

Preface by the volume editors

Ricardo Eichmann and Joris Peters

The archaeological excavations at Göbekli Tepe (English: »potbelly hill«; province of Şanlıurfa, southeast Türkiye; approx. 15 km northeast of Şanlıurfa) began in 1995 with the kind permission of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism as part of a cooperation between the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) and the Archaeological Museum of Şanlıurfa. From 1996, the Chair of Palaeoanatomy, Domestication Research and History of Veterinary Medicine at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich was also won as a cooperation partner. The special position of Göbekli Tepe in the cultural-historical structure of Southwest Asia was recognised very early on by Klaus Schmidt and excavations and analyses were funded by the German Archaeological Institute, the Chair of Palaeoanatomy and the German Research Foundation, for example as part of the DFG projects *The Prehistoric Settlement of the Urfa Region (South-east Turkey)* and *The Domestication of Ungulates and Early Animal Husbandry in the Upper Euphrates Basin*. The excavations yielded significant material sources and provided unexpected and novel insights into the history of the earliest Neolithic period, a time in which the shift from a foraging to a productive economy took place.

Since 2010, the site's study has been funded by the German Research Foundation as part of the project »The Prehistoric Societies of Upper Mesopotamia and their Subsistence« and investigations carried out on a broader interdisciplinary basis, whereby the archaeological component, like the excavations of the preceding years, was initially led by Klaus Schmidt (German Archaeological Institute, Orient Department; † 2014). The interdisciplinary collaboration initially focused on bioarchaeology, represented by Angela von den Driesch and Joris Peters (Ludwig-Maximilians-University München, Chair of Palaeoanatomy, Domestication Research and History of Veterinary Medicine), and from 2015, now under the direction of Ricardo Eichmann (German Archaeological Institute, Orient Department; until November 2020) and Lee Clare (German Archaeological Institute, Istanbul Department; since December 2020), also included geoarchaeology, represented by Brigitta Schütt (Free University of

Berlin, Institute of Geographical Sciences/Physical Geography). This interdisciplinary research approach has led to astonishing results, which will be published promptly in subsequent volumes of this series and have also had an impact on the work presented in this volume.

In the course of 20 years of research at Göbekli Tepe under the direction of Klaus Schmidt (1995 to 2014)¹, numerous structures built of quarry stone dating from the 10th and 9th millennia BC with monolithic sculptures and T-shaped pillars up to 5.50 metres high and decorated with reliefs were uncovered. The architectural ensembles are characterised by a cultural complexity not previously expected for early hunter-gatherers. The older, monumental »special buildings« in particular have made the site a central location for the discussion and reassessment of the Neolithisation process and the associated symbolism and world of ideas. In 2018, the site and its immediate surroundings were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Klaus Schmidt had already begun to produce a publication on the pillars of Göbekli Tepe decorated with reliefs. The international demand for more detailed, reliable information on the sensational reliefs was exceptionally high, which is why it seemed appropriate to open the series of publications on Göbekli Tepe with these objects. Klaus Schmidt was predestined to compile the volume, as he had had a strong interest in prehistoric iconography since his student days. As this mainly involved depictions of animals, he was in close contact with Joris Peters, who studied the osteological finds from Göbekli Tepe and other excavation sites in south-east Türkiye². Klaus Schmidt involved Oliver Dietrich, who was working on the project, in the preparations for the planned publication. On the recommendation of his mentor and professor, Bernhard Hänsel (Free University of Berlin, Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology), he joined the excavation team at the end of 2005 and from 2009 to 2021, he was employed as a research assistant, where his primary responsibilities included the development of a comprehensive catalog for the southwest mound excavation areas, conducting digitization

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The publication of Klaus Schmidt's book *Sie bauten die ersten Tempel – Das rätselhafte Heiligtum der Steinzeitjäger* (2006), which has been translated into several languages, and the successful exhibition *Vor 12.000 Jahren in Anatolien – Die ältesten Monumente der Menschheit* (2007) at the Landesmuseum Karlsruhe generated exceptionally strong media interest in the following years, which required an increasing commitment to public relations, an area of work that Oliver Dietrich helped to oversee. This area of work soon revealed that there was an extraordinarily high level of international professional interest in the publication of the picture-bearing pillars and stone sculptures. The fact that a number of research results had not yet been published favoured pseudo-scientific and conspiracy mythological interpretations, whose narratives remained fictitious from an archaeological point of view.

The foregoing explains why a systematic study and publication of the image-bearing pillars of Göbekli Tepe has been prioritised over other fundamental work, such as the reconstruction of the site formation processes (archaeostratigraphy) – an area of work that has not yet been completed at the time of publication of this volume. The stratigraphy considered here, which already takes into account emerging newer developments in recent stratigraphic research at the site, is based on project work carried out by Jens Notroff until 2020. In the present work, only the verifiable stratigraphic facts are taken into account for the relative chronological classification of the material group of the pillars. The latest archaeostratigraphic results on the site formation processes at Göbekli Tepe will be presented in the forthcoming volume on the archaeotectural research and building history of Göbekli Tepe.

During the excavation campaigns, a continuously updated, list-like description of the pillars as well as pillar fragments was compiled, many of which bore erased relief traces or had been reworked. The dynamics of the construction process demonstrated here matched the observation of numerous structural changes to the masonry of the buildings. In 2012/2013, Oliver Dietrich examined all of the pillars together with Klaus Schmidt and created overview sketches, some of which can be found on the panels presented here. However, many of the alterations are

only visible under certain lighting conditions and are therefore difficult to document; the 3D scans already made for the state exhibition in Karlsruhe were helpful here, as they can be manipulated to simulate different incidences of light. The current catalogue contains previously unknown reliefs/relief remains for 20 pillars.

It is not always possible to predict precisely how archaeological excavation projects will develop over the course of several years. Every excavation harbours surprises that lead to the adaptation and correction of research strategies. The Göbekli Tepe project was no exception: While Göbekli Tepe could still be presented as a unique Early Neolithic site after the excavation campaigns of 1995–1999 – »No comparable site is known so far in the Near East in terms of the topographical setting, its megalithic architecture, large scale stone sculptures and several other unusual items« (Schmidt 2001, 45) – this statement is no longer valid today. Research in subsequent years has gradually brought to light further sites (12 so far), which extend over a 200 km region in the province of Şanlıurfa and contain finds and features very similar to those at Göbekli Tepe. Several of these sites, located in the region known as *Taş Tepeler* (stone mounds), are now being explored through excavations offering comparative materials for future research.

Between 2011 and 2016, foundation pits were carefully excavated at Göbekli Tepe to anchor the supporting elements for protective structures, which were subsequently erected in 2017 and 2018. These excavations provided deep soundings that reached the natural bedrock, uncovering new stratigraphic findings and insights into the »site formation«, challenging the reconstruction of the site as a purely ritual place that was only visited sporadically at certain times. According to this, there were remains of small permanent circular buildings near the special buildings in the lowest layers, whose inventories, including grinding stones, suggest domestic activities. Fine stratigraphic and building research by Moritz Kinzel and Julia Schönicke have recently confirmed that the monumental circular buildings were not designed for only one single event, but were used over a long period of time and changed in size several times, with the architectural components, such as the metre-high T-shaped pillars, being reused. Klaus Schmidt witnessed and helped shape all of these developments in their early days.

The first thematic volume on Göbekli Tepe, which is now being published in the re-established *Archaeologica Euphratica* series, will be followed by further works in the coming years. These will primarily be the dissertations of a new generation of specialists

working on Göbekli Tepe. These contributions cover a broad spectrum, ranging from analyses of lithic inventories to landscape and economic archaeology and symbolism.

We were not sure how Klaus Schmidt, who unfortunately only left the draft for one chapter of this book, had imagined the content structure of the volume, but came to the conclusion that he would have been in favour of the chapter sequence we had chosen. That being said, without his assertiveness, his preparatory work and the many stimulating discussions, we would not have been able to present this volume.

Finally, we would like to thank all our colleagues who were involved in the completion of this volume: Firstly, thanks are due to the authors Laura Dietrich, Oliver Dietrich, Tilman Müller, Jens Notroff, Joris Peters, Nadja Pöllath, Klaus Schmidt (†), Julia Wagner and Sebastian Walter for their painstaking and fruitful work. For the illustrations, we were able to draw on photographs by Nico Becker, Dieter Johannes, Klaus Schmidt (†) and Irmgard Wagner (†),

while the explanatory naturalistic animal illustrations were drawn by Konrad Nuka Godtfredsen (Copenhagen). Several T-shaped pillars, for which only insufficient photographic images were available and for coherency, were photographed by Benny Waszk and Moritz Kinzel for this publication in 2022. We would like to thank Paul Larsen for the translation of the German-language manuscripts into English, which was commissioned and supervised by Anja Fügert, editor of the Orient Department of the DAI. Ulrich Mania, Martina Koch and Moritz Kinzel (DAI, Istanbul Department) were responsible for editing the manuscripts submitted.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our colleagues at the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Şanlıurfa Museum, and the many colleagues who have continuously supported the archaeological investigations at Göbekli Tepe since 1995.

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