the Areopagos, the oldest sacral and political centre of the city; also to the 'Hill of the Nymphs', full of caves and springs;[xiv] and finally, it was the place from which the holy road to the Eleusis sanctuary started – the process going through the Melitan gate. An ancient city in Crete, quite close to Knossos, was also called Milatos, with a cave, close to the old city, giving a particularly stunning view of the bay below; while Miletus was one of the oldest and most famous cities in Ionia, among others home of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, thus giving birth to philosophy. The links between the two cities are ancient, with the Cretan founding the Ionian, according to legends; while the Ionian city is credited to the foundation of more than 100 colonies, thus being by far the most active center of Greek colonialization, also entertaining close links to Etruria. The Miletean aristocracy was called *aeinautai*, or the 'always navigators', understood as implying an involvement with

long term as opposed to short term navigation, thus distinguishing themselves from the mere cultivators (Talamo 2004); a distinction that probably goes back to ancient times. Finally, Meliteia is an old city in Thessaly, at the heart of Achaea Phthiotis, the homeland of Achilles.

Megalithic Europe

Only a few points will be indicated here, alluding to the way in which megalithic cultures, so significant for the prehistory of Europe, can be seen from a new light through recent discoveries in Anatolia. First of all, by realizing the close connection between navigation and agriculture, related to the 'island-hopping' manner in which the Neolithic package was transported from Anatolia to Pelasgiotis, and then to Puglia, we can better see how this same movement can also be connected to the similar island-hopping spread of the same culture through the Mediterranean, passing by Malta – a major stop-over for any sailing from the Eastern to Western Mediterranean – and then further, including the Balearic Islands, then Ireland and Britain, up to Denmark. Even further, megalithic culture, far from representing a fertility cult, rather recognized the problematic character of fertility and unlimited growth, its sudden spiraling out of all proportions, thus problematizing agriculture through its negative impact on the environment, already recognized with the destruction of the Göbekli Tepe sanctuary, and which arguably explains the enormous importance the spiral motive assumed from Çatalhöyük through Malta up to Newgrange and beyond.

Enormous stone structures clearly were built to last for eternity; and this might not have only to do with the cult of the dead, but also with an attempt to insert stability into a culture otherwise threatened with too rapid changes. Still in this same respect it is of further significance that the location of megalithic monuments and centers of metallurgy are quite distinctly separated. Metallurgy is about the transformation of matter, the dissolution of stones – symbols of solidity up to our own days, carried in the name Peter – thus represents the exact opposite of the central values and perspectives of megalithic culture. Thus, while megalithic cultures center around the Mediterranean, especially on the coastal areas, and then further along the Atlantic coast, up to Denmark, the main sites of metallurgy are inland areas, especially crossroads, focusing in particular on Anatolia, the Carpathian basin and the Germanic areas.

There is one thing I'd like to add, concerning the similarity of Anatolian and Mediterranean stone structures – the particularly close resemblance of some structures in Menorca, a Balearic island, the most significant of all Spanish megalithic sites, with the standing T-pillars of Göbekli Tepe.

The Relative Ease and Speed of Conversion to Christianity

This last point is nothing more than noticing a curiosity. It is well known that the conversion to Christianity was by no means equal in different regions of the wider Mediterranean and Europe. For the concerns of this paper it is interesting that Christianity spread much more quickly, and even the first missionary trips of Paul were concentrated, perhaps as a strange game of fate, in areas closely associated with the early Neolithic, and with megalithic culture; though *not* with Palestine. This starts with the city of Urfa, called Edessa at that time, and part of the kingdom of Commagene, which was the first political entity converted to Christianity, in 61 AD (Facella 2006). It continues with the case of Paul, from Tarsus (a port in Cilicia, the port closest to Cappadocia, and

also close to Çatalhöyük), who soon after his conversion went to Cyprus, where he met the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus, from Antioch in Galatea, whom he converted and whose name he took, and then went to his first missionary trip, in Galatia and Cappadocia. On his way to Rome Paul was shipwrecked in Melite, with Malta and Mljet still debating about the exact place, and both claim to have a particularly strong Christian presence ever since. Even further, it is well-known that the main megalithic areas, like France and Ireland, witnessed a particularly quick and thorough Christianisation, in opposition to the Germanic areas even though Ireland was not even part of the Roman Empire; a difference still preserved in the form of the Catholic-Protestant divide, which for Nietzsche was a Mediterranean vs. Nordic divide, and where the lines of the Mediterranean are evidently drawn along cultural, rather than purely geographic lines.

Conclusion

As a conclusion I would like to make two points: one very short and purely symbolic; and one longer and substantive, going to the heart of Archaic Mediterranean culture.

1984 vs. 1994

1984 has been a central symbol of modern culture since Orwell published his famous novel, relevant even for political anthropology (Boland 2008); a symbol that in the past decade was transported from totalitarian rule to postmodern constructionism, through reality TV; much as the centre of social and political power shifted, with kind help from the media, from Foucault's Panopticon to a similar kind of circular structure: the circus. The year 1994, on the other hand, could be taken as of great symbolic value for Archaic civilization, and the interest it represents for us, as the two great discoveries, the Chauvet cave and the Göbekli Tepe Temple complex should alter our perception of our own prehistory in a radical manner.

The second and last point of this paper will give some indication about the direction which this could take, by taking up an idea from major figures in German and Hungarian culture: Goethe and Kerényi, concerning the Archaic Aegean feast.

Goethe, Kerényi and the Aegean Feast

Kerényi's essay on the Aegean feast is devoted exclusively to a scene in the second part of Goethe's *Faust* (Kerényi 1995). According to the logic of 'normal' science, nothing could be more irrelevant for the gaining of knowledge: what can be learned by reading in 2009 a commentary written in the 1940s by a mythologist about a poetic work composed around 1800? The essay, however, is decisively not a work of 'normal' science. It rather considers the scene as depicting a genuine *vision* Goethe had when working on completing *Faust*. Due to this scene, and through Goethe as a kind of medium, we can re-evoke the experiences that animate ancient mythology (Ibid.: 7).

The stakes are set high and Kerényi starts to substantiate his claim by contrasting the final poetic composition with the original plan. The differences are radical. In the second act of the Part Two of *Faust* Goethe planned to include a 'classical Witch's Sabbath' (*Walpurgisnacht*, the night before 1 May). The scene actually composed, however, turned out to be completely different. Goethe characterised his own mode of composing as extremely chaotic, ruled by the unpredictable, and was genuinely surprised about the outcome of his own work (Ibid.: 7-8, 11). He planned to do something as a heroic, even Titanic kudos, comparable to the words and spirit of his Prometheus fragment;[xv] while what he actually accomplished, instead, was something that was beyond not only his own

means, but simply beyond the knowable, as he was evidently 'helped by the unreachable, which is impersonal as above personality, something mythical and divine, which in one word we could call "fortune" ' (Ibid.: 11-2). 'Fortune' here does not mean ' "verbal felicity" ', rather the particular state of mind or spirit in which Goethe wrote this scene, and could be compared to the inspiration of the Muses (Ibid.: 12).

Following his life-long preoccupation, Goethe planned to capture the eruption of the forces from below. Instead, and as a surprise, both concerning his own creative process and within the narrative structure, he gave life to a scene in which mythology and feast became one, reflecting the fact that the archaic feast staged events told in archaic mythology (*Urmythologie*), which themselves were based on the original experience (*Urerlebnisse*) of participation in sacred events, manifestations of the divine (Ibid.: 17-8).

The time and especially place of the event is of particular significance, lying not just beyond Goethe's original plans, but well beyond what was accessible to knowledge in his times. The time is the night before the battle of Pharsalus, the decisive encounter between Caesar and Pompeius (9 August, 48 BC), an event of clear world-historical significance; and the Moon would shine, at its zenith, without moving an inch, through the entire scene. The place is Southern Pelasgiotis in Thessaly; so the epiphany-feast captured in Goethe's vision thus took place exactly at the birthplace of the European Neolithic, or the Archaic Mediterranean civilization.

The unfolding of the feast shows a number of characteristic features. The night is swirling (*strudelnd*) (*Faust*, l.323), and the threatening aspect of a moonlit night and the intrusion of the spirit-world is further underlined by sounds of an earthquake and a discussion by two philosophers, Anaxagoras and Thales, impersonating the principles of volcanic activity and the sea. Yet, the feast will be pleasant, benevolent, peaceful, without any threatening characteristic; a simple and most attractive procession of various divine and semi-divine figures.

This procession is presided by Neptune, or Poseidon, a Pelasgian deity, god of the waters,[xvi] and contains various divine figures associated with the sea. It is introduced by the sound of earthquakes, thus capturing one of the most important features of Aegean civilization, alluding back to Minoan times and beyond, the resilient celebration of life that manages to be reborn again, out of its ashes, despite recurrent destructions brought about by volcanic activities and earthquakes. While the list of participants in this gigantic epiphany-procession is mostly defined by Greek mythology, there are significant differences, and these start with the protagonist of the feast. The planned descent into the Underworld, in order to capture Helen, became transmogrified in Goethe's vision into the 'wedding' (or the 'real'-ization) of Homunculus. As the latter was concocted by Wagner, the former assistant of Faust, in a flask through alchemy, it could be considered as a 'chemical wedding'.[xvii]

Homunculus is a pure spirit without body whose main desire, tyrannically dominating his entire being, is to *become* human, to gain a body. This he cannot perform through purely human forces; thus emerges, out of the blue, the Aegean feast, with its strange divine figures, which alone can produce such a transformation. In order to become part of the procession Homunculus needs a 'horse' that can ride the sea. This will be Proteus, a mythological figure that can transform itself into any other being, but which at the same time does not possess any stability, assuming the form of a dolphin. The wedding procession consists of the sons and daughters of Poseidon, the Tritons and the Nereids, of whom the central figure here is Galatea.[xviii]

The proper, safe completion of the feast assured by the Cabeiri (*Kabeiroi*), (Kerényi 1995: 26, 37), pre-Greek dwarf deities associated with fertility and metallurgy; archaic masters of ceremonies. Up to Hellenistic times they performed vital functions,

through the initiation ceremonies that took place in their homes, the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace, and also through being protectors deities, especially of ships during a tempest; functions that were so important that they were simply called 'the great gods'. The Cabeiri are among the most enigmatic figures of Greek mythology. The sources say very little about their origin and character, even their names and numbers are highly debated, and concerning the character of their initiation rites even Pausanias refuses to go into details (Kerényi 1980: 165).

Kerényi's complimentary essay on the Cabeiri starts by evoking a key term of Greek culture that has been very little discussed or understood: *arrheton* (unsayable), or what cannot be uttered. This is the exact opposite of the so-called 'logocentrism', an ideological construct of scarce value; and also represents the exact literal opposite of *parrhesia*, brought to attention by the work of Foucault. The idea was that there were certain things that the Greeks simply considered as impossible to say or discuss; and the activities of the Cabeiri were prime – perhaps even the original – cases at hand.

A number of reasons can be brought in to explain such a call for silence. The Cabeiri were not Greek deities, though their origins are highly debated. They were associated with the Pelasgians, the legendary pre-Greek inhabitants of the Aegean, who were also considered by the Greeks as being close to the Tyrrhenians, or the Etruscans – an idea that for long was discredited, but that was reinforced by the discovery of the Lemnos stele, and its decoding as an archaic Etruscan text. But the term 'Cabeiri' is also considered as having Hebrew origins, meaning 'great gods'; while Kerényi argues that they are connected to the core of ancient Mediterranean religiosity (Ibid.: 166-7).

The enigmatic nature of the Cabeiri goes way beyond linguistic considerations, and concerns their activities, about which we only have vague allusions. These include a claim that in their rites the Great Goddess herself appears in an improper manner or form (Ibid.: 152); that they committed, or during their rites commit a horrible sin that goes against the very order of the cosmos, and which – given the nature of their religious role – must be of a sexual order, an act considered as in some way 'unnatural' (Ibid.: 162); and they are also accused of fratricide (Ibid.: 168).[xix] At any rate, the contrast between the rites of the Cabeiri and the Eleusinian rites, the most sacred Greek religious rite is crystal clear: the two most important taboos of these latter concern the prohibition of foreign speech – only Greek language can be used; and the precondition of ritual purity – people who committed bloody sins cannot participate in the festivities (Ibid.: 163).

While the exact content of the rite is not known, it had to be associated with marriage, and also with childbirth (Ibid.: 158-9). In their representations the Cabeiri appear as ithyphallic;[xx] in fact, they might be the origin of such representations in Greek culture, underlined by the fact that Hermes is also often considered as one of the Cabeiri, under the name Cadmilus. Apart from appearing with a huge phallus, the Cabeiri are also depicted as dwarfs (Ibid.: 163); while, in order to underline their 'spectral' character, they are also associated with the gigantic titans (Ibid.: 168). It is in this context the Kerényi brings in, following Goethe's scene, one of the most peculiar stories of Greek mythology, the battle between the pygmies and the cranes – a story that is often mentioned, but which nobody understood, even in classical times. The crane as a bird is closely similar to the stork (in fact, in artistic representations it is very difficult to separate the two); and the stork, in Greek *pelargos*, are animals associated with the Cabeiri (Ibid.: 169-73). *Pelargos* as a name is also connected to the Pelasgs; in fact, according to one long-standing view, the name 'Pelasg' is derived from the *pelargos*, as the Pelasgs migrate so much (the other etymology connects them to the open sea, in Greek *pelagos*). To close the circle, one of the most archaic places of Athens is called 'Pelasgikon' or the 'Pelargikon', a large empty square which had a building taboo – and already in classical times nobody remembered the exact reason for this taboo, nor for the name, not even

which of the two versions was original. At any rate, Athenians had recollection of having long-standing kinship ties with the Lemnians.

For the Greeks, wedding was always connected not only to birth, but also to death as well in order to symbolize the way death and rebirth go together, so the intrusion of the forces of the Underworld should not be surprising. It is also applicable with particular clarity to the case of Homunculus, who must literally burst and lose its spirit essence in order to become human. Still, in the case of this feast, as Kerényi makes it clear in the 1949 Postface to the essay, the outcome is not doubtful: '[i]n this "die and be born" again death has no significance any more. Only birth rules' (Ibid.: 45). The scene ends with a few lines, cited fully by Kerényi, which contains some of the most beautiful lines of world poetry; a full-scene hymn to the creative forces of life:

Hail to the sea! Hail to the waves!
Circled, now, by the sacred blaze!
Hail to water! Hail to fire!
Hail to the rarest sweet desire!

Hail, the gently flowing breeze!
Hail, hidden caverns of the seas!
Be honoured now, for evermore,
You, the Elemental four!
(Goethe, *Faust*, Part II, ll. 8480-7)

Heil dem Meere! Heil den Wogen!
Von dem heiligen Feuer umzogen!
Heil dem Wasser! Heil dem Feuer!
Heil dem seltnen Abenteuer!

Heil den mildgewogenen Lüften!
Heil geheimnisreichen Grüften!
Hochgefeiert seid allhier,
Element' ihr alle vier!

Notes

[i] On the beauty of nature, see Plato's *Timaeus*; on the gracefulness of animals, see Bateson (1972).

[ii] See Phaidon's 'critically acclaimed' 2008 book *30000 Years of Art*, which simply has sheer chronology as its organizing principle.

[iii] For details, see Bateson (1958, 1972); Horvath (1998, 2008); Horvath and Thomassen (2008); Radin (1972); Szakolczai (2000, 2003, 2007a, 2007c, 2009); Thomassen (2009); Turnbull (1968, 1973); Turner (1967, 1995); and van Gennep (1981).

[iv] Before contrasting the 'materialistic' and symbolic meanings of the metals and the supposed ages named after them, we should rather realize how extremely close these two meanings went in the past. Gold (and silver) were always primarily valued for their symbolic and ceremonial character (Belgiorno 1999). So the primary meaning of silver, at least according to the Greek testimony – which, as we'll soon see, indeed has special relevance – was that it is a shining material, though less so than gold.

[v] Here I must stress again that I talk as a social scientist, concerned with the roots of European identity and culture (see Szakolczai 2007a, 2007b), who is driven by an

interest, rooted in Plato and Aristotle, but also the main religious and spiritual traditions of mankind, in the nature of a good or decent society, a meaningful and emotionally rich human life. It is from this perspective that I'm plunging into the question of the prehistory of Europe, driven by the strong conviction that identity, and culture, is not a simple 'construct', but a complex combination of respect for tradition and historical roots, and bold innovativeness and creativity.

[vi] For details concerning Greek maps, see Talbert (2000).

[vii] See also Larsa, second of the four main cultic centers in the oldest such list in Mesopotamia (Matthews 2003: 115), with the three others (Ur, Uruk and Nippur) containing the root 'Ur'.

[viii] The prophetic contest between Mopsos and Chalkas is another famous mythological anecdote.

[ix] ' "First you need to get your economy working," he says. "Then you build the monuments that justify the complex social organization that requires".' Ofer Bar-Yosef, as quoted in 'Which Came First, Monumental Building Projects or Farming?', *Archaeo News*, 14 December 2008. As Bar-Yosef is a Professor of Archaeology, not Economics or Sociology, he can be excused for failing to realize that the 'Economy' cannot be reified as an entity that just exists out there, without historical correlates. It is well known in the history of economic ideas that the very idea of the 'economy', as distant from the *oikonomia* of Aristotle, can only be traced back as far as the seventeenth century.

[x] See Peters and Schmidt (2004: 185); the numbers represent percentages of T-pillar carvings. Cranes and storks are difficult to distinguish in most representations even in classical Greece, though the corresponding Greek terms were separate – *geranos* and *pelargos*.

[xi] Interestingly enough, the Biblical Garden of Eden had four rivers, two of which was the Euphrates and the Tigris. Furthermore, the four rivers of Malatya end up in three different seas.

[xii] These designs show a marked similarity both to Çatalhöyük and Malta.

[xiii] See Matthews (2003: 114-8), referring to the work of Guillermo Algaze, who used Wallerstein's world system theory. A citation by Matthews illustrates well the not simply untenable but corrupt character of the accompanying terminology: ' "Early Near Eastern villagers domesticated plants and animals. Uruk urban institutions domesticated humans" ' (Ibid.: 118).

[xiv] We should not here that Melissa and similar names (Melia, Amaltheia) were among the most important names given to water nymphs in Greek mythology.

[xv] About this, also following Kerényi as a guide, see Szakolczai (2007a).

[xvi] Poseidon was also god of the earthquakes, thus is a way combined the positions of the two philosophers; even more puzzlingly, god of the horses, and originally god of the forest Hamvas (2001). On his veneration as Poseidon of the 'approaches' (*prosbaterios*) and 'foundations' (*themelioukhos*) around the winter solstice, in the month named after him, in order to dig new ditches, or clear old ones, in preparation for the late Winter and Spring floods, and also for the protection of embankments and terrace walls, fundamental for Neolithic agriculture, see Robertson (1984: 3-4).

[xvii] About this, see Yates (1972).

[xviii] The centrality of this figure only goes back to Raphael's *Triumph of Galatea*, his most famous mythological painting.

[xix] At least two of the Cabeiri were supposed to be twins, and are also connected to the Dioscuri.

[xx] See a number of such vases in the Louvre.

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