

**Cardiff University**  
**School of History, Archaeology and Religion**

**In the Beginning...The Origins of Predynastic Religion**

**Gillian Margaret Woods**

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## SUMMARY

This work covers the Western Desert to the Nile Valley during the period *ca.* 6500-3750 calBC and determines the aetiology and nature of early Predynastic (Badarian-*ca.* 4350-3750 calBC) belief systems. The migration of peoples from the Western Desert to the Nile Valley as a result of the commencement of aridification in *ca.* 5300 calBC would have influenced belief systems. Throughout, a flexible theoretical framework is used to interrogate the heterogeneous evidence. The catalyst for the work is Bárta's retrospective interpretation of the rock-art motifs in Wadi Sura as early representations of ancient Egyptian deities and the beginnings of ancient Egyptian religion. The motifs are also linked to Middle Kingdom concept of the dead by Le Quellec. These two interpretations are examined and are proved to be incorrect. The conclusion is that the motifs are the result of a shamanic rain ritual. Archaeological evidence reveals there was no direct contact between Wadi Sura and the Nile Valley. The rock-art in Dakhleh Oasis and environs was also analysed as was the megalithic site of Nabta Playa. Although different, both appear to have had concerns about rain and fertility. Ceramic evidence reveals contacts between Nabta Playa, Dakhleh Oasis and the early Badarian sites. This suggests that at least part of the aetiology of beliefs was the Western Desert. The interrogation of mortuary evidence at Gebel Ramlah, associated with Nabta Playa and that of the Badarian period reveals a belief in an afterlife, rebirth and regeneration. The role of the living is considered vital for the dead to achieve this transformational status. At all sites the supernatural and symbolism appear to play an important role as does shamanism. It is apparent that the concepts of fertility, an afterlife and rebirth formed the basis of the early Predynastic belief systems. No recognisable deities existed.

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## COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY TABLE

Years (calBC)	Gifl Kebir	Dakhleh	Nabta Playa	Badarian and early Naqadan Periods
2000				
3000		Sheikh Muftah <i>ca.</i> 3950-2200		
4000	Gifl C <i>ca.</i> 4400-3500		Bunat el- Ansam/ Final Neolithic <i>ca.</i> 4600-3400	Naqada I-II B <i>ca.</i> 3750-3450
5000	Gifl B <i>ca.</i> 6500-4400	Bashendi B <i>ca.</i> 5650-3950	Ru'at el- Baqar/ Late Neolithic <i>ca.</i> 5500-4650	Badarian <i>ca.</i> 4350-3750
6000		Bashendi A <i>ca.</i> 6420-5700		
7000				

Based on the comparative chronology chart of Egypt's Western Desert in Riemer et al. 2009, p.362.

Note: The dates for Gifl Kebir, the Dakhleh Oasis and Nabta Playa are based on those in publications relating to the respective sites: Riemer 2013 (Gifl Kebir); McDonald 2002; 2006 (Dakhleh Oasis); Malville et al. 2008; Wendorf and Schild in Wendorf *et al.* 2001 (Nabta Playa). The dates for the Badarian and early Naqadan periods are based on the new Egyptian historical chronology derived by the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, Dee et al. 2013.

## Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 RATIONALE

In 2010, Bárta published “*Swimmers in the Sand*” in which he interpreted the rock-art of Wadi Sura II, the Cave of the Beasts in the Gilf Kebir in the Western Desert as showing “... links to the ancient Egyptian mythological concepts that are found to have been formulated in the Nile Valley much later.” (Bárta 2010, 39). It was the publication of this book together with his presentation at the *First Interdisciplinary Conference* on the “Seeking Origins and Manifestations of Religion” at Pultusk in Poland in the same year that provided the impetus for this thesis. His interpretation of the images included the identification of the sky goddess Nut and her husband Geb together with Shu and Tefnut. Bárta (2014) later reiterated his conclusions. Bárta (2010, 25) dates the rock-art to 4300-3300/3200 BC. Is it possible that his interpretation of the rock-art motifs is correct? If so, the emergence of deities occurred far earlier than has been thought and yet there is no evidence of deities during the early period in the Nile Valley, which is contrary to what might have been expected if Bárta is right.

I believe that Bárta is mistaken in his interpretations and has followed a line, common amongst Egyptologists, that the Predynastic is a kind of faint image of what later develops as Egyptian religion. In this view the deities are present from the outset as identifiable forms which are simply crystallised and clarified later on. Such a view has some merit for the later Predynastic but in my opinion it does not work for the early Predynastic. This thesis will examine the background to these views and by the analysis of the material culture of the early Predynastic period will attempt to answer the question: “Considering the relatively limited data sets, can the origins and nature of very early Predynastic belief systems be identified?” In attempting an answer I will consider a wide range of evidence and endeavour to suggest the form which the earliest Egyptian “belief system” may have taken.

In my view the beliefs of the early Predynastic period cannot be considered to be reflected by those of the late Predynastic. Societally, different factors have to be taken into account, which were not applicable in the later period – from the

transhumance of the Western Desert to the beginnings of sedentism – each with its particular world view which would influence the formation of the respective beliefs. Belief systems were not static; they developed from the amalgamation of strands of beliefs over the millennia as a consequence of contact, the co-operation of groups or the domination of one over another. The outcome of such political manoeuvrings led to the acceptance, intertwining or merger of beliefs, which resulted in those beliefs becoming more complex with underlying theologies being developed to uphold the developing system. Paralleling what might be termed official beliefs, which would be promulgated in the main through sacrifice and ritual, would be an individual's beliefs, which may be an interpretation of a high level concept on a personal level for example an individual's belief that a certain animal had apotropaic powers, a belief that was not held by others.

## **1.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS RESEARCH**

The importance of my work is that it covers an area previously neglected by Egyptologists. This work differs from that of Bárta by taking into account different types of evidence, not just the rock-art in Wadi Sura, to draw out strands of beliefs. These strands when consolidated, I believe, present a credible belief system for the early Predynastic period and which differs greatly in nature from that proposed by Bárta.

It was only when researching Bárta's material did I learn that previously Le Quellec (2008, 35) dated the rock-art to  $4500 \pm 500$  BC and that he had also interpreted the scenes as being linked to the Dynastic religion that is to the concepts of death and the afterlife as contained in the Middle Kingdom *Coffin Texts* and later religious texts (Section 5.2.2). One of my aims in this thesis is to demonstrate that both Bárta and Le Quellec have misinterpreted the rock-art motifs. I believe their conclusions were based on a straightforward reaction to the motifs, rather than an in-depth analysis. I offer an alternative interpretation. The images were linked to the climatic changes and the need for rain to ensure the continuation of life. This theme, which has a natural progression to the idea of death and regeneration, is a constant throughout this work. The premise accepted here is that there were movements of peoples beginning *ca.* 5300 calBC to permanent sources of water in the Nile Valley as a result of the commencement of desiccation of what is now the Western Desert. Such

movements I believe would have had an impact on the development of belief systems of those living in the Nile Valley.

The importance of carrying out this research is to:

- discuss and critique the relatively recent claims of Bárta and Le Quellec that the rock-art in the Wadi Sura that depicts the beginnings of ancient Egyptian religion are incorrect and to present arguments to demonstrate a new interpretation of the rock-art; that it might represent some form of belief in shamanism;
- examine the Wadi Sura evidence with a particular view to considering any influence that it may have had on the development of belief systems in the early Egyptian Predynastic, and, in the process, to (a) examine evidence perhaps suggesting that such developments came from the other desert sites such as the Oases and environs as well as Nabta Playa, and (b) investigate possible evidence and arguments for the existence of some form of shamanism;
- explore possible links between these desert peoples and the settlements of the Badarian period (the first settlements in the Egyptian Nile Valley) by highlighting connections between the funerary beliefs as identified in the Neolithic cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah, which are believed to be associated with Nabta Playa, and those of the Badarian period;
- present data and arguments suggesting the possibility that some burials could be those of deceased shamans. At this stage, the retention of linkages by the Badarians with the Western Desert mortuary practices in respect of bovine burials will also be considered.

### **1.2.1 Aims and Objectives of this Research**

My aims are twofold:

- To explore the possibility that shamanism played an important role in the very early belief systems of the Predynastic Egyptians.
- To explore ways in which we may be able to identify the beliefs of the early Egyptians from mortuary contexts.

These aims I believe will be achieved by the following objectives:

- An examination of previous work dealing with the possibility that shamanism was prevalent in the Neolithic period.
- An analysis of the images in Wadi Sura taking into account theories about rock-art and rock-art sites in other parts of the world since there is no recent ethnohistory of the area.
- An analysis of the rock-art in the Oases, in particular those of Winkler's (1939, 29f) female "deity".
- An examination of the megalithic site of Nabta Playa to determine the possible purposes of the various stone structures.
- An analysis of the burials and grave goods of the cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah and the Badarian sites to ascertain whether beliefs can be identified.

The aims and objectives will be fulfilled therefore by the analysis of material culture. However, the use of ethnography (see Chapter 3) is a useful tool in helping to formulate conclusions but ethnography deals with the living and not the dead. Thus in essence ethnography deals with modern mindsets, whereas this research focuses on the mindsets of those living some seven millennia ago. How can we be certain whether modern mindsets correlate with those of the early Predynastic Egyptians?

Mithen (1996a, 151ff) concluded that the Middle Palaeolithic transition saw the emergence of the modern mind whereby the human mind developed and evolved from being constituted by a series of relatively independent cognitive domains to one in which ideas, ways of thinking and knowledge flow freely between those domains. Thus, modern day humans have the same mind-sets as their Middle Palaeolithic ancestors.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, based on Mithen's argument, I believe it should be possible to determine the belief systems of the early Predynastic Egyptians. However the possibility of bias in interpretation must be taken into account. Any interpretation will of necessity be based on a subjective viewpoint, no matter how objective the interpreter tries to be, since conclusions will be influenced by the person's own environmental/educational background. Thus, no matter how definite a conclusion might seem, it can only remain a hypothesis. Hawking's (1996, 15) view on physical theory appears to be apt in this instance: "Any physical theory is always provisional, in the sense that it is

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence appears to be emerging that suggests this evolution of the modern mind occurred much earlier in the Palaeolithic period (George 2013, 36-40).

only a hypothesis: you can never prove it. No matter how many times the results of experiments agree with some theory, you can never be sure that the next time the result will not contradict the theory.” Baines (1972, 287) puts it succinctly “...our studies of large areas of Egyptian religion can never advance beyond hypotheses...”. Though he is referring in the main to the Dynastic period, his words are all the more apt when applied to the early Predynastic period.

### **1.3 STRUCTURE**

#### **1.3.1 Chapter 2: Literature Review**

A literature review forms Chapter 2 in which I systematically examine and discuss work relevant to each of the major aspects of the thesis. The literature by social anthropologists of different theoretical schools gives a broad spectrum of views on the nature or cognitive/psychological development of early religion. These views are important since the commonalities will be used to draw up a definition of a religion/belief system (Section 3.6.1). This definition will provide a baseline for the identification of the nature of early Predynastic religion. The views of Egyptologists with a *specific* interest in religion especially Predynastic religion are also discussed. The review then returns to the views of archaeologists who, in recent years, have acted as catalysts in identifying religion and its constituent parts such as ritual and death and burial as an integral part of archaeology. Anthropology had a major influence on this development and the relevant literature is examined. A major premise of this thesis is that whilst ethnography cannot provide direct answers, it can open up avenues of thought which need to be explored. Thus the review covers ethnographic literature on the Nilotic peoples, the Nuer and Dinka, who are deemed to live in a similar biosphere as the early Predynastic Egyptians and therefore might hold similar beliefs. The literature on shamanism – which I believe to be a substratum of early Predynastic beliefs – concentrates on aspects that can be identified in archaeological datasets. Rock-art is the external depiction of internal thoughts and the review covers the arguments for and against the interpretation of certain rock-art scenarios as representing early beliefs including shamanic beliefs, especially that thought to be of a visionary nature. Whilst covering rock-art in a generalist way, the review also covers the literature on the specific rock-art sites of Wadi Sura and the Dakhleh Oasis and environs. Additionally the megalithic site of Nabta Playa and the Neolithic cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah, all of which are

paramount to this thesis, are included in the review. Finally the literature on the sites of Badari, Mostagedda and Matmar is considered. The older literature tends to refer to beliefs of the Badarian period but these tend to be basic and with little argumentation. The more recent literature is inclined to focus on such areas as chronology, economy and contacts; references to burials are mainly descriptive and in-depth analyses of Badarian cemeteries have focused on social stratification. Reference is made to the recent findings of evidence of attempts at mummification.

### **1.3.2 Chapter 3: Theoretical Approaches and Methodology**

Chapter 3 critiques the theoretical approaches of anthropology and archaeology to religion in addition to describing the methodology used.

#### **1.3.2.1 Theory**

Since the evidence is heterogeneous in nature, it is clear that no one theory is suitable and that several have to be employed. Critical consideration is also given to the inter-relationship of anthropology and archaeology for the interpretation of archaeological data whilst pointing out problems that can be raised by using ethnographical data. Anthropological and archaeological theoretical approaches to ritual are considered and that of Rappaport (1999, 23-68) is described in detail since it forms the basis of my analysis of the rock-art in the Wadi Sura and in the Dakhleh Oasis and environs. Shamanism and rock-art theories are critiqued especially the Cognitive Neuropsychological Theory: Altered States of Consciousness (henceforth ASC) since that is used to detect shamanic rock-art but it is a theory that has generated vocal opposition from such people as Bahn (1996; 2001; 2002 and 2010) and Kehoe (2000).

#### **1.3.2.2 Semantics**

The use of the word “religion” by scholars is examined and I conclude that it is an inappropriate descriptor for early Predynastic beliefs. I therefore use the term “belief system” in this thesis and I propose a working definition based on the commonalities of social anthropological theories.

#### **1.3.2.3 Methodology**

It was not possible to obtain permissions to visit the sites in question because of the present political situation; even if that were possible, some of the sites (e.g. Badari) would not provide vital information because they are either deflated or have been destroyed. Therefore reliance is placed on published papers and articles and in

respect of the Badarian period, Brunton's (1928; 1937 and 1948) excavation reports. Since there is no textual evidence available, ethnographic sources in respect of cattle herding societies and in particular of shamanism will be cautiously and critically used where pertinent in order to suggest the possible characteristics of the early belief systems. It is obviously not possible to critically examine every object discovered during the various archaeological excavations. Therefore, I analyse categories of grave goods referring where appropriate to objects from Brunton's excavations which form part of the collections of the Ashmolean, British and Petrie Museums. The purpose of such an analysis is to elucidate possible beliefs from these objects.

### **1.3.3 Chapter 4: Shamanism and Spiritual Beliefs of the Nilotic Peoples: the Nuer and the Dinka**

This chapter provides essential background focusing on two topics: Shamanism and the Nilotic peoples, the Nuer and Dinka.

#### **1.3.3.1 *Shamanism***

The issues covered in the section on shamanism include the question of whether it was "universal", as many scholars believe that it formed a core of Neolithic (and later) belief systems. Morenz, L.D. (2003, 212-218) has postulated shamanic aspects can be detected in the later Predynastic/early and later Dynastic periods.<sup>2</sup> I believe therefore, it is apposite to examine the main tenets of this belief system to determine its applicability to the early Predynastic period. The remainder of the section covers the role of the shaman in society; the importance of regalia; initiation processes and the contentious area of the influence of shamanism on rock-art. From this distillation, I draw up a definition of shamanism to underpin the arguments in this work.

#### **1.3.3.2 *The Nuer and Dinka***

Reference has been made to the use of ethnography in assisting in the interpretation of archaeological data sets. The initial focus is on the beliefs of the Nilotic peoples, the Nuer and Dinka because their economies, physical environment and mode of living are deemed to be similar to that of the early Predynastic Egyptians. Thus, their beliefs may give an indication as to the nature of early Predynastic beliefs. The Nuer and Dinka have complicated beliefs in spiritual entities and these are explored along

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<sup>2</sup> Morenz, L.D. (2003, 218f) also believes that the Middle Kingdom Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor is a shamanistic narrative.

with the roles played by specific individuals such as the Nuer leopard-skin priest and Dinka Spear chief, both of whom are involved with rain making. Whilst it is not possible to say with any certainty that the beliefs, rites and rituals carried out by these peoples are the same as those of the early Egyptians, since millennia separate them, such investigations are a means of exploring possibilities and opening minds as to what may have been.

### **1.3.4 Chapter 5: Influence of the Western Desert**

This chapter focuses on three key sites in the Western Desert, which I believe reflect the concepts of death and regeneration. Shamanism is shown to play a role in these concepts. These three areas are:

#### **1.3.4.1 *Wadi Sura I and II***

This will cover the importance of rock shelters for locations of rock-art and a general analysis of the motifs. The main part of the section concerns the rebuttal using archaeological data of Bárta's and Le Quellec's theories that the paintings are representative of early Egyptian religious thought. An alternative interpretation is offered; the paintings are evidence of ritual. This conclusion is arrived at by using Rappaport's (1999) framework of ritual. Additionally the use of San ethnography demonstrates that the motifs could result from a shamanic rain ritual. The climatic conditions during the Holocene period are thought to be the instigation for this ritual.

#### **1.3.4.2 *Dakhleh Oasis and Environs***

This section concentrates on the anthropomorphic engravings that Winkler (1939) referred to as representations of a deity associated with fertility. Winkler's own and other more recent interpretations and dating are discussed as well. The importance of the location of the rock-art is considered and recourse is also made to ethnographic and scientific data in order to interpret the motifs. The association of the female anthropomorphs with animal motifs, in particular giraffes, which are often understood to be rain animals, is also discussed as are possible links with shamanism. Reference is made to Rappaport's theory on ritual.

#### **1.3.4.3 *Nabta Playa and the Cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah***

The third site, that of Nabta Playa, is a megalithic rather than a rock-art site. The various elements of the site are analysed and reference is made to other megalithic sites. The argument is posited that the site may be interpreted as being linked to rain

rituals and consideration is given as to whether shamanism had a role to play. The cemeteries of Gebel Ramlah are described but not discussed in detail since the theoretical/conceptual issues raised by the burials are taken up in Chapter 6. I posit that there is an association between the peoples of the Western Desert and Badari, excluding those located in the environs of Wadi Sura, as indicated by material cultural remains and mortuary practices.

### **1.3.5 Chapter 6: From Nomads to Semi-Sedentism: Origins of Religion in Predynastic Egypt: The Badarian Period (*ca.* 4350-3750 calBC)**

Although the emphasis of this chapter, the Badarian Period, is on funerary theory, there is a short discussion on the sites and economy, since ethnographic analogies may be made with the Nilotes to determine the format of the Badarian society. Regarding belief systems, I accept the premise that the early Predynastic Egyptians had a belief system which helped them to understand the world and life's events. Since death is the final event in life, it forms part of that belief system. The premise is founded on the definition of belief systems (Section 3.6.1) which is based on the work of social anthropologists (Section 2.2.1). Thus the purpose of burial, position of bodies and coverings are reflected upon. The question of disturbed burials is discussed and personhood/relational theory applied. References are made to the cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah. Animal interments are examined in the light of Saharan animal burials to establish whether they had numinous qualities attributed to them as some scholars believed or if they were linked to rain rituals. Grave goods, which it is deemed played an important role in the belief system since they were placed in the grave for a purpose, are subject to analysis –Tables 1a-1c in the Appendix are basic breakdowns of the contents of the Badarian period graves at Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda, the main sites of the Badarian period. The theories of multifunctionality/layered meanings in addition to relational theory are used to analyse objects. Historical and ethnographic data is also used to assist in the interpretation of objects. From these analyses consideration is given as to whether there are any indications of the possibility of shamanism being included in the belief system.

### **1.3.6 Chapter 7: Conclusion**

In the conclusion I consider whether the aims and objectives of the thesis have been met by using the theoretical framework adopted and identify strengths and weaknesses. Comment is also made on the adequacy of the data sets used as evidence. Notwithstanding this, using the theoretical parameters of the thesis, this chapter draws together the various strands of evidence ascertained to argue that belief systems existed in the periods examined. The main themes of the belief system were that the concept of fertility, rebirth and regeneration were paramount; there was a belief in an afterlife and the supernatural and symbolism played an important role. The evidence strongly suggests that shamanism formed a substratum of belief. I also consider areas for future work.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

It is possible to project backwards from the Early Dynastic Period to the Protodynastic period to determine aspects of religious beliefs with the representation of deities on artefacts such as the Scorpion macehead and ceremonial palettes (Gautier and Midant-Reynes 1995, 108; Wilkinson, T.A.H. 2001, 290 and 294). These deities, including Min and Seth, represented possibly the most important deities during the period of state formation (Kaiser 1959, 130f; Wilkinson, T.A.H. 2001, 199). However, identifying the nature of early Predynastic (*ca.* 6000-3750 calBC) beliefs in a similar manner is not appropriate due to the chronological separation between the periods and the lack of evidence which would support such a link. This thesis demonstrates that early Predynastic beliefs were of a significantly different nature to that of the Protodynastic period and beyond.

Religion is multi-faceted. With no textual evidence to assist in determining the nature of very early Predynastic religious thought, it is necessary to consider the views on early religion proposed and discussed by Egyptologists, anthropologists and archaeologists, since they can provide clues as to the nature of early Predynastic Egyptian beliefs. Additionally specific elements such as ritual and burial are also considered since they too are important aspects of this issue. I believe that the religious beliefs during the period covered by this thesis contain a substratum of what may be broadly defined as shamanism (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Thus this review will cover literature on the subject as well as rock-art, since the premise of this thesis is the rock-art in the Wadi Sura in the Western Desert resulted from shamanic beliefs (Chapter 5) and do not depict, *contra* Bárta (2010; 2014), several Egyptian deities known from later times. Since there is neither ethnographic nor anthropological evidence existing regarding these early peoples, recourse is made to anthropological analogy. Hultkrantz (1966, 147f; 1978, 23) has argued that similar cultures develop similar religious systems. Thus, since the economies of the Nilotic peoples the Nuer and Dinka were based on herding, their beliefs might assist in elucidating the nature of early Predynastic religion, although it is realised that blanket ethnographic parallels cannot be made. Therefore, this review will also cover literature pertaining

to these people. Since the Nilotic peoples, the Nuer and Dinka, shamanism and rock-art are discussed in detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the literature review for these subjects will only be summarised here. Finally, the review will cover the relevant publications on the sites covered by the thesis.

Scholars tend to use the word “religion” in their works, hence its retention in this chapter rather than the use of the term ‘belief systems’ (Chapter 3). Since this thesis covers a wide range of issues, only the most significant literature is covered in this review.

## **2.2 VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF EARLY RELIGION**

### **2.2.1 Social Anthropologists<sup>3</sup>**

Against the background of Darwin’s (1859) evolutionary theory, both Lubbock (1879, 115ff) and Tylor (1871a, 385f) took an intellectualist approach to religion deeming the development of religion in all cultures to be evolutionary, that is it developed in a unilinear progression from the most primitive to more sophisticated systems. Both scholars believed in survivals; beliefs were carried forward through the different developmental stages of religion and were proof of earlier beliefs. Tylor was the first to develop the anthropological concept of “animism”, derived from the Latin *anima* meaning “soul” or “vitalising force” which he based on the work of the 17th century chemist and physician Stahl on the classic theory of vital principle and soul.<sup>4</sup> Tylor (1871a, 385f) believed that animism was the most basic form of belief system. He (1871a, 431) likened such belief to that held by children who transposed life into playthings and other objects, in other words societies with immature cognitive skills held such beliefs. Thus, the difference between such societies and those that were more advanced was “education”.

Animism was the first all-pervading religion which had as its basis the soul, an insubstantial image of the person, which could leave the body during dreams and which continued after death. Animism also comprised the plurality of spirits and deities, which affected or controlled world events. Tylor (1871a, 430) extended the

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<sup>3</sup> Included in this exposition are the views of Freud (1960[1913]; 2008[1927]), who although not a social-anthropologist, used the works of Frazer and Darwin in determining what for him were the origins of early religion. His ideas are relevant to the premise of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Aristotle (1986) in *De Anima* I.1. 402a maintained that the soul was the first principle of living things including animals (1.1.402b) and plants (1.4.409a).

concept of the possession of a soul to all animate and inanimate beings. Fetishism, the belief in spirits embodied or attached to, or exerting influence through material objects such as “stocks and stones” or indeed any object was also a component of primitive religion (Tylor 1871a, 430; 1871b, 132). Human spirits after death were thought to play an important role in the lives of the living (Tylor 1871b, 101ff). Another feature of primitive religions was animal worship of which there were three forms: direct worship of the animal for itself, indirect worship of it as a fetish acted through by a deity and veneration for it as a totem<sup>5</sup> or representative of a mythical tribal ancestor (Tylor 1871b, 215). The veneration of an animal in one place and its killing and being eaten in another conformed to the concept of tribal fetishes and deified totems (Tylor 1871b, 216). According to his thesis, polytheism of great gods such as thunder gods, gods of the heavens, who differed from the other spirits only by means of rank evolved from animism; from polytheism developed a doctrine of monotheism (Tylor 1871b chaps. 16 and 17). In his article entitled ‘On the Limits of Savage Religion’, Tylor (1892, 283-284) emphasised the need to take into account the possibility that the religious thoughts of the “lower races” might be influenced by contact with missionaries and travellers and the fact that such people read their own ideas into such beliefs.

Lubbock (1879, 119) on the other hand identified nature worship with totemism which evolved after atheism and fetichism.<sup>6</sup> Frazer (1920, 222) defined religion as “...a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life... and involved belief in the existence of the deity”. He (Frazer 1900, 1, §2, 7-128; 1920, 226, fn. 2; 233f) introduced a three stage intellectual evolution of magic – religion – science. Religion was a separate concept from magic, which was more akin to science on the grounds that it postulated the order and uniformity of nature. Confusion between magic and religion among early peoples had resulted from the fact that magic had existed before religion but when religion came into being, the two co-operated (Frazer 1920, 226, n.2 and 233f). However, once the difference had been recognised, this

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<sup>5</sup> Later Tylor (1899, 138-148) whilst not wishing to exclude totemism as a causal means of the origins of religion (143), expressed concern at the way totemism was considered to be almost the foundation of religion; the concept had been “...exaggerated beyond all proportion” (144) and felt it wisest not to “...pursue analogies, developments, or survivals of totemism into the religions of the old civilised world, Egypt...” (148).

<sup>6</sup> Lubbock’s spelling.

situation no longer pertained, resulting in suspicion and hostility between the two. Although it was during times of stress that humans turned to both religion and magic for succour (Frazer 1910, 169).

Although McLennan (1865, 122) referred to totemism, it was Frazer (1887, 1910) who understood it to be a religious and social concept. Totemism, formed the basis of the beliefs of many primitive tribal systems. He (Frazer 1887, 2; 1910, 4) identified three types of totems: individual, totems for either males or females, and clan totems. In his view, the clan totem was the most important. The totemic being was in the main a natural species, with animal species seeming to be the most common. The totem afforded protection to the clan; whilst the clan protected the species by not killing or gathering it. Frazer (1887, 3ff; 1910, 4ff) suggests that in antiquity the members of the clan regarded themselves and their totemic animal as belonging to the same species.

Tylor and Frazer, however, have been criticised because they came to their conclusions without having done any field work themselves and so depended on the work of others. Contrary to Tylor and Frazer, who amassed data from all over the world, Durkheim, also a theorist, based his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2001[1912]) on the religion in particular of the Arunta of central Australia. Durkheim (2001[1912], 4ff) argued primitive religions are rooted in, and express, reality and meet human needs and aspects of life. All religions despite their diversity of forms have the same objective meanings and fulfil the same function. Primitive societies, he believed, embodied a corporate mentality and morality. It was only as a result of historical development did religions undergo interpretations of meaning, sometimes involving the creation of mythologies (but mythologies often grow around a kernel of reality). The basic tenets of the religion became obscured especially in the religions of more complex societies. The distinctive characteristic of all religions was the categorisation of the world into two classes: the sacred and the profane. Religion was a collective concept according to Durkheim's (2001[1912], 46) definition:

*“...a religion is a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions –*

*beliefs and practices that unite its adherents into a single moral community called a church”*

He considered totemic religion to be the most basic in form; animism had turned religion into “...a system of hallucinatory images” (2001[1912], 70). The clan totem was a symbol of veneration. Since the totem attracted religious respect, it was forbidden to kill or eat the totemic being. Thus religion was integral to the clan totem. Religion was therefore a symbol, and expression, of society; its function being to provide societal cohesion. Whilst totemism may have been a universal in Australia, as Spencer and Gillen (2003[1899], preface) pointed out, there was considerable diversity regarding the concept between the different tribes. All aspects of social life were only made possible by a symbolism, which expressed social unity in a material form because it forged a sense of communion (Durkheim 2001[1912], 175f), a manifestation of social solidarity and collective beliefs. Rituals were the means of reaffirmation for the society (Durkheim 2001[1912], 287).

Durkheim’s work has been criticised on the grounds of his methodology and misunderstanding of the societies with which he dealt (Pickering 1998, 3; Thomassen 2012, 240). In his concept of religion, the sacred and the profane were two distinct spheres. This is not necessarily so. An item can have a utilitarian use but its usage during a religious ceremony or ritual would render it sacred. Another weakness was the fact that he understood religion to be societal; it was a collective act, whereas religion can be personal and rites can be performed on an individual level.

Weber (1966[1922], 3), probably the first great anti-evolutionist, understood the origins of religion, which involved the existence of spirits, to emerge from human negotiation with nature, in other words to deal rationally with the irrationalities of life; it provides an understanding of the inhabited world. Such beliefs existed “*in nuce*” from the earliest time. Charismatic leaders thought to be imbued with supernatural powers emerge as a result of dynamic factors affecting society (Weber 1966[1922], 2).

Freud,<sup>7</sup> basing his work on that of Frazer, continued the theme of totemism as a means of preventing incest by a psychological allegory. Acknowledging his sources to be Darwin's (1871, 362f) theory of society, that is an alpha male protecting his harem from younger contenders together with Robertson-Smith's (1889, in particular, p. 276) theory on ritual sacrifice as well as using Oedipus case studies, Freud (1960[1913], 140ff) hypothesised that the origins of totemism arose from similar *milieu*. His theory was not accepted but later he (Freud 2008[1927], 55) equated religion with "the human obsessional neurosis" stemming from the Oedipus complex again of a child's relationship to the father, which is one of fear and admiration. Thus, it follows that early humans felt helpless and weak in the face of nature and therefore needed to create a coping mechanism in order to deal with their fears. A second motive in the creation of gods was to combat sufferings and privations they felt by living as a culture group (Freud 2008[1927], 19). Thus the forces of nature were regarded in a paternal manner and were transformed into gods. Religion was therefore a means to overcome anxieties and satisfied emotional and psychological needs whilst at the same time reinforcing cultural norms and behaviour.

Malinowski was critical of the methodology of the early anthropologists: he referred to the fact that there was "...an appalling lack of relevant and reliable observations..." (Malinowski 1925, 29). The only methodology to be used was one of close observation by means of living with the people under study and acquiring a thorough knowledge of the language in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of their ways of life (Malinowski 1922, xvi).

Malinowski (1925) expounded his theories on the religion of Trobriand islanders, who used both religion and magic in their lives. The difference between the two, according to Malinowski (1925, 81), was that magic comprised acts which were the only means to a definite end which was expected to follow later – usually only one person had the power to carry out magical rites, whereas religion, in which everyone took part, was a body of self-contained acts that were the fulfilment of their purpose. However, religion was involved at the various stages in human life such as initiation, marriage and death and provided a framework for life (Malinowski 1925, 38f). He

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 3 for the reason for Freud's inclusion in this section.

(Malinowski 1925, 53-57) was also highly critical of Durkheim's (2001[1912]) thesis that religion was a societal affair; he believed that Durkheim had 'divinised' society. Religion was also an individual affair. The strongest religious moments often occurred when in solitude; such deep personal religious moments occurred in primitive as well as complex religions. He agreed that collective acts did keep society together but argued that they could be of a secular rather than a religious nature. He explained religion in terms of his functionalist theory of human need. Religion arose to help deal with the emotional stressful crises by opening up "...escapes from such situations and such impasses as offer no empirical way out except by ritual and belief into the domain of the supernatural" (Malinowski 1925, 80).

Lévi-Strauss (1972) in *The Savage Mind* was also dismissive of the evolutionary nature of religion. He was influenced by the linguistic theory of de Saussure (1974 [1916]) which distinguishes *parole* (the use of language – speech) from *langue* (the system of language), with the emphasis being on the latter and together with that of binary oppositions of Jakobson and Halle (1956). Lévi-Strauss' (1963, 68f) premise was that all culture was structured like language itself, which is itself a condition of culture. His aim was not to examine superficial cultural variation but to focus on the organising "grammar" that underpinned all cultural systems. Using this theory, Lévi-Strauss thought it possible to determine a common basis for human cognition. Lévi-Strauss' method of structuralism showed that the "savage" mind had the same structures as the "civilized" mind and that human characteristics are the same everywhere.

With this structural approach, totemism as a religion was deemed to be an illusion (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 15-32); it was a modern construct, a method of analogical classification of relationships between nature and culture based on binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss 1972, 35ff) which brought order to the world. It was the "...obsession with religious matters which caused totemism to be placed in religion...". (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 103).

The word "totem" is derived from the Ojibwa word *ototeman* meaning "he/she is a relative of mine" thus indicating kinship (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 18). It was a means whereby primitive humans could order and structure their world by reflecting on

differences between species which enabled the production of differences or hierarchies among human groups and to bring order to chaos. Religion, which also incorporated magic (Lévi-Strauss 1972, 221), was a structure underpinning society. He (Lévi-Strauss 1972, 10) argued that objects were sacred because of the place they occupied; taken out of their place disorder would reign. Thus sacred objects helped to contribute to the order of the universe by occupying the places allotted to them. On a slightly more detailed level, Lévi-Strauss (1972, 220ff) did moot that humans could only have accorded nature with qualities, which were discernible within themselves. Religion comprised "...a humanization of natural laws...the anthropomorphisation of nature ..." (Lévi-Strauss 1972, 221).

Myths, vehicles for explaining the origins of beliefs, by deconstruction could be shown to be variations of, or transformations of, one another (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 428-444). Religion being integral to culture was therefore a means of communication and could only be understood as a means of integrated thought. Criticisms of Lévi-Strauss' underlying theories include the fact that he was only concerned with the present and did not engage with the past and therefore omitted consideration of the influence of history. Structuralism also does not pay cognisance to the role of the individual within culture, or to the fact that human thought processes may differ across cultures.

Evans-Pritchard (1965, 116) deemed religion not to be a product of fear but an assurance, and insurance, against fear. Whilst he never produced a grand theory of religion, Evans-Pritchard (1956, 311) was critical of the early evolutionary theories as being for the most part pure conjecture. He (1965, 101) queried the reasoning behind attempting to discover the origins of religions when there was no historical evidence to assist in the endeavour. It was not a sound scientific method. As a science, anthropology "...deals with relations, not with origins and essences" (Evans-Pritchard 1965, 111). He (1965, 108f) referred to Tylor and those of his ilk as armchair anthropologists whose experience was limited to their own class and culture and who interpreted their data with a lack of understanding, imagining themselves in the same position as those groups being studied. Fieldwork was essential if the beliefs of pre-literate peoples were to be understood. He argued that, based on statements and ethnographical evidence from the Nilotic Nuer people, Nuer religion was highly complex based on signs and symbols. Thus it was imperative to

investigate the symbolic meaning represented by every element of the religion. He was concerned that modern views distorted the meaning of primitive religions of those who practised them and deemed that non-believing anthropologists searched for biological, psychological or sociological theory to explain primitive religion (Evans-Pritchard 1965, 121). Whilst religion was part of social life, for anthropologists with a religious belief, it took on an additional meaning. It was they who were sensitive to the inner meanings of the various aspects of the religion in question. In particular, ritual, which Evans-Pritchard (1965, 113) believed identified the essential nature of religion and which involved the use of images and symbols, could only be really understood by those with a religious nature. However, such sensitivity could also influence the anthropologist. Evans-Pritchard, a Roman Catholic, appeared at times to theologise. He (1956, *passim*) referred to *kwoth*, the Nuer spirit in the sky as “God”, not “god” and reference is made to God’s children. Yet at the end of his book he (1956, 322) stated that he had reached the point where “...the theologian takes over from the anthropologist”.

Geertz (1973, 88) maintained that the anthropology of religion had stagnated and affirmed his belief in the importance of religion in society. He defined religion as follows:

*(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”* Geertz (1973, 90)

In tribal religions, traditional imagery inculcated authority by means of its persuasive powers (Geertz 1973, 110). Culture, of which religion was an element, denoted a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by which men communicated, perpetuated and developed their knowledge about, and attitudes to, life. Religious symbols were powerful since they were culturally perceived conceptualisations of the world and humankind’s place in it. Ritual was an important element as it generated the conviction that religious concepts were truthful and religious directives sound (Geertz 1973, 112). To him the study of religion was a two stage operation: the analysis of the meanings embodied in the symbols making up religion proper and

the second, relating these systems to socio-structural and psychological processes. His (Geertz 1973, 125) argument was that social anthropology neglected the first whilst concentrating on the second. Animism, totemism, shamanism, ancestor worship were insipid anthropological means of categorising data. Geertz (1973, 122) believed that human beliefs were as various as humankind.

Religion as a human construct is taken up by Firth (1996) himself a humanist. Its purpose was to provide solutions to problems that arose in life and the certainty of death (Firth 1996, 70). It was an art of making sense out of experience. Religious beliefs were particular to individual societies; such beliefs were based on secular beliefs, fears and desires which had been raised to a higher power with an alleged external authority, such were “non-rational figurations” (Firth 1996, 184-215).

The cognitive scientist, Atran (2004, 266) demonstrated that religion evolved from the evolution of the mind and involved the same cognitive structures as non-religious beliefs and practices. Religion evolved from an ‘evolutionary’ landscape (Atran 2004, 10) as a means of dealing with the problems that arose during the course of human existence (Atran 2004, x). Thus it was a psychological response to environmental stimuli. In other words it is evolved from human experience. One of his aims was to show that in all cultures the behaviour of supernatural entities and the performance of sacred rites were predictable as a result of cognitive and emotional constraints (Atran 2004, viii). Supernatural beings were by-products of a cognitive mechanism for detecting predators, enemies and hospitable situations and for dealing with those situations but there was no single origin of religion, nor a set of functions that it served (Atran 2004, 15). All religions followed similar pathways; they all invoked supernatural entities to help cope with the vicissitudes of life and the fear of death. All had benevolent and malevolent entities (Atran 2004, 266). He explained the differences between the various types of religion: animism, totemism, pantheism and monotheism as resulting from differences in the content of the beliefs in the supernatural, not to any differences in the cognitive structures of those beliefs (Atran 2004, 9).

Boyer (2001) using evolutionary psychology examines the cognitive processes that are engaged in the acquisition, use and transmission of cultural knowledge. He (2001) understood this process as the perception, interpretation and recording by

various inference systems of whatever was seen or heard. Some pieces of information produce the effects identified as “belief” in that the person recalls them and uses them to explain or interpret particular events. This could result in specific emotions coming to the fore and possibly influencing behaviour (Boyer 2001, 34). During this process, selection would have taken place – only some information would trigger these effects and not others; also the same piece of information would have these effects on some people but not others. Thus, within the same community, beliefs may be interpreted differently by individuals. Religion to Boyer (2001, 377) was therefore a selection of processes and thus every version of god/spirit is slightly different. Religious concepts did not always provide comfort or reassurance. They were connected to human emotional systems which were connected to life-threatening circumstances. They were used to explain or help to understand a particular occurrence. Human inferences required supernatural entities to act like humans because the one human feature that was projected onto such a being was the mind (Boyer 2001, 163). According to Boyer’s (2001, 184) thesis, people did not invent gods or spirits, they received information that led them to build such concepts. Particular systems in the brain specialised in particular aspects of objects around people and produced specific inferences about them. Thus Boyer argued that religion, which he never defined, results from inferences, emotional responses, which involved reasoning and the making of judgements which were developed overtime and which became melded to create what was understood as belief.

The original concept of animism that all animate and inanimate beings had spirits has undergone critical review in recent years (Bird-David and responses, 1999), the result being a lack of consensus of opinion. Rather than having a spiritual essence, it is argued that animism is based on relationships humans have with nature and inanimate objects. Ingold (2006, 10) pointed out that there is no universal acceptance of what is living or not and therefore there is no universal discrimination between animate and inanimate things. To him, animism is a condition of being in the world and being sensitive and responsive to an environment that is constantly in flux. It is a transformative nexus of relationships which cause beings of all kinds to “...continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence.” Thus animism is a complex network of reciprocity and interdependence. The animistic world is therefore not a dichotomous one comprising humans and nature but is an integrated

world view built on a relational ontology. According to Bird-David (1999, 89) animism involves positively engaging with beings/things, then perceiving them as persons. Within such a world view, there are super-persons, which, she (1999, 71) acknowledged are referred to by other anthropologists as spirits, supernatural beings or other than human beings.

### **2.2.1.1 *Relevance***

In Chapter 3, a definition of religion/belief systems, which is used throughout this thesis, is based on these socio-anthropological interpretations of the nature and form of the religions of pre-literate societies.

## **2.2.2 Views of Egyptologists on the Origins of Egyptian Religion**

### **2.2.2.1 *Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century – Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Prior to the Discovery of Evidence of the Badarian Period)***

During this period, Egyptology was very much influenced by anthropology and was understood at least by Griffith (1901, 9) to be a discipline of anthropology. With the development of anthropological totemic theories in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries discussed above, several early Egyptologists (Loret 1904, 69, 98; 1906; Moret 2001[1927], 40; Petrie 1906, 20f) linked the early Predynastic beliefs with totemism, each tribe having its associated species of animal. Loret (1906, 26-28) interpreted the ensigns on D-ware (Naqada II *ca.* 3500 BC) as clan totems. Such formed the protective ensign of a community and the totemic animal was regarded as an ancestor. In contrast, Petrie (1906, 20) maintained that there was a kinship between humans and animals, similar to that in totemism. Each tribe or district had an associated sacred animal, which was specifically chosen because of its special qualities unlike totemic beings elsewhere (Petrie 1906, 27). Petrie (1920, 48) mooted that burials had the characteristics of a ritual since grave goods were usually deposited in the same order. Grave goods themselves indicated that there was a belief in immortality and that weapons forming part of a deposition revealed there was no fear of the dead.

Erman (1909[1905]) was the first to set ancient Egyptian religion into a historical perspective. He (1909[1905], 1f) believed the deities arose from natural phenomena. In the beginning each locality would have its own specific deity. Unlike other scholars of the age, he decried the socio-religious classification of beliefs (animism,

totemism and the ilk) because such theories needed to be proved. Moreover, his book was aimed at a wide audience. Erman emphasised there was no discussion of disputed points, his aim was to present the development and decay of a great religion through more than three thousand years. Breasted (1912, 4ff) - a former pupil of Erman's - held similar beliefs in that the gods, the controlling forces, of the early Egyptians were to be found in nature, with each god being local to an area. However, Breasted attempted to correlate with religion "*the other great categories of life and civilization which shaped it...no systematic effort has yet been made to trace from beginning to end the leading categories of life, thought and civilization as they successively made their mark on religion, or to follow religion from age to age, disclosing especially how it was shaped by these influences, and how it in turn reacted on society*" (Breasted 1912, viiif).

Newberry and Garstang (1904, 14f) indicated that initially in the "tribal ages" there were local guardian deities. The emblematic signs depicted on pottery were related to tribalism. The main belief was that death was a phase like sleep, which led to an afterlife (Newberry and Garstang 1904, 8).

#### **2.2.2.2 1930s – 1960s**

Sethe (1930, §§ 1-3) posited the development of a belief system against the pertaining political situation whilst stressing this was a hypothetical approach. From an analysis of literary texts, in particular the Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts*, Sethe (1930, §4 and §104) deduced the existence of state gods during the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC since he envisaged a unified kingdom under the rule of Heliopolis and dominated by the falcon god Horus; a deduction which, he stated, in 1929 would not be accepted by the "*Göttingen Horus*", namely Kees (see Kees 1980[1956], VI). Political developments did not necessarily result in the casting off of the old but often in the absorption of the old into the new so vestiges of the old beliefs could still be identified (Sethe 1930, §1). The oldest and most primitive form of deities were local and could be termed fetishistic - that is they were all deities within a living or inanimate form. Sethe (1930, §4) argued that at all times, the Egyptians maintained a tenacious attachment to the indigenous cults of their local 'town gods' with their specific myths and cult customs.

Kees was influenced in his writings by the political environment of Germany during the rise of Nazism and World War II in which he played an active role. He was one of the German Egyptologists accused by Steindorff of being actively affiliated with the Nazi party (Schneider 2013, 146). For Kees religion and politics were interlinked. His main contribution on ancient Egyptian religion *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten* was first published in 1941 and as he (Kees 1980 [1956], VII)<sup>8</sup> stated he wanted to focus on the dominant traits, rather than present an overview, of Egyptian religion. He determined that the development of religion was concomitant with that of the cultures that archaeology had brought to light and to politics. He (1980[1956], 126 footnote 1) emphasised that unlike Petrie's belief in archaeology, different cultures did not equate to tribal migrations or national movements. Kees (1980[1956], 125ff) envisaged the oldest form of religion was focused on local cults, the objects of worship being animate and inanimate beings, the special nature of each local god would have been jealously guarded as an inviolable right. However, he admitted that nothing could be said about the religious lives of the Badarian people although he did not dismiss the possibility of the existence of animal cults. Kees (1980[1956], 123) believed the development of religion took place alongside that of political unions (unlike Sethe, he did not accept that there was an early kingdom unified under Heliopolis) and that the exertion of the earthly rulers struggling for the supremacy of their territory was paralleled by those of the respective local deities, the local chiefs being the living images of the deities (Kees 1980[1956], 127).

Mercer's (1949, viii) aim was to reconstruct the main characteristics and aspects of ancient Egyptian religion from prehistoric times. His discussion on the situation during this period is also covered in *Horus, Royal God of Egypt* (1942). He (Mercer 1942, 42ff; 1949, 299-300) agreed that certain animate and inanimate objects could be considered as being external manifestations of divinities or were symbols of gods and he was content to accept that such belief constituted animism. There was insufficient evidence to suggest these objects were totems. He argued that there was no evidence to show that the ancient Egyptians had any familial relationship with a symbol or ensign. Fetishism, whereby a spirit dwelt in an object, or that the object had powers of its own, was also an aspect of early religion (Mercer 1942, 42; 1949, 300). The gods were local gods known only to those people living in the locality. If,

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<sup>8</sup> Second edition.

however, that locality were conquered by a neighbouring settlement, the local god would continue to exist but would be demoted in importance deferring to the god of the conquerors (Mercer 1942, 43). Numerous animals were the object of worship possibly because of their qualities and Mercer (1942, 45) believed that the anthropomorphisation of these gods may have taken place before the beginning of the Dynastic period. He (1942, 43) denied that totemism had existed.

Jéquier (1946, 10) stressed that he supported neither Sethe nor Kees, nor proposed a new theory. Rather he (1946, 9) believed that it was the duty of Egyptologists to make a study of religion and most of those who had done so had, from the plethora of often inadequate information, produced often contradictory overviews. Jéquier determined that rather than produce a systematisation of ancient Egyptian religion, which he thought useless, his approach would be to consider each local religion and to follow developments. It is interesting that the title of his book refers to religions in the plural and not to religion singular due to the fact that the population comprised diverse groups from different ethnic backgrounds. However, he believed that there were some simple general ideas that were common throughout Egypt (Jéquier 1946, 8-9). He (Jéquier 1946, 12-25) saw the basis of all stages of Egyptian religion as the perpetual renewal of life, creation, preservation, death and resurrection which was seen in natural phenomena with a supernatural power in control. Each community would interpret this concept on an individual basis. He argued that three ages of Predynastic religious thought could be defined:

- Fetishism: The choice of object through which a superior power was “worshipped” would have been based on the mind-set or needs of the people; the fetish may also have been selected as a result of chance events.
- Zoolatry: this probably arose as a result of sedentism and
- Anthropomorphism: this probably occurred immediately before the historic times and therefore lies outside the period in question.

Despite his use of the words “ages” and “phases” which would indicate different periods in history, Jéquier (1946, 15) was careful to point out that these phases did not constitute a progression, *“Les principes memes de ces trois phases sont trop divergents pour qu'on puisse les considerer comme une evolution normale; comme*

*un progress suivant une ligne directrice constant...*<sup>9</sup> as social conditions differed throughout Egypt at the time.

Vandier (1949, 13, 14 and 16) believed that originally there were a number of local cults which had their defined areas of influence. He (Vandier 1949, 12) posited that the representations of the early deities could be the emblematic signs on boats and other constructions, which took the form of animals, plants or inanimate objects. However, many of these gods originated from the natural environment including animals whose powers were feared and birds whose flight abilities were admired (Vandier 1949, 15f). Agreeing with Sethe that deities lived in both animate and inanimate objects, Vandier believed the inanimate objects, the fetishes, were symbols whose original significance had long been forgotten. He (Vandier 1949, 24) thought the arguments made by Loret and Moret in respect of totemism were not convincing but concurred the hypothesis did explain some aspects of ancient belief and therefore it should not be rejected. The major belief from the earliest time, and one that was not subject to “...une interprétation qui peut être, parfois, dangereuse”<sup>10</sup> was that of a life after death, a life which was an extension of earthly life (Vandier 1949, 71).

Černý (1952, vii) indicated that he wrote this work as a response to a request<sup>11</sup> and stated that it was a sketch of ancient Egyptian religion. His was not an attempt to produce a catalogue of gods, or to link religion with the political developments of ancient Egypt. Černý (1952, 17) purported that the earliest religion was fetishistic involving animals or objects. However, he did accept that some form of animal worship did date back into remote antiquity. His evidence for this was the animal burials of the Badarian period. It was funerary remains from the Badarian and Naqadan periods that provided evidence of a belief in the afterlife that appeared to be similar to that on earth (1952, 14f). The foetal position of the body was similar to that elsewhere in the Neolithic but he pointed out that although the body was laid on its left side, the opposite was true at Merimde-Benisalame and el-Amrah. The direction in which the head faced could demonstrate Predynastic beliefs: the west represented the dwelling place of the dead; the east, the direction of the rising sun,

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<sup>9</sup> “The same principles of these three stages are too divergent to allow them to be considered to be a normal evolution; as a progression following a constant direct line...” (Trans. Author)

<sup>10</sup> “...an interpretation, which sometimes can be dangerous.” (Trans. Author).

<sup>11</sup> He does not say by whom.

gave rise to the concept of new life and rebirth and the north could be related to possibly an early astral belief of souls dwelling among the circumpolar stars in the northern skies.

Frankfort (1961 [1948], viii) like Jéquier, believed that it was not the right time to write a history of ancient Egyptian religion; rather it was necessary to try to elucidate its identity. It was possible to define some aspects of belief. Supernatural powers identified themselves in a variety of ways, even through accidents. He (1961 [1948], 4ff) instanced an anthropological example of a stone being deemed to be powerful because it had caused a person to trip over it – the emotional tension made the person receptive to signs of a supernatural power. Although he focused on Dynastic religion, he denied that the worship of animals during that period developed from a primitive stratum of religion, whereby the animals had local significance; he believed they should equate in significance to certain sacred objects like the crossed arrows of Neith. They were not totems since the claim of descent from such, the totemic feast and exogamy are not evidenced in ancient Egypt. He believed that the animal, whatever species, possessed religious significance which continued throughout ancient Egyptian history. However, in *Kingship and the Gods*, Frankfort (1948, 17), based on observations of African peoples, he acknowledged the existence during the Predynastic period of local cults with associated emblems.

With the growth of interest in Egypt, Morenz, S. (1973[1960], xiii)<sup>12</sup> believed that many wished to have a clearer understanding of ancient Egypt. Since many aspects of the lives of ancient Egyptians such as art, political structure and cultural achievements had religion at their core, he believed there was a need, despite the number of previous works on the subject, for another book since each work provided new insights on the subject. His emphasis focused on Egyptian religion as the faith of the Egyptian people. A recurrent theme of Morenz, S. (1973[1960], xiv, 137) was “man’s relationship to God”, which he believed to be the very core of Egyptian religion and that the gods were part of a single divine essence. This divine essence or God corresponds to the Christian God “...who is in man and above man” (Morenz, S. 1973[1960], 5). He (1973[1960], 18) deemed that fetishes and totemism were inappropriate with regard to Predynastic Egypt. Morenz, S. (1973[1960], 17)

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<sup>12</sup> The German edition was originally published in 1960.

believed that there existed *mana* or “power”, which formed the basis of worship. Such “power” could be found in animate and inanimate beings, which become central to a cult. With the fusion of units of society culminating in the unification of the state, the local deities were brought into a relationship either by merger or syncretism (1973[1960], 139).

### **2.2.2.3 Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century - Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The work of Morenz, S. (1973[1960]) with its emphasis on one god prompted Hornung’s (1996 [1971], 30) work whose aim was to stimulate reflection on the nature and meaning of the gods by producing a comprehensive study of the Egyptian concepts of god drawing in depth and in breadth on all the sources since such an approach was lacking despite a plethora of works on the subject. Hornung (1996 [1971], 32) was concerned not to construct an abstract being but to consider the ancient Egyptians’ relationship with individual gods, or “with the generality of the Egyptian conception of god”. His work focused in the main on the Naqada and dynastic periods. Hornung (1996 [1971], 83) deemed Jéquier’s thesis of early religious development to be a simplification and maintained that fetishes, animal powers (not zoolatry) and abstract natural powers existed simultaneously. The burial of animals during the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC was evidence for a cult of sacred animals or divine powers in animal form. Palettes in zoomorphic form carried on this thought (Hornung 1996[1971], 101).

Other modern Egyptologists with a particular interest in religion, such as Assmann (2001; 2003 and 2008) and Quirke (1992; 2015), focus on Dynastic religion when views and concepts had developed from relative inchoateness to theological complexity. Baines (1995, 95-156) links religion and kingship and therefore focuses on the late Predynastic/Dynastic periods. These works, however, lie outside the period of this work.

### **2.2.3 Recent Archaeologists/Anthropologists on Religion**

Since the study of material culture is of the essence in determining the origins of Predynastic religion, it is necessary to include reviews of works emphasising the archaeology of early religion. The last decade in particular has witnessed the publication of a number of works focusing on this area of archaeology, including conference publications (Barrowclough and Malone 2007; Insoll 2004a; Laneri

2008) and other edited volumes (Insoll 2011a; Tarlow and Stutz 2013; Whitley and Hays-Gilpin 2008) generally covering wide chronological periods, geographical areas and themes. Such a focus on different religions, prehistoric and new religions, world religions and considerations of the anthropological creations in particular shamanism together with an emphasis on funerary archaeology, ritual and the materiality of the body, indicates that religion, however defined, is becoming an important issue for archaeologists.

The focus of various theoretical approaches and the concomitant literature is discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter concentrates on the publications of those archaeologists and anthropologists who in my view have been a catalyst of the interest in religion and its constituent parts in the field of archaeology.

Renfrew (1994) encompassed archaeology of religion within cognitive archaeology. Religion involved a belief in a supernatural essence, a non-human power and he maintained that such an assumption was one that has to be made since the very term “archaeology of religion” presumed that religious experience occurred in early societies (Renfrew 1994, 48). The underlying purpose of religion was to provide answers to existentialist questions. Archaeological evidence of such religious systems was often difficult to find. He commented on the Marxist approach of religion being a facet of ideology and anthropological approaches such as functionalism and cultural evolution but deemed them deficient. Reference is made in Chapter 3 to the possible indicators of early cult practices. Renfrew (1994, 51f) equated cult to religion and the practices were identified as rituals, which took part in a hypothesised liminal zone. Burials should also be considered to be indicators of religion in that they may signify a belief in an afterlife.

Renfrew (2007, 113) later expanded his views on religion: there was a need for cultural dictated interaction by humans with cultural posited superhuman beings. Thus, he felt the interpretations of religion by Durkheim and Geertz (Section 2.2.1), which avoided any reference to the supernatural, were unhelpful.

Insoll (2004b, 1 and 2004c, 1) took the view that the relationship between archaeology and religion was one of neglect. Focus had been on generalities or on a single religion such as Islam or as part of conference proceedings. Part of the problem lay in the difficulty of differentiating material culture as being ritualistic or

religious (Insoll 2004b, 2; 2004c, 10, 24). Insoll (2004b, 2; 2004c, 30, 144; 2011c, 1005, 1009) expressed concern about the misuse of the terms animism and totemism as being ancient religions when the former was an element of a larger system and the latter represented complex beliefs and customs. The most contentious of all was shamanism, which was a creation of a religion but in many cases was a miscategorisation in that it reduced "...something infinitely more complex to a label which is, even in its relatively recent creation, little understood in itself" (Insoll 2004c, 147) (see Sections 4.2 and 4.2.1 on the terms "shaman" and "shamanism"). He (2004b, 3; 2004c, 79) considered post-processualism as being the most useful theoretical framework in pursuing the archaeology of religion but admitted that the term "religion" has been generally avoided by archaeologists and in particular he (2004b, 3f; 2004c, 79f) referenced Hodder. Insoll (2004b, 4f; 2004c, 82) argued that this avoidance could be due to the secularism of archaeologists. For Insoll, religion formed one of the final frontiers of archaeological research. In a later publication he (2011b, 1) commented on the more positive situation which pertained in the world of archaeology with regard to religion and religious ritual since his earlier publications. Serious consideration was now being given to their materiality and that this might enable better definitions to be made of religions and the reconstitution of rituals. Insoll (2011b, 1) pointed out that the contributors to this publication were not "religious" archaeologists but those with an interest in the subject or possibly not, to emphasise the fact that such issues have become a focus of archaeology. This acceptance of religion as now being an archaeological issue is seen in the title of Hodder's publication *Religion at Work in a Neolithic Society* (2014a).

### **2.2.3.1 Ritual**

As noted above, archaeologists often use the word "ritual" as a synonym for "religion", however they are not synonymous. During the last decade or so, a number of anthropologists and archaeologists have elicited an interest in the concept of ritual (for example Bell 1997; 2009 [1992]; Bradley 2005; Insoll 2004a and c; Rappaport 1999; and edited volumes such as Barrowclough and Malone 2007; Insoll 2011a; Kyriakidis 2007a; Whitley and Hays-Gilpin 2008). Whilst ritual pervades all aspects of life, it forms an important element of religion since it is the means by which belief is expressed through action.

Rappaport (1999, 24) set out his arguments for his understanding of the meaning and purpose of ritual drawing on anthropological, historical, philosophical, comparative religious sources in so doing. His definition of ritual "...the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers." forms the basis of an extremely detailed analysis set out in Chapter 3 of his book. This analysis is discussed further in Section 3.4.1 of this thesis and in Sections 5.2.5.4 and 5.3.1.3 in relation to the rock-art in the Wadi Sura and Dakhleh Oasis respectively.

I disagree with Rappaport's argument that ritual was the causation of religious conceptions (Rappaport 1999, 3), believing the opposite to be true. Ritual was surely a means of codifying those beliefs within a performance. Rappaport (1999, 169) regarded rituals and their sequences as being 'liturgical orders' since they represented and maintained cohesion between the elements and thus kept them "in order". Accordingly, they created order rather than disorder or chaos. Ritual was not an alternative means of expression and some things could only be expressed through ritual, thus rituals had no equivalents or alternatives. Rituals comprise performance (Rappaport 1999, 3, 24) thus without performance there could be no ritual (Rappaport 1999, 37). Ritual was the means by which people coped with threats and disruption (Rappaport 1999, 101ff). Ritual was the social act basic to humanity (Rappaport 1999, 31).

Bell's (2009 [1992] and 1997) two works are possibly the most cited in any discussion on ritual alongside that of Rappaport. Her discussion was theoretical rather than based on ethnography (Bell 2009 [1992], 4). She (2009 [1992], 219) regarded ritual as not being a natural category of human practice and argued that some activities were carried out in ways that raised them above others making them appear to have special meanings and implications. She (2009 [1992], 219ff) regarded this as the ritualization of activities. Those performing these acts, or as she referred to them "ritualizing agents" had the ability to deploy, play, and manipulate basic schemes in ways that appropriate and condition experience effectively. Thus ritualizing agents were instruments of control of what she referred to as the micro-relations of power. The type of authority formulated by ritualization tended to make ritual activities effective in creating a sense of community without overriding the

independence of individuals or subgroups. Ritualization did not create a community; a community resulted from having relationships and interests in common. Ritualization did however identify and emphasise those areas of importance for the community. Bell (1997, 138-169), set out what she considered formed elements of ritual-like activities: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule governance, symbolism and performance. These traits coincide with those of Rappaport (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5) but in a coalesced form. She emphasised that archaeology had been ignored in the development of ritual theory. Bell (2007, 278) also stressed that in her initial work she had not offered a definition of ritual as her initial work had been “a thought experiment”. She (2007, 277ff) queried why archaeologists wanted to complicate matters by having a definition but conceded because datasets were small, that the simplest definition would be useful and pointed to that of Renfrew (see below). However, definitions in all probability created more problems than they solved since they were never unilaterally accepted (Bell 2007, 283).

Bradley (2005), although concentrating on prehistoric Europe, viewed ritual as a specialised form of behaviour, a kind of performance, which developed from the concerns of daily life. Rituals focused on the local and informal to the public and formal. He (2005, 33ff) discussed Bell’s use of ritualization, which, he argued made it possible to consider the contexts in which rituals were created and performed. Ritualization revealed the concerns of society and was a process of selection of aspects of life which were then given added emphasis. Bradley’s (2005, 210) thesis was that ritual was not distinct from other parts of life and it was wrong to try to separate them.

Renfrew (2007, 121) stressed that rituals were not necessarily religious in nature although sometimes the boundary between religious and social could be difficult to determine especially as in most societies there was no distinction between the two. Being involved in a ritual meant an acceptance of the conventions the ritual stood for and thus a ritual influenced order within society (Renfrew 2007, 118). He (2007, 115) referred to 18 indicators (listed in Renfrew 1985, 19f) of ritual practice in material evidence which could be conflated into four main categories: 1) attention focusing; 2) special aspects of the liminal zone; 3) presence of the transcendent and its symbolic focus and 4) participation and offering. Indicators 1 and 4 he stressed

could also be characteristic of secular as well as religious rituals. Rituals were carried out periodically for example on a monthly or annual basis, according to the seasons or human life cycle. Rituals themselves had time durations and comprised well determined sequences of actions with prescribed repetitions and assigned durations (Renfrew 2007, 116).

Kyriakidis (2007b, 3) posited a need for a greater focus on the development of a theory to temper what he refers to as extreme approaches to the subject. He (2007c, 10) was concerned about the difficulties in identifying evidence of ritual within data sets. He believed rituals were probably easier to trace because they are repeated frequently and could form patterns in the archaeological record. However, the interpretation of specific rituals from data from a ritual site, the fact that a site could have been used for secular and religious rituals and the interpretation of finds in secondary contexts are problems that present difficult resolutions (Kyriakidis 2007c, 10ff). In the concluding chapter, he (2007d, 289ff) took stance with Bell evincing support for a definition, which he argued stimulated discussion and analysis. A lack of definition had given rise to most of the problems that had arisen in discussions on the subject. He argued there was no difference between ceremony (often considered to be secular) and ritual (religious). To him the two were tautologous as their Latin equivalents indicated: *caerimonia* referred to a religious state whereas *ritus* meant “rite” or “ceremony”.

Insoll’s work (2004b and c) has focused in the main on religion rather than ritual. He pointed out that ritual, especially in the way it was interpreted by archaeologists, was in fact subject to many confusing interpretations and alluded to the work of Bell (2009[1992]; 1997). Ritual, from material evidence, could be deemed to be static and the wider text of movement, that is performance, was therefore ignored (Insoll 2009a, 262; 2009b, 294), whereas in effect it was an emotional experience (Insoll, 2004c, 10). Movement was also relational to time, space and memory. He emphasised the fact that parts of secular life could be ritualised; ritual was not the prerogative of religion. Within archaeology, ritual was usually associated with burials, politics or ideology and not religion (Insoll 2004c 11). Commenting on Bell’s elements of ritual, Insoll stated that because of the complexities of ritual, each must be considered on its merits. Where ritual was deemed to be religious, it must be

understood that it was not religion *per se* but that it was a constituent element of religion. It is not an isolated event, but must be considered within “thick” context (Insoll 2004b, 3; 2004c, 12). Insoll (2009a, 262; 2011b, 1f) accepted that the consideration of materiality of ritual was now a serious proposition in archaeology, and the evidence was interrogated as to its function and symbolism rather than being accepted as just being present.

### **2.2.3.2 Ritual and Symbols**

Symbols are integral to ritual since ritual “...is a pattern of symbols” (Leach 1964, 15) but the problem lay in the fact that the same symbol could have different meanings (Leach 1964, 259). Turner (1970, 20ff) however deemed that polysemy was inevitable since people understood the suggested tripartite approach to the understanding of symbols: 1) external form and observable characteristics 2) interpretations of experts and laypersons and 3) significant context. There were also three-levels of meaning: 1) that of indigenous interpretation, that is information gained from questioning those involved in the ritual both specialists and laypersons, 2) observation of how the symbol is used and the group involved in its use and the affective qualities of the handling of the symbol and 3) the symbol’s position in relation to others, since they could indicate its meaning among many accorded it (Turner 1970, 50ff). Dominant symbols were often polysemic or multi-vocal in that the one symbol unified different disparate symbolic meanings connected by analogous qualities or association in thought (Turner 1970, 28). Turner (1970, 46) believed that polysemy or multi-vocality was essential for the maintenance of unity and continuity in society, although the opposite might be expected.

### **2.2.3.3 Death and Burial**

In a pre-textual prehistoric society, the evidence for a belief system has to be derived from other material culture. The evidence gleaned from cemetery sites is important in this quest since that of settlements in the period under discussion is slight. Death and burial form the subject of a number of anthropological and archaeological publications for example that by Huntington and Metcalfe (1979) and those edited by Bloch and Parry (1982); Laneri (2008); Tarlow and Stutz (2013). The last mentioned contained a number of articles of particular relevance to this work. In his article “Creating Death: An Archaeology of Dying” Robb (2013, 441-457) claimed that

there has never been an “archaeology of death” only that of the dead person (see Parker Pearson below). Robb (2013, 441-457) referred to the agency of the dead but focuses in the main on the fact that dying is a social process, which can take place over a long period from the preparation for death to ceremonies of remembrance. Ekengren’s (2013, 173-192) work on “Contextualizing Grave Goods” with an emphasis on the grave being the product of action and the need to consider the physical state of grave goods together with Gramsch’s (2013, 459-474) paper on the treatment of bodies and its social implications are important aspects that are taken into account in Chapter 6.

Parker Pearson (2003 [1999], 5), based on ethnographic evidence, emphasised that the study of funerary practices reveals more about the living as it was they who were responsible for the burials rather than the dead. The archaeologists’ own experiences of the world aided interpretation of the treatment of the dead and their inhumation as well as for their continued existence alongside the living (Parker Pearson 2003[1999], 20). He deemed the body to be an artefact that was carefully worked and transformed the moment death occurred (Parker Pearson 2003[1999], 71). He considered anthropological theory and concluded, like Ucko (1969, 263), that ethnoarchaeology was an aid to understanding but that is all it was. It did not provide answers. Parker Pearson commented on and criticised the processualist approach to mortuary archaeology which equated social status and funerary expenditure. Burial was an integral part of social geography as the dead could still be considered as active members of the community; burial of the dead was also a means of ensuring ownership of the land (Parker Pearson 2003[1999], 141). Parker Pearson (2003[1999], 147) suggested mortuary rites articulated concepts of the self and the social body “...through the development of a sophisticated awareness of the nature of death and hence of human existence”.

Van Gennep (1977 [1960], 11) understood life to be marked by a series of transitions from one social status to another or rites of passage of which death and the concomitant funeral was one. Rites of passage comprised a threefold process: separation/preliminal, transition/liminal (“betwixt and between”: Turner 1970, 93-111) that is the deceased was in an ambiguous in-between state and incorporation/postliminal. It was not only the deceased that underwent this transformation – death, journey to the afterlife and finally incorporation into the

society of the dead - but the survivors also (van Gennep 1977 [1960], 147) – separation from the dead, mourning the dead and re-entry to society when the mourning period was over. Although van Gennep’s approach has been criticised on the grounds that he lacked adequate theory about the nature of society (Gluckman 1962, 1), his thesis is often central to discussions on ritual, with some scholars, for example Parkin (1992, 16) purporting that the tripartite approach could be identified in all rituals. Insoll in *Archaeology, Ritual and Religion* (2004c) however, makes no reference to van Gennep. Van Gennep’s thesis that death rituals were not just a transition but a transformation links with Fowler’s work (see below) on personhood and transformations of the deceased and the community.

Fowler (2004; 2011; 2013a and b) considered the issues of death and burial from the viewpoint of the transformation of ontological status or personhood and relationality. The review will concentrate on his books *The Archaeology of Personhood. An Anthropological Approach* (2004) and *The Emergent Past* (2013b) since the other publications referred to are articles on the subjects within edited tomes. Dealing with personhood, Fowler (2004, 121) stressed that the term was not restricted to humans, it could refer to any entity, including animals although he found it difficult to include natural objects. He (2004, 9) admitted that his definitions were fluid and would not be constant throughout and concluded (2004, 156) that there could be no single definition because personhood was so entangled with other factors of identity. Personhood could be understood as being composed of different aspects, the most important for Chapter 6 of this thesis is that of Dividual and Dividuality whereby persons are deemed to be composite but multi-authored beings. This category, based on Melanesian (Strathern 1990, 13) and Indian (Marriott (1976 cited by Fowler, 2004, 24) ethnographic analogies, could be subdivided into two. i) Partible, an element of Melanesian thought: relationships are understood in terms of physical substances or objects. Thus the exchange of gifts, which are multi-authored, affects a person’s identity in that they are removed from the person who encapsulated them and absorbed by those receiving them. To give a gift is to give a part of a person, that is to give part of the self. ii) Permeable, a key feature in Indian contexts, whereby component parts are identified as a flow of substances i.e. blood, alcohol, cooked food and knowledge which are transmitted between bodies and persons (Fowler 2004, 9). Interactions with others affected the composition of the whole and

identities changed with different relationships (Fowler 2004, 8). This theory is important from a mortuary context, since the Western view regarded the deceased as being an individual rather than a dividual person and will be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 6. Whilst Fowler in *The Emergent Past* (2013b) covers graves and grave types, the interest for this work is the consideration of the objects buried. Not all the objects will have belonged to the deceased but to the living community. The grave goods may have been placed at different times during the mortuary process (2013b, 108) and those that exist as a piece may be representative of the whole (2013b, 129). Fowler (2013b, 2) moots that no object or person is bounded nor is an entity in itself. Rather, all have biographies and transactional relationships, with each having a role to play in transformative mortuary procedures. This aspect will also be discussed in Section 3.2.3 and Chapter 6.

### **2.3 THE NILOTIC PEOPLES: THE NUER AND DINKA**

Ethnographic materials are used to generate ideas in instances where there is no incontrovertible evidence which allows for the development of hard and fast conclusions on the form and structure of belief systems. I believe that the early Predynastic Egyptians, who were pastoralists, followed similar lifestyles and lived in a similar biome as the herders of sub-Saharan Africa. Similar ecological adaptations tend to result, cross-culturally, in relatively fixed groups of religious traits. Following Hultkrantz's (1966, 147f; 1978, 139f) theory, beliefs and rituals are thus likely to be linked to adaptation to the environment. Therefore, it is apt to give consideration to the beliefs of the Nilotes: the Nuer and Dinka of south Sudan.<sup>13,14</sup>

Since these beliefs are covered in detail in Chapter 4, only the more seminal works will be covered here. The emphasis is deliberately on older works, since they reflect an earlier point of contact with the peoples concerned. Influences and subjectivity on the part of the ethnographers and religion, however, cannot be avoided but by using older sources the effect of the proselytization of Islam and Christianity is lessened and the advances of the technological age, such as radio, television, the internet and

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<sup>13</sup> The Shilluk have been omitted because their main relevance to ancient Egypt is the position of the king and his link to the welfare of his people, an issue that is not relevant in the early Predynastic period covered by the thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Whilst modern ethnoarchaeology would in all probability have produced more "hard" evidence, none has been undertaken and it is unlikely that any will be in the present political climate.

mobile phones, are obviated. Both Seligman and Seligman's *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (1932) and Butt's (1952) *The Nilotes of the Sudan and Uganda* are surveys of the various peoples in the Nilotic Sudan concentrating on aspects of kinship and family life, religion, death and funeral ceremonies.

Evans-Pritchard (1949a; 1949b; 1951a; 1951b; 1953 and 1954) wrote a number of articles on various aspects of Nuer religion, the subjects of which were subsumed in his seminal work *Nuer Religion* (1956). His fieldwork, carried out at the behest of the Government of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as the Nuer were proving to be hostile to the Government, was disjointed (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 7ff). His main focus was on societal and political structure of the Nuer. He was not allowed to hold confidential interviews with individual Nuer; they had to be held in public and were subject to constant interruptions, which could have negatively affected the information provided. Additionally, the fact that he was financed by the Government of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and was assisted in his work by members of the administration together with those of various church missions could create bias in his thinking.

*Nuer Religion* (1956) explains the complex myriad of spirits and the Nuer's personal relationship with them. This relationship is detailed in Chapter 4. Persons of significance, whose roles impinged on those of a shaman (see Chapter 4) were the leopard-skin priest, one of whose roles was that of an intercessor for rain and the prophet, the mouthpiece of the Spirit, who exorcised evil spirits and could foretell the future (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 305ff). Johnson's (1990, 50) article on Nuer shrines being built over the remains of sacrificed oxen could have implications for the tumuli at Nabta Playa and is discussed in Chapter 5.

Lienhardt's (1961, viii) work is very much in the vein of that of Evans-Pritchard, a fact which he acknowledged. He gives an overview of the Dinka way of life and moves on to focus on their complex social and linguistic relationship with cattle. Animal sacrifice is the central religious act and cattle are the "perfect victims", (Lienhardt 1961, 10); this is discussed in Chapter 4. Death and mortuary practices are described with reference made to rites of separation and aggregation, the latter being symbolised by sacrifice to propitiate the deceased (Lienhardt 1961, 290). A large proportion of the book is dedicated to the Master of the Fishing Spear and the myths surrounding this priestly and political person (Lienhardt 1961, 210), one of

whose functions was rain-making, a function of a shaman. *The Dinka of the Sudan* (1972) was written by Deng himself a Dinka and an associate of Lienhardt. The book aims to portray life from procreation to the grave and the author was fully familiar with his material, although his knowledge could be tainted by his status (son of a Dinka Paramount Chief), despite stressing the egalitarian values of the Dinka. The beliefs of the Dinka are contained in one chapter which covers beliefs on death (Deng 1972, 122-136). He stressed that the religious nature of the Dinka is rooted in the demand for a secure life in this world and continued participation after death.

## **2.4 SHAMANISM**

Shamanism is an issue which has aroused much debate since there is no agreement on the definition of a “shaman” and thus shamanism has been identified throughout the world. The subject is discussed in greater length in Chapters 3 and 4 and therefore only the main works will be considered here despite there being a vast amount of topical literature. Many of the publications, books, in particular such as those of Eliade (1964), Hutton (2007) and Vitebsky (1995), are generalist in their approach. However, even such approaches provide pointers for the possible identification in prehistoric datasets of items, which could be interpreted as being shamanic in origin.

Eliade (1964), Hutton (2007), Pentikäinen (1998) and Vitebsky (1995) all state that shamans generally wear distinctive garments, which are often highly decorated and linked the shaman to an animal or bird. In instances where no such costume was worn, headdresses and belts fulfilled the same function. Pendants also formed part of the regalia (Hutton 2007, 79ff). The use of percussive instruments is also associated with the contacting of spirits by shamans (Hutton 2007, *passim* but in particular 81f; Needham 1967, 607; Pentikäinen 1998, 26ff;). Stones were thought to contain special powers (Vitebsky 1995, 82). Such artefacts do not provide absolute proof of the existence of individual shamans but the interrogation of these objects can lead to the conclusion that certain of the deceased had played a particular role in society. By comparison with what is known about shamans from the literature, it could be suggested that these individuals had shamanic powers. Rock-art is also a tool used for determining shamanic existence and is dealt with in Section 2.5. Thus, although not based

on archaeological finds but on ethnographic reports, this literature does have the potential for assisting in the identification of shamanism in a pre-literate society.

Price's edited volume *The Archaeology of Shamanism* (2004a) contains a number of studies on various aspects of shamanism. The book is meant to be an overview but Price admitted that there are omissions such as the classical world and desert religions of the Middle East. The focus is on the northern hemisphere. He (2004b, 7) argued that there was a plethora of literature on the history of shamanism and thus the aim of the book was to show its regional variations. Price (2004b, 3ff) gives a historical overview and touches upon the problem of the word "shaman" being used throughout the world to denote *any* person who interacts with the supernatural by whatever means and for whatever reason when originally it was used by the Evenk peoples of Siberia to refer to *specific* individuals who mediated and negotiated with the spirit world for the good of the community (see Chapters 3 and 4). The remainder of the book comprises studies of shamanism within different regional contexts and despite the focus on the northern hemisphere, the first study is that of the interpretation of the rock-art of the San Bushmen and altered states of consciousness by Lewis-Williams (2004a, 17-39). The most useful studies for the purpose of providing archaeological evidence of shamanism in a long dead society are those that are based on "hard" evidence such as artefactual evidence, iconography and artistic representations such as portable art, decoration of the shaman's ritual costume, iconography of metalwork and mortuary practice. The studies by Jordan (2004, 87-104) on the Khanty *isyl'ta-ku* healers and the *elta-ku* shamanic persons and enculturated landscapes and Walter, D. (2004, 105-119) of lineage mediums and shamans in Nepal have an ethnographic rather than an archaeological base but are important guidelines. Whilst other issues are important for shamanism such as gender identity, unless the archaeological evidence demonstrates, for example, a third gender, such a belief cannot be identified although such concepts cannot be dismissed. What Price does not do is to draw up a list of indicators of shamanism in the archaeological record. However, the book does reveal that whilst shamanism is not a static concept, it is not one that evades interpretation by means of archaeology. Price (2011, 998) identifies specific areas in the social environment that need to be investigated, many of which were covered in his 2004

publication. To these he adds war and aggression, leadership and subsistence strategies. It is only by studying all aspects would a better understanding of shamanism be reached.

Insoll (2004c, 145f) alluded to the problems of definition and believed much of the criticism of the extended use of the terms “shaman” and “shamanism” was valid since "shamans are now routinely identified under almost every 'archaeological stone'". Therefore, all, not just an isolated piece of, evidence within the given archaeological context should be taken into account when determining whether shamanism could be identified. Whilst Insoll's view is commendable, there will be times when the contextual framework is severely limited and recourse cannot be made to settlement or mortuary evidence because it no longer exists or has not been discovered.

The identification of the existence of shamanism must be viewed against different cultural backgrounds, giving rise to possible difficulties in identifying material culture that can be associated with a shaman and shamanism. VanPool (2009, 179ff) did not see the lack of a unified definition of a shaman as being problematical since she argued that most archaeological terms are defined in different ways by archaeologists but as long as they are used within a defined context, such terminology is useful. She distinguished several "*sacra*" or identifiers for shamanism in archaeological datasets: imagery (rock-art); noise makers and musical instruments; psychoactive plants and chemicals; and altars and activity spaces. Such would be evidence of the shaman's role in attracting spirit helpers, travelling between the different realms (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) and communicating with the supernatural. The more strands of evidence, the stronger the case.

## **2.5 ROCK-ART**

Rock-art is often cited as being an indicator for the determination of beliefs although it is accepted that not all rock-art could be explained in that manner, a view with which I concur. The theories about rock-art are dealt with in Chapter 3 and their application in Chapter 5, hence only the fundamental literature is reviewed here. The emphasis is on the work of Lewis-Williams and Whitley since they, and the former in particular, have played a major role in the advances made in the last two decades or so for the interpretation of rock-art.

Palaeolithic rock-art, for example that located in the Périgord and the Pyrenees, was initially thought to represent animals, that is, those that were desirable for eating (Reinach 1903, 258), and through magic ensured the proliferation of game on which the people depended (Bégouen 1929, 15f; Reinach 1903, 263). This theory was eventually undermined by Leroi-Gourhan (1964, 121), who, pursuing a structuralist approach, demonstrated that the animals depicted in Palaeolithic cave art were not primary food animals. The animal species were specifically selected and had varying symbolic signification. He (Leroi-Gourhan 1964, 108, 153) believed that prehistoric religion was based on binary oppositions with an emphasis on that of male/female or on the animal opposition of the bison or aurochs/horse. The cave was deemed to be symbolically female (Leroi-Gourhan 1964, 154). He (Leroi-Gourhan 1982, 58) dropped this emphasis later but retained his belief in the female symbolism of the cave, either "...as a whole or in certain parts". However, the theory of hunting magic was upheld in America by Heizer and Baumhoff (1959, 904f) and later, resulting from an appraisal of their work, by Garfinkel (2006, 231ff). Heizer and Baumhoff's theory of relating hunting magic and food procurement posited a processualist stance (Smith and Blundell 2004, 241; Walderhaug 2010, 216) since the rock-art depicted artistically a subsistence strategy (Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982, 493-495). It should be noted that Layton (2001, 314) refers to ethnographic evidence that some rock-art of the Columbian Plateau related to hunting magic. Lommel (1967) understood rock-art to be linked to shamanism.

With the emergence of cognitive theory, the tendency has been to interpret rock-art as visionary art, the result of altered states of consciousness of shamans (see Chapter 3 for explanation). The two main advocates of this approach are Lewis-Williams (numerous from 1980-2004a, b, c and d; with Dowson 2000; with Pearce 2009) and Whitley (e.g. 1992; 1994; 1998 a, b and c; 2001; 2011) in respect of South African San Bushmen art and North America respectively. Both made use of ethnographic material in their deliberations. Such an interpretation could be described as a paradigm shift. Lewis-Williams with Dowson (1988) used the approach to interpret Palaeolithic rock-art in Europe. However, all authors have stressed that such an interpretation is not applicable in every case.

Chippindale and Taçon (1998) in their edited volume, which was the first of its genre, emphasised the importance of the use of ethnography or ethnographic analogy

for interpreting rock-art or the Informed Approach and where none is available, recourse has to be made to the Formal Approach (see Chapter 3 for details). Six papers relate to the relationship to shamanism in North America, South Africa, Canada, Texas and central Asia. Chippindale and Nash's (2004a) volume focuses on the interaction of landscape and rock-art. Rock-art sites were selected as they were thought to have numinous power and became places of ritual. Several contributors discussed the concept of the rock face being a veil between the living and the spirit world and the rock-art could be seen as a portal (Helskog 2004, 265-288; Keyser and Poetschat 2004, 118-130; Taçon and Ouzman 2004, 39-68; Whitley *et al.* 2004, 217-238). The papers in the edited volume of Blundell *et al.* (2010), *Seeing and Knowing*, expand on Taçon and Chippindale's (1998, 6f) Formal and Informed Approaches to the interpretation of rock-art and indicate that in most cases the two are used in tandem. In the concluding paper, Price (2010, 281-289) emphasised the dynamic and differing natures of shamanism represented in rock-art. He also considered the question of whether recent ethnographies could be used in the study of ancient rock-art but concluded that it was not possible to dismiss indigenous analogies altogether.

The interpretation of visionary art is not universally accepted. Kehoe (2000, 73) opposed shamanistic interpretations. Bahn (1997, 181ff; <sup>15</sup> 2010, 130, 136) argued in the absence of hard evidence it was impossible to differentiate between shamanic and non-shamanic rock-art and did not accept the three stage trance had any basis in fact. Conkey (2001, 281) was sceptical about the universality of altered states of consciousness in hunter-gatherer societies. Layton (2000, 184), however, whilst accepting that some rock-art was shamanic, was concerned that "The shamanistic hypothesis is a voracious beast which can all too easily devour the world's hunter-gatherer rock-art" but maintained Clottes and Lewis-Williams had tried to restrain it. He did set out criteria for distinguishing shamanic rock-art from totemic (see Chapter 3). Dowson (2007, 49-61) who had previously been fully supportive of Lewis-Williams' interpretation of San rock-art with its over-riding cosmology of shamanism, decided such interpretation was no longer tenable and that it was time to move the debate on. Solomon (2000, 77) was highly critical of Lewis-Williams' work believing the San rock-art represented mythology and gender ideology. Taking

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<sup>15</sup> The text was written after the death of Bahn's co-author Vertut.

an opposite stance Pearson (2002, 158) argued that whatever the time and place, hunter-gatherer rock-art would relate to shamanic experience.

## **2.6 SITES**

### **2.6.1 Egyptian Western Desert**

Two locations of rock-art in the Egyptian Western Desert, Wadi Sura (Wadi Sura I: Cave of the Swimmers and Wadi Sura II: Cave of the Beasts) and Dakhleh Oasis with its environs together with the megalithic site of Nabta Playa and the Neolithic cemeteries of Gebel Ramlah, are of importance to this work. These are discussed in full in Chapter 5.

#### **2.6.1.1 Wadi Sura**

Le Quellec (2005, 67-74; 2008, 25-37; de Flers *et al.* 2007, 58ff) interpreted the unique rock-art in Wadi Sura as scenes linked to the ancient Egyptian conception of the world of the dead. He was adamant they were not shamanistic paintings. However, it is Bárta's (2010) *The Swimmers in the Sand* which is of fundamental importance to this thesis since his presentation of a paper on the subject at Pultusk, Poland, 2010 was the catalyst for my research. Bárta interpreted some scenes of rock-art in Wadi Sura II (Cave of the Beasts) as representing archaic beliefs which gave rise to ancient Egyptian religion (Chapter 5). He also identified a number of deities. He failed, however, to take into account the archaeological evidence published earlier by the University of Cologne (Riemer 2007, 30-33 esp. Fig. 3) revealing that the peoples of Wadi Sura did not migrate to the Egyptian Nile. In 2014, Bárta (2014, 188-201) reiterated his theories which remained unchanged. The results of University of Cologne's work in the Wadi Sura were brought together in *Wadi Sura – Cave of the Beasts* edited by Kuper (2013). The greater proportion of the book is devoted to images of the rock-art. Of the papers, that by Förster and Kuper (2013, 24-27) is critical of Le Quellec's and Bárta's conclusions.

#### **2.6.1.2 Dakhleh Oasis and Environs**

The female images discovered by Winkler (1939) were thought by him to be associated with a deity linked to fertility (Chapter 5 for a full discussion). McDonald (1990, 46) did not dismiss the goddess theory *in toto* and suggested a possible shamanistic interpretation. Further work was carried out by Krzyzaniak and Kroeper

(1991, 60) who discussed other possible identifications of these female anthropomorphs without discarding the goddess theory.

### **2.6.1.3 Nabta Playa and the Neolithic Cemeteries of Gebel Ramlah**

Although there are a number of articles on Nabta Playa, most are offshoots of the main publications on the excavations of the site by the Combined Prehistoric Expedition. These are the volumes on the *Holocene Settlement of the Egyptian Sahara*. Volume 1 (2001) by Wendorf *et al.* includes chapters on the archaeology and discussion of the various locations within the site such as tumuli, stone circles, megalithic alignment and ceremonial and ritual structures; overall little attention was given to the significance these locations may have had in respect of belief systems. The possible exception was the Complex Structures, with the discovery beneath Complex Structure A of a crudely shaped rock thought to resemble a cow (Wendorf and Królik 2001, 510ff). Wendorf and Schild (2001a, 1-10; 2001b, 648-675) wrote both the introduction which focuses on the history of the excavations and the conclusions which summarise the findings and places them in a regional context. Volume II by Nelson *et al.* (2002) focuses on the ceramics of Nabta Playa. Schild and Wendorf (2004, 15) believed the Complex Structures were linked to the circumpolar stars, where the deceased lived forever. Malville (2011; Malville *et al.* 1998; 2008), a palaeoastronomer, involved in the work of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition, focused on the astronomical interpretations of the stone circle and megalithic alignments in particular and links the former with the summer solstice and rain rituals using ethnographic data to support his conclusions and interprets the alignments as navigational guides.

The cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah, *ca.* 25 km from Nabta Playa also are the subject of a number of articles (for example Kobusiewicz and Schild 2005; Kobusiewicz *et al.* 2004 and 2009). They describe the burial sites and grave goods, the last mentioned in some detail. All this information is brought together in the 2010 publication *Gebel Ramlah: Final Neolithic Cemeteries from the Western Desert of Egypt* again with Kobusiewicz as lead author. This publication analyses the cemeteries and burials, both skeletal remains and grave goods in detail and considers the site's chronology. Similarities of the material culture with that of the Tasian/Badarian period (see Section 6.2.1 on the Tasian question) are mentioned which lead the authors to

conclude there was some reciprocal contact between the two. The issue of belief systems is not commented upon.

### **2.6.2 Badarian Period Sites**

The period is generally considered as being the first identifiable period in the Predynastic era. Settlement evidence is sparse (Brunton 1928; Brunton 1937 and 1948; Hendrickx *et al.* 2001). Thus attention has been concentrated on the evidence of cemetery sites of Badari, Mostagedda and Matmar. The main issues commented on were origin, chronology, economy and contacts; burials are reflected on but only from the point of view of detail (for example Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000, 17-43; Hoffman 1984, 136-144; Midant-Reynes 2000, 152-166. Wengrow's (2006, 70) more esoteric approach touched upon the configuration of relationships in life and in death and a wider configuration of the relationship of the landscape and non-human inhabitants of which burial rites formed a part. Specific analyses of the grave data in Brunton's work have identified social ranking within the Badarian populations (Anderson 1989; Castillos 1998, 255-259; 2000, 253-256; 2007, 9-17).

Despite the Badarian Period being mentioned in numerous publications, very little appears to have been written about the beliefs of the Badarian peoples. The seminal works are those of Brunton (1928; 1937 and 1948) but the only reference made by him (Brunton 1928, 42) was that little could be said about every day religious life: the presence of amulets suggested a belief in their efficacy and the discovery of large pots in the cemeteries indicated that feasts were held to placate the dead. That certain animals were revered was evidenced by their burial (see Chapter 6). Similar views were held by Baumgartel (1955, 63); Černý (1952, 17) and Hornung (1996[1971], 101). Petrie (1939, 8) suggested that the beliefs of the Badarians may be indicated by the discovery of human figurines, a view taken up by Baumgartel (1955, 23), who posited they were connected to the worship of a mother goddess, who was possibly revered in the form of a cow on the basis of the cattle burials. Murray, M. (1956, 89) maintained the grave goods elicited a belief in an afterlife. This too may be indicated by what appeared to be evidence of early attempts of mummification (Jones *et al.* 2014).

## 2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The multi-stranded nature of this thesis necessitates the confining of this literature review to only the most seminal literature. This chapter together with Chapter 3 form the foundation underpinning the remainder of this thesis. Chapter 3 builds and expands upon this review to set out the differing theoretical approaches to the anthropology and archaeology of religion, which provides for the determination of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

This literature review reveals that anthropologists, no matter what their theoretical background, have demonstrated the existence of belief systems, which were integral to the life of early societies. Such systems were related to both the natural and spirit world. They provided a means of explaining phenomena that occurred during life and providing answers to existential questions of being. This early period of Egyptian beliefs has largely been ignored by Egyptologists with an interest in religion, the focus being on the Naqada period which lies beyond this thesis.

The review has demonstrated how anthropology and archaeology can have a positive symbiotic relationship despite differences in their *raison d'être*. Religion is now being incorporated into archaeological hermeneutics. Evidence of ritual, one element of religion (although it can be a secular act), is thought to be identifiable in datasets because of its repetitive nature. The issue of death and burial are covered, with emphasis being placed on an interpretation of relationality. Reference is made to anthropological comparators, the Nuer and Dinka whose beliefs may provide an understanding of early Predynastic beliefs since their economies are thought to be similar. Since shamanism is deemed by some (for example Vitebsky 1995, 132-134 but, see Chapters 3 and 4 for details) to form at least part of the beliefs of early societies, the review focuses on archaeological identifiers. Rock-art is understood to be representative of cognitive thought; it is postulated that some can also be regarded as an identifier of shamanic beliefs, especially visionary rock-art. Reference is made to two major rock-art sites in the Egyptian Western Desert: Wadi Sura, the rock-art of which has been deemed to be linked to ancient Egyptian beliefs and Dakhleh Oasis and environs which appears to have archaeological links with Badarian sites. The megalithic site of Nabta Playa has been included in the review because of its importance as a ritual site. The cemeteries of Gebel Ramlah are also included

because of the similarities that can be discerned in their material culture and that discovered in the ancient Egyptian cemeteries of the Tasian/Badarian period, which is suggestive of a link between the two peoples. The review revealed that little has been written on the beliefs of the Badarian peoples, who occupied the earliest sites in the Egyptian Nile Valley. This early period of Egyptian beliefs has largely been ignored by Egyptologists with an interest in religion, the focus being on the Naqada and the Dynastic periods which lie outwith this thesis.

Whilst the esoteric probably cannot be identified in a dataset, it would be expected that evidential clues would be found in the material culture of prehistoric societies. Chapter 3 therefore, examines *inter alia* various *archaeological* theoretical approaches to determine their efficacy in identifying evidence of prehistoric religious beliefs as well as *anthropological* theories which can assist in the interpretation of the evidence. I also question whether “religion” is the correct term to be applied to these beliefs.

## Chapter 3

# THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I review different theoretical approaches in order to determine their applicability for the analyses to be undertaken. I also consider the interaction between archaeology and anthropology and the assistance the latter can give the former in the interpretation of data. The word “religion” is commonly used by both anthropologists and archaeologists, and as the word is accorded various nuances and meanings, I have deliberately placed the discussion on the appropriateness of the term for the use in respect of very early beliefs in Section 3.6 after the discussion on archaeological theory. Until that discussion, I continue to use the word “religion”. In addition to considering the main theoretical principles, I also consider various theoretical applications as the nature of the evidence is variable: ritual, rock-art, megalithic site and burials as well as a consideration of the anthropological concept of shamanism. It is apparent from this review that a single theoretical approach is not appropriate. Thus the framework I propose is, of necessity, an amalgam of approaches (see Sections 3.5 and 3.7.2).

The methodology section covers the form of the research and the means of obtaining the data necessary to arrive at conclusions on the origins of early Predynastic beliefs. I then discuss which theoretical frameworks will be followed for each of the sites and due to the diversity of approaches, I posit the application of “cabling” (Section 3.5) whereby different outcomes of various approaches can be drawn together to produce a strong argument.

### 3.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL THEORETICAL APPROACHES

#### 3.2.1 Early Views on Religion

Religion has not been a central focus of prehistoric archaeological theory in recent times. This is not to say that it was ignored completely. Childe (1945, 78) with his Marxist views deemed religion to be a delusion in perpetuating ‘theocratic’ despotism. Whilst grave goods were concrete expressions and embodiments of human thoughts and ideas (Childe 1956, 1), he was pessimistic about the ability to recover spiritual experiences. He (Childe 1947, 73) did concede that there were

dimensions that could be considered, for example temples and burials. To some extent Childe was correct; without religious texts and inscriptions as evidence, it is difficult in general to elucidate prehistoric beliefs from material culture remains. Religious institutions and spiritual life formed stage four of Hawkes' (1954) ladder of inferences, thus categorising it as the most difficult to interpret from archaeological evidence, the easiest being technical processes. He (Hawkes 1954, 162) did posit, however, that anthropology which provided an understanding of the development and underpinning systems of modern preliterate societies could be taken into account by archaeologists when interpreting this data, thus allowing for suppositions to be made about religion. He (Hawkes 1954, 162) emphasised that "...you cannot this way demonstrate what they did have, and you know you cannot even hope to unless you can show some real connection between *this* modern and *that* prehistoric". Notwithstanding Hawkes' views, claims were made for the identification of a belief in a prehistoric mother goddess or great goddess related to fecundity and fertility with the discovery of female figurines at Çatalhöyük (Mellaart 1962, 57, a theory developed by Gimbutas 1974; 1989; 1991). Additionally, Mellaart identified some structures at Çatalhöyük as being shrines; a designation later overturned by Meskell (1998, 46-62). I refer to goddess theory because it affected thinking in respect of the rock-art in the Dakhleh Oasis and environs as discussed in Chapter 5.

### **3.2.2 Processualism**

Processual or New Archaeology had little impingement on the archaeology of religion. Its emphasis was on the development of independent, more scientific ways of testing propositions about the past. Whilst its focus was subsistence and the development of technology, Binford (1962, 218-19), the main proponent of the Processual school, did recognise that one category of artefacts recovered by archaeology, ideotechnic artefacts, comprised *inter alia* religious objects such as figures of deities and clan symbols, which had their primary functional context in the ideological component of the social system. However, there does not seem to have been an interest in the beliefs that lay behind such artefacts. Even Binford's (1968, 17) Middle Range theory that was based on ethnographic studies of present day societies in order to identify commonalities with past societies also had to be tested against verifiable hypotheses. Again, this is not a suitable approach to be used for

trying to determine the abstract beliefs of a people. The opportunity Binford had to determine the beliefs of a people was in his ethnoarchaeological work with the Nunamiut of Alaska. He (Binford 1978, 427) referred to “powerful shamans” but elucidated no further. Binford’s (1983, 27ff) three great areas of archaeology highlighted the major concerns of processualism that is technology and subsistence, not religion:

- the behavioural characteristics of the earliest ancestors,
- whether the evolution of the essence of man should be regarded as a quantum leap or a process of accretional growth and
- the origins of civilisation.

According to Whitley (1998a, 9) the concept of religion was ignored and was considered to be epiphenomenal i.e. being of secondary interest. Religion belonged to the realms of palaeopsychology (Fritz 1978, 38). Archaeology was seen as a means for assisting the goal of anthropology to explain cultural differences and similarities (Binford and Sabloff 1982, 151). Processual methodologies are useful, to determine the social status of the deceased by their burials (Anderson 1989; Binford 1971, 23; Shennan 2009, 27-32; Tainter 1975 1-15) since statistical analyses could be undertaken to establish numbers and types of grave goods especially those of high value, quality of those goods and energy expenditure on graves. Such allows a hierarchical structure to be developed, whereas actual belief systems involving human emotions and engagement with the supernatural are more esoteric and cannot be subjected to such a scientific approach. Thus processualist theory will not be used in this work.

### **3.2.3 Post-processualism**

Post-processualism, which emerged in the 1980s, is an umbrella term covering a variety of theoretical approaches used to interpret the archaeological record. Its aim was to move away from the primacy of the theory of testing and to search for cultural meanings or symbolism behind the material culture and to determine social strategies to try to establish correlations between the present and the past (see Hodder *et al.* 1997, 242). It allowed, therefore, for a variety of theoretical approaches

to be used in the analysis of the archaeological record (Hodder 1995, 184).

Like all the previous schools of archaeological thought, religion did not play a prominent role in post-processualism despite its multi-pronged approach. Shanks and Tilley (1992, 130) with their Marxist approach refer only to ideology which is defined as "...an aspect of a limited practice, an aspect of relations of inequality... and that ideological practice misrepresents contradiction in the interests of the dominant group." into which religion is no doubt subsumed but is never specified. This is not to say that religion *in toto* is ignored by archaeologists; religion is a multi-faceted concept, as can be seen from the working definition (Section 3.6.1), with some aspects often being able to be identified in the material evidence such as ritual (see Section 3.4.1) and symbolism. Hodder (1995, 241) refers to the Neolithic period as being concerned "...with the symbolic and apparently irrational." He (Hodder 1990, 18f) initially interpreted the complex symbolism at the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük as being a metaphor of the wild (*agrius*) being brought into a social and cultured setting (*domus*), with no direct reference to the possibility of such symbolism having a religious connotation. However, after discussions with multi-disciplinary groups assembled to consider the topics of religion and spirituality at Çatalhöyük, Hodder (2010a 1-31; 2010b, 332-355) became convinced of the existence of religion during the Neolithic period. At Çatalhöyük rather than it be a discrete aspect of life, he believed it "...to have been an ever-present aspect of life..." (Hodder 2014b, 22). Thus at the important site of Çatalhöyük, religion now plays an important role in the interpretation of the dataset. This is not to imply that the subject is ignored or dismissed elsewhere, but it aptly demonstrates the importance of multi-disciplinary interpretations of evidence where such esoteric issues are concerned.

Post-processualism with its multi-stranded approach allows for diversity in the interpretation of data. The theoretical approaches which are pertinent to, and will be used in, this thesis include:

- Landscape: this was not considered a means of subsistence but was viewed as a dynamic entity created by those living in it (Ingold 1993, 152-174). It provided for those within it "... a sacred, symbolic and mythic space replete with social meanings wrapped around buildings, objects and features of the

local topography, providing reference points and planes of emotional orientation for human attachment and involvement” (Tilley 1994, 16-17).

- Personhood/Relational theory (Fowler 2004; 2011; 2013a and b). The bounded individual or indivisible self was in essence a product of Kant and Fichte’s philosophies (Mauss 1985, 22). However, anthropology showed there can be a different interpretation. People did not live in isolation but were in continuous relationships with those around them and also those from whom they had descended. They were not unique entities but dividual or composite beings, constructed as “...the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them” (Strathern 1990, 13). Dividual persons are also permeable (Fowler, citing Marriott 1976, 109-137). Thus a person is multi-authored comprising the substances and actions of others. It follows that the internal composition of a dividual person is affected by the succession of relationships during life. Dividual beings are partible in that the person is reconfigured “so that one part of it can be extracted and given to another person to whom it is owed” (Fowler 2004, 9). Relationships are also understood in terms of physical substances or objects. Based on Mauss’s (1990, 16) theory “...to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul”, the exchange of gifts, which themselves are multi-authored, affects a person’s identity. They are removed from the person who encapsulated them and absorbed by those receiving them. Personhood was therefore not static but constantly evolving (see Chapter 2 and Fowler 2004). Thus rather than being a person in control of his/her actions, a person is a relational entity embedded within a social context. Fowler (2004, 96) maintained that on death a person is relocated spatially and temporally, not as a whole but as an aggregate of different features. Sometimes parts of the body were retained and circulated thus maintaining a presence of the deceased in the community. Burial entailed the movement of personal substance, the renegotiation of value and transformation of personal identity among survivors as well as deceased (Fowler 2004, 81; 2013b, 253).

Fowler (2013b) also extends the theory to grave goods, which themselves have multi-authored complexity and therefore have multifaceted relational values with

those who created and/or owned them. Objects became entangled along with personhood of human beings. According to his relational theory, persons and objects are not self-contained or bounded but constantly undergo dynamic relational changes since they are the products of past and present relationships (Fowler 2013b, 2). Mortuary processes involve transformations, which can affect the assemblage of grave goods, some can be added, some taken away (Fowler 2013b, 230), each having a role to play. Each burial is an assemblage; each is unique but links to others with a similar object contained within the assemblage (Fowler 2013b, 222).

The dominant overall theme that emerges from the work is the importance of the role of the early Predynastic peoples in dealing with situations which lay outside their control. The material culture examined provides the essential clues as to the dynamism of these people in attempting to create environments that were conducive to their continuance both in life and in death. In other words they were acting as agents in ensuring the maintenance of their worlds. Whilst agency theory (Dobres and Robb 2000) is not specifically mentioned throughout, by implication it is an important underpinning premise.

### **3.2.4 Cognitive Theory**

Cognitive archaeological theory, like Post-processual archaeology, emphasises the importance of the individual and the community. The assumption is that in each human mind is a perspective of the world, an interpretative framework. People live together in communities, share the same culture and generally have the same cosmological viewpoints. The finds of archaeology “if skilfully interrogated” (Watson 1995, 685) can reveal the mental attitude of humans in the far past since material culture is essentially the product of the human mind and intentions (Renfrew and Bahn 2004, 394). The focus of cognitive archaeology is the human ability to construct and use symbols, rather than on their meaning (Renfrew 2002, 172). However, Renfrew and Zubrow (1994b, xiii) asked if it were possible to make the “... mute stones speak”; they therefore do not dismiss the possibility of the meaning of the symbols from being determined. Renfrew and Bahn (2004, 414) in their discussion on the archaeology of religion accepted that religion comprised a framework of beliefs relating to supernatural/superhuman beings and that in Durkheimian thought it was also a collective practice upholding society. This latter

theory was upheld by Rappaport (1971, 59-76). Marcus and Flannery (1994, 55) preferred to use the term ‘holistic archaeology’ since cognitive archaeology should be given equal weight with ecological, economic and socio-political archaeologies. The context of an object is also all important (Demarraais 2005, 144). According to Marcus and Flannery (1996, 36f), cognitive archaeology comprised the study of all those aspects of ancient culture that are the product of the “ancient mind”, in particular, religion, cosmology, ideology and iconography.

### **3.2.5 Summary**

Archaeological theory allows for the reflection on and interpretation of prehistoric material culture within a given framework. The above analysis shows that a processual approach is inappropriate. A multiple theoretical approach is essential for the present work since consideration must be given to diverse types of evidence, for which a single theoretical approach would be insufficient. Furthermore, in order to assist with the interpretation of data, reference must be made to anthropological theories. These issues are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

## **3.3 INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF ANTHROPOLOGY/ETHNOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

### **3.3.1 Use of Anthropology/Ethnography in Interpreting Archaeological Data**

Anthropology and ethnographic insight are valuable tools to be used in enabling interpretations of archaeological data to be made (Garrow and Yarrow 2010; Hodder 1982). The use of ethnography and/or ethnohistory and if neither are available, ethnographic analogy, is emphasised particularly by commentators on rock-art (Chippindale 2001, 262ff; Chippindale and Nash 2004b, 14; Layton 2000, 169-186; 2001, 311-331; Lewis-Williams 1980, 467-482; 2004a, 17-39; Taçon and Chippindale 1998, 6f; Walderhaug 2010, 216ff; Whitley 2010, 123; 2011, 307, 319). The reasoning is that much rock-art apparently represents religion/beliefs, which are resistant to change (see Bloch 1974, 58-81 who argues that religion is extremely formalised in nature and therefore is unlikely to change) whereas other aspects of life, such as technology, are subject to change as is the situation today. New beliefs and changes tend to be accommodated by indigenous peoples, who at the same time continue to follow their traditional beliefs. For example, in Africa it would appear that only those aspects of Christianity and Islam which coincide with the traditional

cosmologies are adopted (Horton 1971, 103f; Jok 2011). However, sometimes traditional beliefs can decline dramatically as a result of the imposition of stringent ideologies. Shamanism was badly affected by the soviet pogroms against religion and the imposition of communism in particular during the 1930s, although the collapse of the Soviet Union has resulted in its resurgence (Vitebsky 1995, 136). Thus, ethnographic information can provide vital clues and even evidence of the beliefs, or changes in beliefs, of earlier peoples, especially if the ethnohistorical data refers to a period just prior to the present time (see Whitley 1994; 2010, 118ff).

As far back as 1982, Hodder maintained that all interpretations of the past drew on theoretical and common sense assumptions of the people in the present "...in order to clothe the skeleton remains from the past in the flesh and blood of living, functioning and acting people." (Hodder 1982, 12). The use of anthropology by archaeologists is recognised but the fact there is not equal reciprocation is at present an issue of debate (see Garrow and Yarrow 2010). Both disciplines investigate complementary aspects of human societies (Thomas 2010, 183). Whilst archaeology can provide a long temporal trajectory, developments over time have to be inferred from objective data. Anthropology provides understanding of the development and underpinning systems of modern preliterate societies, which can be taken into account by archaeologists when interpreting data.

### **3.3.2 Problems in the Use of Anthropology/Ethnography**

Anthropologists, like archaeologists, draw conclusions from evidence that is partial (Strathern 2010, 175; Thomas 2010, 181). Anthropological evidence is subject to a number of weaknesses, including that of the problem of language, which can result in the misunderstanding of a situation (Bloch 1997, 212-215). Even if there is no language barrier, there is no guarantee that information is interpreted accurately due to possible misunderstanding of the meaning or nuances of the language. It could be that it is impossible for a person to articulate why for example a certain ritual is carried out in the manner it is since after a time actions become automatic; or it could be that the persons themselves do not understand the reason (Melas 1989, 151). Beliefs could be said to be derived from the ancestors and no further explanation given (Douglas 1966, 73). Regarding sacred rituals, it could be that the meaning of them was so powerful for the people concerned that only initiates, in particular elders, were allowed to participate and have knowledge of them. It could be that the

gender of the questioner was important in ascertaining such information. Douglas (1966, 172) stated that she was unable to ascertain the knowledge about the religious doctrines of the Lele of the Kasai "...because they were carefully guarded secrets of male cult members". Responses could be contradictory, evasive and sometimes misleading (Howell and Thomson 1946, 12). In addition, the ethnographer was not free from the bias of his/her own religious background and in some cases colonialism. There was also the possibility of a lack of rapport between ethnographer and the peoples being studied and that accounts could have *lacunae* (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 7ff). Thus, at all times it must be remembered that ethnographies are written by those outside the society in question, and this leads to bias and to ignorance (Kyriakidis 2007d, 297).

The usefulness of ethnography and ethnographic historical documents besides being dependent on their quality is also contingent on their understanding and interpretation. In cases where direct ethnographic or ethnohistorical data cannot be used, recourse can be made to ethnographic analogy. Such analogy cannot be understood to be an explanation of material culture. The ethnographic data used is not necessarily linked either geographically or temporally. Nor does it take into account possible changes in social conditions from the time of the prehistoric society being studied to that of the ethnographic analogy. Thus, it may be concluded that there had been no changes, a state of uniformitarianism existed. Analogy can only demonstrate similarities and differences between and give rise to possible hypotheses.

### **3.3.3 Basis of the Use of Ethnographic Material in this Thesis**

It is my belief that notwithstanding such problems, anthropology can and does play an important role where matters of interpretation are concerned. Hawkes (1954, 162) realised its usefulness as far back as 1954 in respect of religion. However, whilst the use of ethnographic analogy is of importance in the interpretation of archaeological data, it should always be understood that it does not and cannot provide a definitive answer, since, to state the obvious, it focuses on present societies, whereas archaeology, in the context of this work, focuses on prehistoric ones. Leach (1973, 761) was concerned that direct analogies would be made between the present ethnographic society and the archaeological past that "...primitive societies from the

20<sup>th</sup> century can be read as fossilized survivals from proto-historical or even Palaeolithic times.” There is a danger of direct analogies being made in order to arrive at a neat solution when faced with the conundrum of identifying and interpreting the material culture from a pre-textual period. However, I believe that anthropological theories should not be dismissed as being irrelevant and whilst archaeologists can never be *certain* of their appropriateness, such theoretical approaches as Ucko (1969, 262f) encouraged, should be used to increase the number of possible explanations which could then be considered by archaeologists when interpreting data. It is on this basis that I refer to ethnographic data on the Nuer and Dinka in particular in this work.

### **3.4 THEORETICAL APPLICATIONS**

#### **3.4.1 Ritual**

Ritual, like religion/belief, is an area which is difficult to define. As stated in Section 2.2.3.1, ritual can be secular in nature as well as being a facet of religion. In societies where there is an obvious divide between the sacred and the profane such as is the case in the present western world with its highly organised religions, the category of a ritual is more easily identifiable. However, this thesis focuses on an ancient people whereby such a distinction cannot be easily made from the material culture. Goody (1961, 151) pointed out that some preliterate societies did not distinguish between the natural and supernatural. Such societies very often did not distinguish between ritual and secular action. However, he (Goody 1961, 160) accepted that this did not represent a universality since conclusions on the matter could only be made by observation. The study of the observations and views of anthropologists, ethnographers and archaeologists undertaken for this research has led me to believe that whilst the beliefs of ancient pre-literate peoples would impinge on other areas of life, beliefs in the supernatural would be identifiable within their framework of life. It is the recognition of the evidence that is problematical. Rituals form part of that framework but not all rituals are public affairs, some are performed in private (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 182). This work focuses on rituals that involve the community as a whole.

What constitutes a ritual is also debatable. Kyriakidis (2007d, 294) defines ritual as “...an etic category that refers to set activities with a special (not-normal) intention-

in-action, and which are specific to a group of people". Rappaport (1999, 32) stressed that the vocal aspects of rituals are not entirely encoded since there is always the possibility for the rearrangement of, or the insertion of new, elements. Such change would have been authorised by a greater power than those enacting the ritual. The aim of the ritual was to bring about a positive result but such a result can never be guaranteed (Fogelin 2007, 58; Rappaport 1999, 32-46). The *raison d'être* of ritual was to maintain religious and socio-political order; to promote social cohesion in face of disaster and uncertainty; to communicate with ancestors and deities; to petition help from benevolent supernatural beings and to appease malevolent ones and to cure illness and ease anxiety (Marcus 2007, 67). However, there can also be subversive reasons for enacting rituals (Braithwaite 1984, 94f). Using Sperber's (1996, 81) argument, rituals are only understood because all involved, that is actors and audience, have similar linguistic ability and knowledge which allows for attainment of the same comprehension of the ritual. Whilst that is intrinsically correct, it is my view that interpretation is individualistic and discrepancies in meaning could occur in a purely spoken ritual not backed-up with textual evidence although the overall actions are probably understood in the same way.

The structuration of rituals is discussed by Rappaport (1999 23-68). His conclusions correlate on the whole with those of Bell (1997, 138). Rappaport's framework comprises the following:

- encoding by others than the performers (pp. 32-33)  
Rituals follow an order established or believed to have been established by others. The performers transmit the message.
- formality i.e. decorum (pp. 33-36)  
The various sub-rituals tend to adhere to the form of fixed sequences and to be repetitive, not spontaneous. They take place at specialised times and in specialised places.
- invariance (pp. 36-37)  
Rituals follow strict patterns which do not generally change.
- performance (pp. 37-46)  
Without a performance by actor(s) there can be no ritual.
- formality (pp. 46-50)

A contrast to functionality.

- communication (pp. 50-52)

In a religious context, ritual is a means of transmitting certain messages and certain sorts of information.

- self-referential/canonical messages (pp. 52-54)

Transmission of the immediate, particular and vital aspects of events/ encoded and enduring.

- Symbols (pp. 54-58)

The means of transmitting messages.

Titiev (1960, 293) argued that in primitive societies certain rituals involving the higher power(s) take place on a regular basis (calendrical), while others take place when an emergency arises, usually in a crisis (critical). The amount of emotional arousal created by a religious ritual is inversely proportional to the frequency of performance (McCauley and Lawson 2007, 238). Thus critical rituals will be high-arousal events and evoke long-term memories due to the amount of emotion.

The rock-art in Wadi Sura II will be analysed in accordance with Rappaport's framework to determine if it complies with each of the sections of that framework. The aim is to ascertain whether the rock-art resulted from ritualistic procedures. Cognisance is also taken of the theories of the frequency of rituals.

Ritual is also a catch-all term used for material culture that is unusual, is not properly understood and cannot be explained in a utilitarian manner (Brück 1999, 317). As stated above the word "ritual" can have both religious and secular connotations and in some societies, as seen above, the two can be difficult to differentiate. Therefore as an element of religion, ritual is difficult to identify. Hodder (2010a, 14f), whilst tending to use the word "ritual" in his works (for example Hodder 1982; 1999 and 2003), admitted that it can be difficult to distinguish.

Within processualism, ritual was interpreted in the main as a demarcation of status and social complexity especially that of mortuary ritual (Binford 1971, 22ff) and as a political means (Flannery 1976, 333). Ritual may, however, be discernible in the material culture of prehistoric peoples since they are generally repeated activities (Kyriakidis 2007c, 9). Renfrew (1985, 19f) produced a list of eighteen

archaeological indicators of ritual which can be conflated into four categories: focusing of attention, for example a location rich with repeated symbols; a boundary zone between this world and the next; the presence of a deity; and participation and offering. Not all of these categories, it was argued, would be found in an individual archaeological context. Such a framework would not be accepted by all. Kyriakidis (2007d, 299) makes an important point when he states that rituals have a visual effect on the landscape which acts as markers and memorials and enforce collective memory. Whilst not all rituals will have that effect, Kyriakidis' statement is important particularly in respect of the rock-art of the Western Desert sites discussed in Chapter 5. Ritual practice is understood to have a social role involved in the reproduction and renegotiation of social order (Braithwaite 1984, 93-110). Shanks and Tilley (1982, 133) encapsulate ritual as an ideological practice that legitimises the social hierarchies; Parker Pearson (1982, 101) takes a similar approach. The work of Bender *et al.* (1997, 147-178) on Bodmin Moor, Britain has shown how integrated Bronze Age settlement and ritual activity could blend together.

Ritual, whichever interpretation is accepted, secular or otherwise, emphasises the actor(s), that is the person(s) and this is true in mortuary rituals. According to Fowler's relational theory (Section 3.2.3), in which objects and humans are formed from, and contain, relationships and are relational to each other, ritual is understood to focus on the renewal and transformation of both the deceased and society, on the commemoration of relationships of the deceased who is an accumulation of relations and the product of relations with and between other persons in society (Fowler 2004; 2011; 2013a and b).

### **3.4.2 Shamanism**

Shamanism has been brought to the fore by cognitive theory in that the interpretation of much rock-art, which is the outward expression of human cognition, is of shamanic origin (for example Lewis-Williams *passim* including 1982; 1987; 2004c, 162; Lewis-Williams and Blundell 1998; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988 and 2000; Pearson 2002; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993; Whitley *passim* including 2004 and 2011). Today the word "shaman" is used universally to describe any person who has contact with the spirit world. Insoll (2004c, 86) cynically stated that "... if current fashions persist, the inhabitants of Çatal Hüyük will be interpreted as followers of shamanic practices!" That year, a paper appeared by Lewis-Williams (2004e) in

precisely that vein; his co-authored book with Pearce, *Inside the Neolithic Mind* (2009), included a significant section on the subject in the following year. Hodder (2006, 196-198) was certainly not dismissive of Lewis-Williams conclusions and the subject was one of the foci of discussions at two multidisciplinary Templeton projects involving Çatalhöyük (in the main van Huyssteen 2010, 105, 111, 116, 120; 2014, 128, 130).

The main, sometimes opposing, anthropological theories relating to shamanism are:

- A shaman is a person, male or female, who, by transformative means, interacts with the supernatural world, which includes spirits of nature and ancestors, for the benefit of the community. (Jordan 2004, 89f; Pentikäinen 1998, 50).
- The shamanic cosmos is a three tiered world. The upper world is inhabited by supernatural beings; the middle world by human beings and animals and the lower world by monsters and the spirits of the human dead. The boundaries of these worlds are permeable allowing the shaman to penetrate each layer (Jordan 2004, 88; Pentikäinen 1998, 44ff).
- A trance-like state is essential to enable a shaman to penetrate the different layers of the cosmos (Pentikäinen 1998, 49; Vitebsky 1995, 64).
- The shaman's regalia are impregnated with spiritual qualities (Devlet 2004, 43-55; Vitebsky 1995, 82-90).
- Shamanism is a universal phenomenon (Vitebsky 1995, 26-51; Winkelmann 1990, 308).
- It is a Siberian/central Asian phenomenon (Pentikäinen 1998; Rozwadowski 2012a, 194ff).
- It is generally associated with hunter-gatherer societies (Eliade 1964; Guenther 1999; Lommel 1970, 47; McClenon 1997, 346 *contra* Rozwadowski 2012a, 200; Whitley and Keyser 2003, 388).
- It is considered to be a religion (Eliade 1964, 11f; Guenther 1999; Lewis-Williams 2004c, 135; McClenon 1997, 349; Rozwadowski 2012a, 201– in parts of Central Asia; van Huyssteen 2010, 120; Vitebsky 1995, 11; Whitley *et al.* 2004, 233).
- It is not a religion *per se* but should be understood as intervening in religious life to provide meaning (Humphrey 2008, 524).

- It is a world view (Pentikäinen 1998, 61; Price 2004b, 13).

The archaeological approach focusing on shamanism is that of cognitive archaeology which, as discussed above, has focused on prehistoric rock-art as being the portal to the ancient mind, a view accepted here. The analyses of what has been identified as visionary rock-art assist in the understanding of the beliefs of those shamanic societies producing it. The review of the evidence on shamanism and the theories pertaining to it has led to an initial hypothesis that very early Predynastic beliefs were likely to be “shamanic” in nature. The evidence for this is examined in the following chapters before a final conclusion is reached.

### **3.4.3 Rock-Art**

Rock-art is an expression of human cognition by means of visual communication. Its interpretation, like other material culture, is often difficult to determine especially with the passage of time since the image’s inception. Basing his view on ethnographic data, Whitley (2011, 307) maintained that most rock-art was religious in nature. Whether an image was understood by the indigenous population as a whole at the time is unknown unless there is direct ethnographic evidence to that effect. Otherwise recourse has to be made to ethnographic historical records and/or ethnographic analogy, which might indicate an interpretative hypothesis and is in accordance with Taçon and Chippindale’s (1998, 6f) theory of Informed Methods. However, as seen in Section 3.3.2, the interpretation of ethnographic evidence is subject to influences on the parts of the provider and receiver of that information. If ethnographic material is not available, Taçon and Chippindale (1998, 7f) advocate the use of formal methods which involve no inside knowledge. The information is restricted to that intrinsic within the images or which can be discerned from their relationship to each other and to the landscape, or by relation to whatever archaeological context is available. They advise that wherever possible both methods should be used.

Archaeologically, until recent years in many parts of the world, rock-art was often marginalised. Early theories about rock-art tended not to be concerned with religion *per se*. In America the focus in the beginning was on the identification of culture traits in order to define culture areas (Whitley 2001, 12). During the ensuing period, structuralism continued to be deployed in addition to semiotics to analyse rock-art

(Lewis-Williams 1972 and 1974); it was deemed to be “art for art’s sake” (Halverson 1987, 63-71 and 82-89); to have a functionalist purpose that is as a means of communication, initially as mnemonic aids for children to assist their cognitive development (Mithen 1988, 323) but later as a means of enabling hunters to retrieve information relating to stalking animals and thus enabling strategies to be determined (Mithen 1996b, 86ff). In addition, the view that rock-art should be a structured communication system continued with Helskog (1995, 247) believing there was a need to continue to search for “maleness” and “femaleness” in rock carvings.

With its multi-stranded approach, post-processualism witnessed a more positive approach to rock-art, with a number of theoretical approaches coming into play such as gender (Solomon, in particular 1992, 291-329) and post-structuralism such as reading rock-art as text (Tilley 1991). Tilley (1991, 26ff) divided the rock-art at Nämforsen, northern Sweden into four pages with each unit equating to a sentence. I am sceptical about such an approach here because although the rock-art considered is a means of communication, it does not lend itself to being parsed in a grammatical or syntactical manner. This is especially so of the Wadi Sura paintings whereby the images of the beasts, which should be interpreted as being the most important because of their size, appear to be placed randomly on the rock face. The fact that Tilley then analysed the rock-art using different theoretical paradigms<sup>16</sup> suggests that he did not accept *in toto* this approach but accepted that the Nämforsen rock-art was capable of different interpretations as a result of being analysed using a plurality of theoretical approaches. He (Tilley 1993, 125) does however state that he stretched aspects of structuralism to show its inadequacy.

From a phenomenological viewpoint, the location of rock-art in the landscape is important in understanding its role. A locale within the environment would have been selected because of its significance and feelings of power emanating from it experienced by the peoples concerned. Tilley (1994 31-33) argued that one way to make a place sacred is by the use of visual symbols. If such a place has a liminal dimension associated with the sacred practice, such as symbolic iconography, people experience the extraordinary. The surface of rocks was thought to be the veil

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<sup>16</sup> Structuralism, hermeneutics and structural Marxism.

between this world and that of the supernatural and spirits. Natural fissures were incorporated into the art work thus becoming one with it. Images emerging from such fissures were identified as spirits emerging from their hidden world (Taçon and Ouzman 2004, 39). Thus rock-art produced for a non-profane reason must have aroused emotions in those seeing it rather than a feeling of neutrality. According to Lenssen-Erz (2004, 144ff) the amount of ritualistic rock-art there was in a location could be correlated to an increase in the number of rituals being performed which was indicative of critical conditions being experienced. However, it is the theoretical approach of cognitive neuropsychology of the Altered State of Consciousness (ASC) that has made an impact on the interpretation of the meaning of rock-art thought to be shamanic in origin.

#### **3.4.3.1 Cognitive Neuropsychological Theory: Altered States of Consciousness (ASC)**

It was during the Middle Palaeolithic transition or earlier in the Palaeolithic (see Section 1.2.1) that the modern mind emerged and is deemed to be the same as that of today. On that basis, stimulation of early nervous systems would produce virtually identical hallucinatory visions and experiences as would those of today. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978, 295ff) realised that the shapes seen by the Tukano of Columbia (Fig. 3.1) during a trance experience were similar to the images produced during the first stage of human trance experience identified as a result of Knoll's laboratory conducted experiments in Munich (Fig. 3.2). These involved the application of electrical pulses to the temples (see Kellogg *et al.* 1965, 1129f; Knoll and Kugler 1959, 1823f). Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978, 292) identified three stages in the Tukanos' hallucinatory experience. He (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978, 297ff) also noted that after-images of these signs remained for up to six months. He stressed the point that the Chocó, who lived more than 1,000 km from the Tukano, also saw similar geometric signs during a trance experience. Oster (1970, 83) referred to the fact that phosphene-like figures appeared in prehistoric cave drawings and folk art. Siegel's (1977, 132-140) controlled experiments with hallucinatory drugs had similar results as did his observations of peyote-taking Huichol Indians of the Sierra Madre of Mexico (Fig. 3.3). Such hallucinations were due to the excitation and arousal of the central nervous system (Siegel 1977, 139f). An examination of Horowitz's (1975) and Siegel's (1977) work revealed there were three stages of the hallucination. **The**

**first stage** comprises geometric forms (entoptics). In **the second stage** attempts are made to make sense of the entoptic forms by interpreting them as familiar objects. These forms or construals are often dependant on the person's disposition (Horowitz 1975, 177ff). **The third stage** is entered by a tunnel or vortex. In this stage complex combinations of imagery (iconics) are seen; entoptic signs may still be present in the imagery (Siegel 1977, 132f). Like stage two, the images in stage three are culturally influenced. These three stages are not necessarily sequential. Some people move straight to the third stage whilst many only progress as far as the first (Lewis-Williams 2001, 340; 2004c, 130; 2004d, 107; Fig. 3.4). Hallucinations can be caused by a variety of means not just the ingestion of hallucinogenic substances; other means include drumming, singing, rhythmic dancing, fasting, meditating, fatigue and hypnagogia (a transitional state to and from sleep). The application of this theory in respect of rock-art entails the analysis of the images to determine whether the images can be classified according to stages 1-3 outlined above. Much of the rock-art identified as resulting from a shaman's trance experience focuses on stage one – entoptics – but that does not dismiss images that would result from stages 2 and 3. However, caution must be observed since entoptic signs in the form of spirals and circles forming rock-art that is deemed to be totemic (see Section 3.4.3.2) can denote an ancestor's sacred site (Munn 1973, 138).

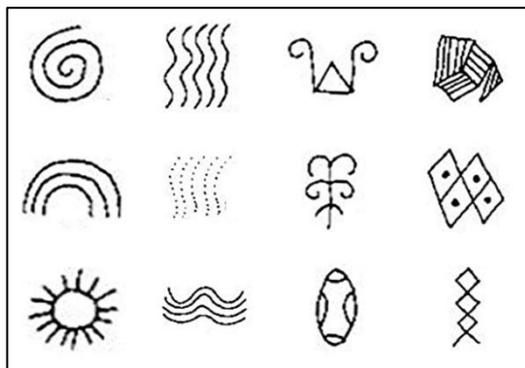


Fig. 3.1: Examples of Tukano entoptic signs (After Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978, Fig. 8)

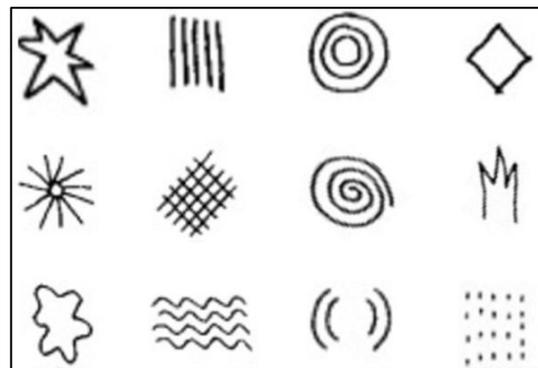


Fig. 3.2: Examples of electrically induced entoptics in more than a thousand of Knoll's patients (After Oster 1970, 87)

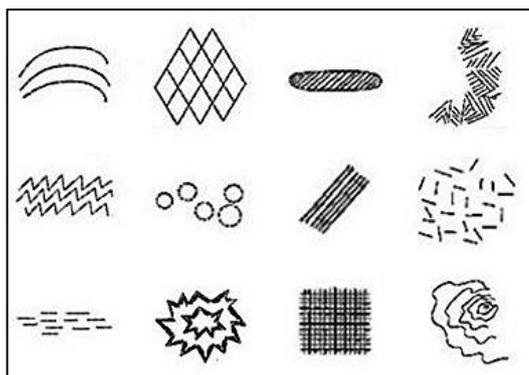


Fig. 3.3: Examples of entoptic shapes seen during hallucinations. (After Siegel 1977, 138)

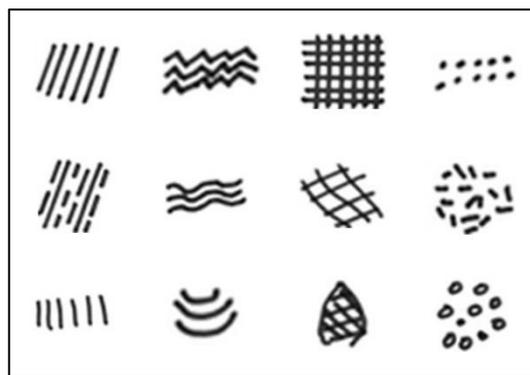


Fig. 3.4: Examples of entoptic shapes. (After Lewis-Williams and Dowson 2000, Figs. 25 and 26)

The cognitive neuropsychological ASC model has been applied by Lewis-Williams (numerous including: 1999; 2003; 2004b, c, d and e) on San rock-art in South Africa and on that of the Palaeolithic in France and Spain (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, 201-217 and 232-238). Whitley (e.g. 1994; 1998a, b and c; 2011, 308ff) used the model on the Shoshonean rock-art in the Coso Range of the Great Basin in California. In all three areas, ASC was deemed to have played an important role in the production of the rock-art (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, 201).<sup>17</sup> Later Clottes and Lewis-Williams (1996, 131) emphasised that not all Palaeolithic art could be interpreted in a universal manner; a thesis supported by Price (2011, 990). The decoration of Irish Neolithic passage tombs has also been identified as being shamanic (Dronfield 1995; 1996) as has some Central Asian rock-art (Rozwadowski 2004, 65-86). The theory of shamanism and rock-art on its own or with ASC has aroused much debate and criticism (Bahn 1996, 55-57; 2001, 52-58; 2002, 87; 2010, *passim*; Francfort 2001a, 31-49; Hamayon 2001, 1-27; Helvenston and Bahn 2003, 213-24; Kehoe 2000, 71-75; Le Quellec 2001, 135-159; 2004, 173ff; Meighan 1982, 226ff.; Solomon 1999, 51-60; 2000, 77f; 2001, 163). Bahn's (2010) extremely critical publication in the view of this work appears at times to border on the personal.

<sup>17</sup> In their 1988 paper, Lewis-Williams and Dowson used Whitley's unpublished material on the Shoshonean rock-art at Coso. Prior to their work, Kirchner (1952, 271ff) had interpreted the tableau in the Lascaux caves comprising an ithyphallic man lying before a bison as representing a shaman in a trance; reference to shamanism in the Palaeolithic is referred to by Eliade 1964, 503; Lommel 1967, 149 believed rock-art showed shamanism existed in the Magdalenian period (*ca.* 15000-1000 BC-Lommel's dates).

### 3.4.3.2 Totemic Rock-Art

That not all rock-art is shamanic is agreed by most commentators. Some could be deemed to be secular whilst others could be what Layton (2000, 169-186) interprets as being totemic (see Section 2.2.1 for the interpretation of totemism). In the main, totems appear generally to have been a species of animal or plant but as is the case with the Nuer and Dinka (see Chapter 4) sometimes inanimate objects are deemed to be totems; all are ritually celebrated. In the context of rock-art, the totem is probably best defined as an emblem. However, an emblem is not selected arbitrarily; there are reasons for its adaption. Thus an emblem must have significance for those that come within its ambit. According to the *New Oxford Shorter English Dictionary* (Brown (ed.) 1993, 804) an emblem is a symbolic representation of *inter alia* a quality. A totem is deemed as such by a community because its qualities are those with which the people desire to be associated. Therefore a relationship is formed between the two. For the Dinka, the emblem is representative of the clan's deity who gives the clan strength (Lienhardt 1961, 116). The most common aetiology of the emblem was the birth of twins, one of whom was human and the other the emblematic form of the deity; another was that the deity in emblematic form had helped a clan ancestor who was in trouble (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 84). No matter how totemism is understood or interpreted, no matter what western gloss is given to the term, the basic underlying principles of an animal or plant (or even an inanimate object) being associated with the clan ancestor and thus the symbol of that ancestor formed a significant part of the belief system in modern early societies such as Native American Indian and Australian indigenous tribes as well as in present day Nilotic societies (see Chapter 4). This suggests the same situation could have pertained in at least some prehistoric societies.

The interrelation of animals and humans is a factor in both totemism and shamanism. However, as Ingold (2011, 115) cogently argues, in totemism, humans and the animal totem share the same ontological essence of the ancestor. Whilst shamanism involved the invocation of the supernatural through the medium of trance and certain animals may be chosen to assist the shaman in this encounter; these animal species are not the "sole property" of individual shamans. Layton (2000, 176) argues that a difference can be detected in shamanic and totemic art. Shamanic rock-art tends to predominate at an individual site or to occur throughout the territory since the animal

is not the preserve of any one group (Sauvet *et al.* 2009, 322). Clan totems or, as Layton refers to them “symbols”, are frequently animals. He (Layton 2000 180f and Fig. 5) has shown that art depicting such symbols is concentrated at significant points in the clan’s territory or across a region. Barton *et al.* (1994, 185, and 200) argued that representations of clan totems were *inter alia* boundary markers. Whilst this theory is criticised by Smith and Blundell (2004, 252) on the grounds that such boundaries often have no cultural demarcation marks and are often not fixed, I believe totemic art would signify ownership of, or claim to, land.

### **3.4.4 Landscape**

The location of the rock-art in the landscape is integral to its understanding. Landscape was not considered a means of subsistence but was viewed as a dynamic entity created by those living in it (Ingold 1993, 152-174). The landscape provided

*“... a sacred, symbolic and mythic space replete with social meanings wrapped around buildings, objects and features of the local topography, providing reference points and planes of emotional orientation for human attachment and involvement”* (Tilley 1994, 16-17).

The rites of passage for example birth, initiation and death take place within the living landscape, which becomes integral with the rituals performed. Each rite contains a liminal phase which Turner (1977, 95), building on van Gennep’s (1977[1960]) work, stresses is the state of “noneness”, of being neither here nor there. Haaland and Haaland (2011, 26f) argue that the liminal phase would take place in areas within the landscape which could be considered to be liminal. Such places could be identified as locations for additional ritual activities. Caves can be understood to be liminal locations. Their entrances are on the surface but the body of the cave is hidden. Rock shelters may be understood in a similar manner. Such features could become woven into a mythological ethos with an influence on the present day inhabitants of that landscape. However, it cannot be automatically assumed that a topographical feature in the landscape was charged with meaning for those living in it in the past. Sometimes it is the small and often to the Western eye insignificant forms that are pregnant with meaning even if the landscape is full of interesting topographical features (Smith and Blundell 2004, 248).

### **3.4.5 Multifunctionality/Meaning**

Baines' (2007, 310) theory on multifunctionality of objects and Derchain's (1976, 7-10) theory that art has multi-layered meanings are useful theories to apply in particular to the decorated grave goods, which reflect the views of the society which created them. Baines (2007, 301) contends the term 'art' can be applied to ancient objects and that such objects are generally multifunctional. Thus to accept that a piece of work only had one function resulted in other uses being ignored (Baines 2007, 310). Additionally, analyses of art should not ignore its symbolic meanings (Baines 2007, 298). Derchain (1976, 7) argued that the real meaning of ancient Egyptian art is not the apparent one; there are different levels of meaning each playing an important role. Baines' theory links to that of Derchain (1976, 7) in that ancient Egyptian art was open to interpretation at different levels from the straightforward representation of the artistic work to the underlying meaning of the various components of that work taking into account the multifunctionality of the piece.

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

The theoretical approaches to be utilised in this work are drawn from the above. In order to establish the nature and character of the belief system of the early Predynastic Egyptians, I believe that once humans became cognitively aware of the natural world, which they inhabited, they would have developed beliefs about its workings and its effect on their lives. Belief systems are therefore an amalgam of thoughts and beliefs about different aspects of life (and death) as the definition above indicates. Due to the diversity of the nature of beliefs, it is clear that the evidence will also be heterogeneous in character. Thus a single theoretical approach is unsustainable. Rather several are employed (see Table 3.1). Processual approaches are inappropriate since belief systems, esoteric in nature do not lend themselves to being tested against verifiable hypotheses or to statistical analyses. Belief systems result from the cognitive process of sifting and storing information that is important and recalling it in times of need or times when explanations are needed about the workings of the world. Whilst it is not possible to establish precisely what is in the mind of an individual or community, using cognitive theories of archaeology, it is possible to gain an understanding of the nature of those thoughts. A cognitive approach, including ASC where applicable will be used in particular for the rock-art

evidence, since rock-art is the external dimension of inner thought. Shamanism is not so straightforward since multiple theories come into play and require further more in-depth consideration, which forms part of Chapter 4. Section 3.7.2 below describes in detail the theoretical approach. Certain post-processualist approaches are also applicable such as those concerning landscape and context; relational theory in particular will be used when discussing burials. Baines (2007) and Derchain's (1976) theories of multifunctionality and levels of meaning will be applied in the deliberations on grave goods.

As already discussed anthropology and ethnography are important adjuncts to archaeology in Wadi Sura. The rock-art in Wadi Sura II particularly, since it portrays the largest number of images of the headless beasts, will be analysed in accordance with Rappaport's theory of ritual since it is my belief that the tableaux represent a rain ritual. Recourse will be made to ethnographic analogy when discussing the rock-art. This multi-stranded approach lends itself to Wylie's (1989; 1993) "cabling theory", which will be used to draw together the outcomes of these approaches to produce a cable made up of many strands and therefore a stronger argument. Wylie's theory is based on Peirce's (1974, 5.265.3) work developed by Bernstein (1983, 69) that arguments used to evaluate non-linkable theories do not proceed in linear mode, from link to link, from premises to conclusion or from individual facts to conclusion but rather by the consideration of multiple strands and diverse types of evidence, data, hunches, arguments to support a scientific theory or hypothesis.

*"Any one of these strands may be weak in itself and insufficient to support the proposed theory but collectively they produce a stronger warrant for rational belief than any single line of argument – like a strong cable that is made up of multiple weak strands"* (Bernstein 1983, 69).

Wylie's (1989, 13) deduced interpretation of archaeological data necessitated the questioning of archaeological data together with other data drawn from other sources such as ethnography, anthropology, sociology, to produce strands of reasoning. *"They are compelling taken together because it is highly implausible that they could all contain compensatory errors"* (Wylie 1989, 15; 1993, 25): in other words it is unlikely that all the strands contain the same biases.

Theory	Aspects			
	Shamanism	Burial	Grave Goods	Faunal
ASC	x			
Rock-art	x			
Shamanic	x	x	x	x
Landscape	x	x		
Ritual	x	x		
Ethnographic	x	x		x
Cabing	x			
Personhood/Relational		x	x	x
Contextual <sup>1</sup>	x		x	
Multi-functionality/meaning			x	

Table 3.1: Theoretical Approaches used to determine Belief Systems  
x= theory used; <sup>1</sup>that is location of find

### 3.6 A QUESTION OF SEMANTICS: RELIGION/ WORLD VIEW/BELIEF SYSTEM

I have used the term “religion” in this work up to this point because that is the term most readily used by the scholars whose work and theories I have reviewed. However, consideration now needs to be given as to whether it is the correct word to use in respect of the beliefs of early prehistoric peoples. According to Smith (1991, 37f), the word “religion” is a relatively recent western concept and was originally applied to Christianity. Its roots lay in the Reformation but it was in the Age of Enlightenment (1650s-1780s AD) that religion achieved its present form (Saler 1987, 395). Religion became identified with communities with long traditions of complex beliefs and faith to which the West has accorded them identifiers (Smith 1991, 60). He (Smith 1991, 50) believes that the word should not be used because it is confusing and often distorting. Many cultures have or had no word for religion.

However, as the word has been used by anthropologists and archaeologists, its use cannot be dismissed. The word “religion”, originating from old French is derived from the Latin *religio*, refers to piety, life or a community lived according to suppositions about the will of God, an obligation or bond (Brown (ed.) 1993. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 2538). Further definition refers to a superhuman controlling power or powers:

*“... entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship, or in a system defining a code of living especially as a means to achieve spiritual or*

*material improvement; acceptance of such a belief (especially as represented by an organized Church) as a standard of spiritual and practical life; the expression of this in worship etc."* and

*"action or conduct indicating such belief; in plural, religious rites."*

All the definitions imply either reverential behaviour to God or to the following of codes of behaviour/philosophies laid down by those who were regarded to have great wisdom.

The word *religio* reaches back into antiquity. However, its etymology is uncertain. There are two possible derivations: *re-legere* – to go through or over again as in reading, speech and thought and *re-ligare* – to bind. From the beginning, commentators were divided over their use: Cicero (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) in *De Natura Deorum* (2, 28, 72) derived the origin from *relegere*, his concern being the attitude that is the reverence and diligence of humans towards the gods. Lactantius, an early Christian philosopher *ca.* 250-325 AD, in *Divinarum Institutionum* (Book 4, 28) referring to Lucretius (1<sup>st</sup> century BC), understood religion as having its roots in the word *religare* and was concerned about an external power. Augustine (354-430AD), one of the Fathers of the early church, also adopted this derivation (see *De Vera Religione* 55, 113). Religion was not concerned with observances and beliefs but with the personal confrontation with God. The purpose of detailing these early understandings of the meaning of *religio* is to emphasise that there was no generally accepted definition. An examination of *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Glare 1968, 1605f) and that of Lewis and Short (1955, 1556-1557) reveals a multiplicity of meanings of *religio*, although the emphasis is upon that which is divine or sacred and the need to carry out observances in a reverential manner.

*Religio* is therefore used in relation to human aspects to the divine, whereby the divine are identified deities. Thus in my view religion, based on the word "*religio*" involves observances of organised, even codified, beliefs in the worship of either a divine being or divine beings, which are gods. Such a system would require specialists, that is priests, to administer the system. Whilst this thesis deals with beliefs in supernatural beings, it is my belief that these beings were not conceptualised as actual deities and thus the use of the word "religion" is incorrect.

The other two possible terms are world view and belief system; both concepts are localised to individuals and communities. World view has a wide connotation comprising a set of fundamental beliefs, attitudes, values which determine or constitute a comprehensive outlook on life, including belief systems. Thus a world view encapsulates all aspects of life, which impinge on each other. A belief system is a set of precepts based on experience, which explain the workings of the world. It provides a structure for life and help to cope with and explain life's events (Usó-Doménech and Nescolarde-Selva 2014 (see also Atran (2004) and Boyer's (2001) views on the origins of religion in Section 2.2.1). Since this thesis focuses specifically on the very early beliefs of transhumants/pastoralists regarding the powers of nature and death and the afterlife, the term "belief system" is deemed to be the most suitable.<sup>18</sup> Hence the review of the different anthropological theoretical approaches outlined above allows for the identification of commonalities in belief systems of different preliterate or traditional societies. These, when drawn together, form a useful working definition.

### **3.6.1 Working Definition of Belief System**

The dominant concepts that emerge from the review of views of social anthropologists in relation to religion (Chapter 2) are:

- A belief in supernatural beings.
- Public rituals and heightened sense of awareness.
- Use of symbols.

In addition, the following suppositions can be made about the theoretical application of belief systems. They are:

- Coping mechanisms when faced with the vicissitudes of life; they help to provide explanations of the inexplicable.
- A framework for life thus creating order.

On the basis of these conceptual approaches and suppositions, I propose the following working definition of a belief system:

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<sup>18</sup> Although I use the term 'belief system' henceforth, in instances where I refer to a work in which the word 'religion' is used, I retain its use.

*Belief systems are derived from the reaction of bewilderment or fear of the unknown; in other words they are a human and emotional response to the challenges of the world. These beliefs give meaning to the inexplicable; they can be related to a supernatural entity or entities and if so usually involve a set of practices and trappings that allows engagement with such beings. Symbolism usually plays an important role. These beliefs can be societal or personal.*

### **3.7 METHODOLOGY FOR THIS THESIS**

#### **3.7.1 Method of Approach**

Archaeological evidence may suggest the earliest inhabitants of the Nile Valley originated in the Western Desert. Thus in order to answer my research question on the origins of predynastic religion, I have focused initially on sites in that region. The first of these is Wadi Sura for which claims have been made that the rock-art motifs there are linked to the origins of ancient Egyptian beliefs (see Chapter 1). I then consider the rock-art in the Dakhleh Oasis and the megalithic ritual site of Nabta Playa since archaeological evidence suggests there was contact between those sites and Badari. Although the sites of Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda are the earliest in the Nile Valley, habitation evidence is sparse. I have therefore focused on the cemetery evidence of those sites. The recently discovered cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah, which are believed to be associated with Nabta Playa, are also considered to determine if they reveal similar funerary beliefs to the Badarians.

The main focus of the discussion on funerary practices is on the Badarian cemetery sites that were excavated by Brunton prior to the first half of the last century. I had hoped to use Brunton's diaries and records of his excavations as part of this research but investigations have shown them to be lost (Stevenson 2014, personal communication). I have therefore relied on his published excavation reports (1928, 1937 and 1948) which are not comprehensive and do not always accord with the Town and Grave registers contained within them. Of the 633 burials, 272 (approximately 43%) had been disturbed and therefore I have concentrated on the 333 (approximately 53%) undisturbed burials when discussing grave goods to ensure confidence in the findings since the context is secure. Where relevant, I do refer to artefacts in partly disturbed graves. I have considered the various categories of grave

goods virtually in totality, although more attention is given to the non-organic objects since their preservation is better. Certain categories of objects, for example, those that are decorated, I consider as having a greater, symbolic significance since the decoration is not essential to the basic function of the object (see Baines 2007, 310; Hendrickx 2011, 256, note 1; Hendrickx and Eykermann 2012 23-72; Wilkinson, R.H. 1999). Some objects I believe are connected to shamanism and are discussed in Section 6.6.

A breakdown of Badarian graves and grave goods is given in the Appendix. The tables forming the Appendix comprise a compilation of the graves contained in Brunton's excavation reports in respect of the cemeteries at Badari (Table 1a), Mostagedda (Table 1b) and Matmar (Table 1c) and his grave registers which appear as plates within those reports. The tables are comprehensive breakdowns of the burials (those of individual animals are highlighted). These breakdowns are based on grave number and where information is available on the state of grave, sex/age of the deceased, position of head and the grave contents. The main divisions of the tables relate to the state of the graves with the initial focus being on those that are undisturbed, followed by those considered by Brunton to be partly disturbed and then finally those graves quite disturbed. All are in grave number order. Since this work focuses on undisturbed graves in the main, this breakdown allows for ease of consultation. At the end of each site table there is a numerical breakdown according to the state of the graves of the sex of the deceased together with the numbers of sub-adults. The site tables form the basis of those in Chapter 6 on aspects of burials and grave goods.

Prehistoric belief systems are abstruse and their existence is dependent on the interpretation of the evidence in the light of a wide range of archaeological and anthropological findings. Thus I have examined a number of anthropological and archaeological theoretical approaches and concluded that a single theory approach would leave many questions unanswered in respect of each site due to the heterogeneous nature of the evidence. Consequently a flexible multi-theoretical approach has been adopted and the different strands of reasoning cabled as discussed by Wylie (1989 and 1993), to produce a stronger argument. The sites in question have not been analysed in this way before. That of Wadi Sura was based on identification with much later iconography and textual evidence (Chapters 1 and 5)

and work on the rock-art of Dakhleh Oasis has focused in the main on the sexing of the anthropomorphs (James 2010; 2012). The excavators of Nabta Playa (2001) used ethnographic analogy to determine the meaning of the stone circle and the need for water but did not consider the possibility of shamanism. The cemeteries of Badari have been subject to analyses to determine social status and ranking (Anderson 1989; Castillos 1998; 2000; 2007).

The literature on the sites in the Western Desert focused on official reports of excavations and articles on various aspects of the work undertaken. Unfortunately during my period of research, the political situation in Egypt did not allow for visits to be made to the Western Desert sites.<sup>19</sup> To supplement the written records available, contact was made with significant researchers working at all the Western Desert sites under consideration and in particular Heiko Riemer, Heindrich-Barth-Institute, University of Cologne and András Zbory, independent researcher (Wadi Sura); Mary McDonald, University of Calgary (Dakhleh Oasis); Romuald Schild, Polish Academy of Sciences and John Mckim Malville (University of Colorado) (Nabta Playa). Conferences, in particular the triennial “*Egypt at its Origins*”, which focuses specifically on the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, were also attended in order to ascertain the latest findings and to discuss in detail those findings with the authors of the relevant papers.<sup>20</sup>

After undertaking in-depth archaeological and anthropological literature searches, the details of the publications were tabulated in a basic manner for ease of retrieval. The table contained details of the author, name and date of publication and the summary of the main issues with a keyword being allocated to facilitate searches. In the thesis where only parts of publications are relevant, I have given the year of publication and the appropriate page numbers; in instances where the whole publication is relevant only the year is cited.

A significant number of artefacts from Brunton’s excavations, which relate to the Badarian period are in the collections of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the British

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<sup>19</sup> Additionally the site of Badari on the east bank of the Nile has also been destroyed (Friedman 2014, personal communication).

<sup>20</sup> I have attended three Origins conferences: 2008: venue: British Museum, London; 2011: venue: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; 2014: venue: Institut français d’archéologie orientale (IFAO), Cairo.

Museum, London and the Petrie Museum of Egyptology, London. Since the objects, form an evidence base for the discussion in Chapter 6, I thought it important to examine them at first hand since the monochrome imagery in Brunton's excavation reports is sometimes of poor quality. A close examination of objects provides a better appreciation of their materiality including the vibrancy and variety of colours and workmanship. It also allows sight of details that are sometimes not discernible in an image but which can be constructive in the development of arguments. The objects most relevant for this research are part of the collections of the British Museum and the Petrie Museum of Egyptology, London. Several visits were made to both; the aim being, after examining the objects to photograph them. The British Museum objects referred to in Chapter 6 are so well displayed that it was possible to make a careful examination of their main attributes, which was essential for this work. Although photography was undertaken, permission was only granted to use images from the British Museum website. At the Petrie Museum of Egyptology a handling session of objects I had identified as being integral to this work was arranged. Photography was permitted as was the use of the photographs in this work.

If this thesis were concerned with early Predynastic social ranking, it would be imperative to have carried out such tasks as measurements, numbers of objects per grave and the grave size. However, results of such analyses do not indicate the esoteric nature of a belief system. What do they signify? What is their meaning? How do they relate to the dead? These are matters based on archaeological and anthropological theory. The dead do not bury themselves, thus the role of the living in dealing with death is also a paramount consideration. Such is the approach taken in this thesis.

### **3.7.2 Theoretical Approaches: Sites**

The general theoretical principles applied in this thesis have been discussed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 above. Each site is now considered in more detail. The sites fall into three main categories: rock-art, megalithic and funerary, with each category demanding a different theoretical approach (Table 3.2). Due to the diversity of theoretical approaches used, the application of cabling theory will be essential throughout. It will be noticed that fewer theoretical approaches are used in relation to Gebel Ramlah. The reason for this is that in the main, theories relating to burials

and grave goods will be discussed in relation to the three Badarian sites: Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda; hence the arrows on the following table.

Theoretical Approach	Wadi Sura	Dakhleh and Environs	Nabta Playa	Gebel Ramlah <sup>1</sup>	Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda <sup>1</sup>
Rock-art	x	x			
ASC	x	x			
Landscape	x	x	x		
Ritual	x	x	x		x
Shamanic	x	x	x		x
Ethnographic	x	x	x		x
Personhood/Relational				x →	x
Contextual <sup>2</sup>				x →	x
Multi-functionality/meaning				x →	x
Cabling	x	x	x		x

*Table 3.2: Theoretical Approaches: Sites*

<sup>1</sup>Cemetery sites

<sup>2</sup> Used here in the sense of location.

### **3.7.2.1 Rock-Art Sites: Wadi Sura and the Dakhleh Oasis and Environs**

With regard to the rock-art sites several theories will be utilised. The placement of rock-art in the landscape is an important element for determining the nature of rock-art considered. Thus theories concerning landscape together with those regarding totemic/shamanic art will be considered. When analysing the actual representation, Taçon and Chippindale's (1998, 6-8) Formal Approach and Informed Methods will be utilised. The latter is commonly used to identify symbolism and meaning, contributing to an understanding of the religious implications of the art (Whitley 2011, 318). As stated previously in Section 3.5, those in the Wadi Sura form tableaux and Rappaport's (1999) theory of ritual will be used to determine whether they are ritualistic representations. Additionally, since the tableaux contain representations which do not have parallels in the natural world, a cognitive neuropsychological approach will be applied to determine whether they represent trance images. Where relevant throughout, ethnographic material will be used to suggest possible explanations and meanings. General theories regarding ritual will be applied to determine whether the artistic representations in Dakhleh and environs are connected with rituals.

### **3.7.2.2 Nabta Playa**

This megalithic site is examined using landscape theory. Consideration will be given to other megalithic structures in the Sahara and elsewhere to try to identify possible purposes. Since it is believed that Nabta Playa was a site of aggregation, consideration is also given to its probable ritual nature. Ethnographic data will be used to provide possible analogies in addition to theories of shamanism to determine whether the site could be considered to be a locus of such a belief system.

### **3.7.2.3 Gebel Ramlah**

This cemetery site is located *ca.* 25 km NW of Nabta Playa. The section is mainly descriptive since the theoretical concepts that arise in respect of burials and grave goods are discussed in Chapter 6 to avoid duplication. However, reference is made to the theories of personhood/relationality and multifunctionality/meaning.

### **3.7.2.4 Badarian Sites: Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda**

The focus of discussion is centred on burials. The approaches applied are: landscape theory and relational theory which considers the relations between the living and the dead as well as the grave goods being aspects of a relational person; ritual theories; theories of multifunctionality/purpose and context whereby the function and purpose of grave goods are considered and the context in which they were discovered. Evidence of shamanism is considered both relating to human and animal burials.

## **3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has reviewed social anthropological approaches to religion with a view to determining commonalities which can be used to draw up a working definition for the purpose of this thesis. However, since the period covered by the thesis is 6,000-3750 calBC, the word “religion”, which creates a mental image of organised practices and codes of behaviour together with specialist priesthood is, I believe, inappropriate. Thus I have used the term “belief system” in its stead. Archaeological theories are also considered. Since the material culture is not homogeneous in nature, I have attempted to demonstrate that a single theoretical approach is unsustainable. Thus from the theories considered a theoretical framework has been devised by which the evidence for early Predynastic belief systems will be considered in which cabling theory plays an important role.

The importance of ethnography assisting in the interpretation of archaeological data has been stressed. This theme is continued in the first part of the next chapter where the focus is on the cattle herding societies of the Nuer and the Dinka, whose lifestyles could give an indication as to that of the early Predynastic Egyptians. The second part of the chapter expands on the theories of Shamanism. Thus, the following chapter provides background information deemed to be essential in determining the nature of early Predynastic beliefs.

## Chapter 4

### SHAMANISM AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS OF THE NILOTIC PEOPLES: THE NUER AND THE DINKA

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides essential background for the task of trying to ascertain the nature of beliefs held by the early Predynastic Egyptians. The first part relates to shamanism, a belief system which a number of scholars believe was integral to hunter-gatherer and/or early pastoralist/nomadic societies (for example Hultkrantz 2007[1993], 12; McClenon 1997, 346; Ouzman 1998, 31; Pentikäinen 1998; Rozwadowski 2012a, 200; Vitebsky 1995, 30; Winkelmann 1990, 319f; 2006, 143). Atran (2004-see Section 2.2.1) argues that supernatural beliefs existed from a very early stage and developed as a means of coping with people's existential anxieties; people exploited specialist cognitive faculties to solve an array of inescapable, existential problems that have no worldly solution. Shamanism adopts such an approach. The problem is that there is no universal acceptance of the functionality of the shaman or of what beliefs and practices constitute shamanism (Section 3.4.2). The result is a myriad of conflicting opinions resulting in the entrenchment of positions as will be demonstrated in the following exposition. My focus is the consideration of the various aspects of shamanism together with the role and functions of a shaman to determine where the weight of evidence lies. From the various views proffered, a definition can be formulated, which I believe is appropriate to this work. The argument of this thesis is that shamanism formed an element of the developing belief system of the early Predynastic Egyptians. This conviction is based on the identification in the material culture examined of a number of aspects which might be attributed to shamanism.

Chapters 2 and 3 emphasised the importance of anthropology as a tool for interpreting archaeological datasets. If no direct ethnography was available, ethnographic analogy might cautiously be employed where it was deemed that there was comparability even if the analogue were chronologically and/or geographically separate. There is, of course, no ethnographic evidence in respect of the early Predynastic Egyptians, which therefore necessitates this approach. On the basis of economy and biosphere, the present day cattle herding cultures whose territories also

lie along the Nile such as the South Sudanese Nuer and Dinka, may provide an apposite ethnographic analogy. There is no guarantee that these reflected that of the early Predynastic period. Nevertheless, as Mithen (1996a; see Section 1.2.1), has noted the modern-day mind-set is similar to that of the prehistoric peoples, so it is feasible that a study of the beliefs of the Nuer and Dinka could provide essential indicators. In the examination of these societies, it became apparent that they too have shamanistic features. Furthermore, Hultkrantz (1966, 147-148; 1978, 23) posited that societies with comparable ecological and subsistence backgrounds develop similar belief systems. Thus the belief systems of the modern cattle herders in South Sudan may in essence be similar to the beliefs of the early Predynastic Egyptians and are thus worthy of consideration.

#### **4.2 SHAMANISM**

The word “shamanism” is deemed by a number of scholars (for example Pharo 2011, 11; Price 2004b, 6) to be an anthropological construct to describe the rituals and practices of the shaman. This presents the first problem as scholars have differing views as to what shamanism comprises, thus giving rise to multiple interpretations. Secondly in Section 3.4.2 I have noted that there is disagreement whether the concept is: found in hunter-gatherer societies; a universal or Siberian/central Asian phenomenon; a world-view or a religion. The key to these conundrums rests with the interpretation of the word “shaman” a contentious term in itself.

The word “shaman” is hypothesised to have originated within Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries from the Siberian Tungus Evenk word *šaman*. The term was used by explorers to denote those carrying out similar roles within other tribes across the region, even though those people did not use the term itself. Siberia is often regarded as the cradle of shamanism, because of the derivation of *šaman*. There is no single agreed understanding of the term “shaman”. For example Hultkrantz (2007[1993], 8) interprets a shaman as being a magician or conjuror, Lewis (1997, 119): a specialist in religious ecstasy and Pentikäinen (1998, 49): “...a person with special supranormal skills”. Kehoe (2000, 8) says the root of shaman is *sa* the verb to know and refers to “...an especially knowledgeable person”. According to Rozwadowski (2012b, 278f) almost every culture within Siberia and central Asia has its own name for the office and within single language groups the name differs regionally. Although a Tungus derivation is normally accepted, Hutton (2007, 114) points out

that the most common Siberian word for a shaman is *kam*. He also moots the possibility that Buddhism may have been an influencing factor since the *Pāli*<sup>21</sup> word for a Buddhist monk is *sha-man* and a 12<sup>th</sup> century inscription refers to one as a worker of wonders. If the Pali word was absorbed by the Tungus peoples, this would give support to Shirokogorov's<sup>22</sup> (1935, V3, 100) view that Buddhism had an influence on shamanism.

The word "shaman" has been applied widely to cover a number of functionaries, a number of whom may have some commonalities. Shirokogorov (1935, V3, 94) is emphatic that a shaman could be of either sex.<sup>23</sup> The term is used to describe medicine-men/women, ritualists, healers, diviners, protectors of animals. Other definitions of a shaman are: Eliade (1964, 182): a doctor and a healer; Gilberg (1984, 21f) gives a number of definitions including: a clairvoyant, diviner, exorcist, healer, rainmaker; Glick (1970, 42): man of power; Guenther (1999, 427): someone who could handle forces on which lives depend; Kehoe (2000, 8): "...religious leaders, men and women who serve their communities by using hand-held drums to call spirit allies."; Lommel (1967, 76 and 140): priest, doctor, "sorcerer", poet and artist; Pentikäinen (1998, 11): healer, priest, fortune-teller, psychopomp, epic singer and politician; Price (2004b, 6) refers to beliefs that the shaman is "...almost any kind of mediator in any kind of medium, between one perception of the world and another" and Vitebsky (1995, 10, 25): doctor, priest, social worker and mystic, in some communities they have different powers. Lewis-Williams (2004a, 32) acknowledged the existence of a rain shaman. Thus the term because of its uncritical usage by anthropologists is not helpful, since the variety of definitions would imply different roles. However, I agree with Vitebsky (1995, 25) that shamans do not perform in exactly the same manner no matter their culture. Scholars are clear that there can be other specialists performing certain ritual tasks within the same community as the

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<sup>21</sup> Pāli is the language of many of the earliest extant Buddhist scriptures.

<sup>22</sup> Shirokogorov undertook fieldwork on Tungus shaman just before and at the beginning of the Russian Revolution and his work represents a first-hand source, "the most sophisticated analysis of Siberian shamanism yet made" (Hutton 2007, 38). He lived with the Tungus for six years and mastered several dialects of the language and so was able to talk to them directly (Hopkins 1938, 151f).

<sup>23</sup> Female shamanism according to Vitebsky (1995, 41) flourished in the Far East but the difference between them and their male counterparts elsewhere was that these female shamans did not go on spirit journeys and penetrate the other levels of the cosmos. According to Jordan (2004, 91) women became powerful shamans once they were post-menopausal as shamanic powers were inimical to menstrual blood (Whitley 1994, 365).

shaman. There must be some functionality of a shaman that distinguishes him/her from these other specialists. The one characteristic that is identified in the literature is the shaman's ability to control his/her relations with the spirits.

Shirokogorov (1935, V3, 94) was concerned about the need to identify shamans from other practitioners and especially those practising sorcery, magic or mysticism. The defining feature of a shaman for him (1935, V3, 96) was ecstasy – a shaman who could not enter that state would never have credibility. However, ecstasy or trance is a feature of other belief systems such as Sufism. Shirokogorov, however, records an added dimension, the shaman “exteriorates” his soul and either descends to the lower world (V3, 110) or ascends to the upper world (V3, 111). The soul journey is embarked on by the shaman for the benefit of the community. This soul journey is taken up by Eliade (1964, *passim*) and Guenther (1999, 427), although Vitebsky (1995, 10) states that it is not a necessary element of shamanism. Pentikäinen (1998, 39, 44) argued that the role of the shaman is to mediate with the spiritual world, within the relevant ontological zone. Hultkrantz (2007[1993], 8) stressed that when in a trance, guardian spirits assisted the shaman in achieving the necessary psychic state to establish a rapport with the supernatural world by means of a soul journey. Hutton (2007, 88) agrees that the spirit journey is an important element of shamanism, although he admits, like Lewis (1971, 46), that some shamans absorbed spirits into their bodies i.e. possession; this was the practice in a number of Siberian societies. A way of accommodating the differences according to Hutton (2007, 90) was to consider them as sequential acts: that the shaman caused the spirits to enter him at which point he questioned them and finally he flew with them. Perhaps that is too neat an explanation. One fact cannot be overruled and that is that the shaman's performance would differ according to the situation. As stated above, the practices and rituals of shamans are not homogeneous and therefore there will be differences in the complex of methods used, and to those methods, new ones can be introduced (Shirokogorov 1935, V3, 95). Taking that into account I offer the following definition of a shaman:

*The shaman is not worshipped by the community but is regarded as the one who, with the assistance of spirit helpers usually in animal form, can on a voluntary basis, penetrate the boundaries between the physical and non-physical worlds in order to deliberately interact with supernatural*

*entities. Such interaction is carried out whenever necessary for the benefit of the community in order to maintain its well-being with the cosmos.*

It is this ability to contact the spirits on such a basis that sets the shaman apart from other ritual specialists.

#### **4.2.1 Is Shamanism a Religion?**

The collective belief of shamanism evolved when missionaries, who understood shamanism to be a pagan religion, sought to convert the Siberian peoples to Christianity during the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century (Pentikäinen 1998, 20f; Price 2004b, 4).<sup>24</sup> From the beginning there was dispute as to whether shamanism should be regarded as a religion or not (Price 2004b, 4). During the period between the two World Wars, shamanism was believed to be a psychiatric/psychological concept and shamans were considered to be mentally ill (Vitebsky 1995, 140). Shamanism also came within the ambit of Marxism; it was understood to be a means of power and of controlling production; shamans were also considered to be psychopaths (Price 2004b, 4f). To some, it is still considered to be a religion (Eliade 1964, 4, 11f; Lewis-Williams 2004c, 135; McClenon 1997, 349; Rozwadowski 2012a, 201; van Huyssteen 2010, 120; Vitebsky 1995, 11, 132-134; Walter, M.N. 2004, XXII; Whitley *et al.* 2004, 233). Hultkrantz (1978, 11; 2007[1993], 11) argued that shamanism was just one aspect or configuration within a religious system. Pearson (2002, 162) regards shamanism as an early religion whilst Guenther's (1999, 430) stance was that shamanic religion was diverse not static due to the fact that the societies in which it flourished were varied. Humphrey (2008, 524), whilst not arguing that it was a religion *per se*, claimed that shamanism intervened in religious life and infused it with meaning.

Others believe it to be a world-view (Price 2004b, 13), which can be interpreted as a way of life that covers such areas as environment, economy and social structures (Pentikäinen 1998, 61 and 77-81). Shirokogorov (1935, VI, 11) was adamant that shamanism was **not** a religion on the grounds that it was not a fixed stabilised system and also because it lacked ethics. Since shamanism does not have codified beliefs and as the practices and rituals of shamanism are not consistent across cultures, in my view it should not be classified as a religion. In Section 3.6, I discussed the

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<sup>24</sup> See these two authors for a brief history of shamanism: Pentikäinen 1998 and Price 2004b, 3-16.

meaning of world-view which is an all embracing view of life of which belief systems form a part and which is community based. I believe that shamanism does broadly conform to the definition of a belief system in Chapter 3 in that:

*It is a human and emotional response to the challenges of the world. Shamanism is linked to the community; the practices and rituals carried out by the shaman also involve the community in his/her efforts to maintain equilibrium. Therefore, by participating, the members of the community have a perception of how the problem may be resolved. Direct contact with the supernatural is the essence of shamanism and this is achieved by the shaman wearing special regalia when conducting specific rituals pertinent for the problem in question.*

Thus it is my belief that shamanism forms a psychological and cognitive element of the world-view concept.

#### **4.2.2 An Original World-Wide Belief System?**

Whether shamanism is a world-wide phenomenon is the basis of a protracted controversial debate. A number of scholars (for example Hamayon 1990; Kehoe 2000, 102; Rozwadowski 2012a, 194 and 201) believe it should just apply to Siberian cultures where it is still a living tradition. Others, such as Eliade (1964); Guenther (1999, 426ff); Hutton (2007); Vitebsky (1995) and Winkelman (1990, 308; 2004, 193, 195; 2010, 165) believe shamanism to be a more or less universal concept, although Siberia is generally understood to be the classical locale. Vitebsky (1995, 10) deemed it to have many similarities no matter where it was practised.

Hultkrantz (1978, 27-30) believes shamanism is found in areas where there are traces of Palaeolithic culture. Cave art of that period has been linked to the altered state of consciousness (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996). Many scholars accept that shamanism is a belief system of hunter-gatherers/fishers and early nomadic/pastoralist societies (Eliade 1964; Francfort 2001b, 247; Guenther 1999, 426ff; Hultkrantz 2007[1993], 12; McClenon 1997, 346; Pentikäinen 1998; Rozwadowski 2012a, 200; Vitebsky 1995, 30f; Winkelman 1986a, 17f, Table I; 1990, *passim*; 2002, 71f, 83 and 95; 2004, 193ff; 2006, 139, 142ff; 2010, 159f, 163ff, 167). In small societies with a simple societal and political structure, it is

believed the shaman held a pivotal role since such societies tended to be exposed to more adversity such as hunger, disease, warfare and extreme climates (Gilberg 1984, 25-26). As societies grew more complex, the role of the shaman evolved eventually into that of a priest (Winkelman 1989; 2006; 2010).

In order to answer these questions, Winkelman (1990, 313; and Table 1; 2006, 141) undertook an in-depth cross-cultural survey<sup>25</sup> which concluded that some magico-religious practitioners found in Eurasia called shamans were more similar to practitioners in the Americas and Africa than they were to other magico-religious practitioners within their regions. While some shamanism may be the result of diffusion, for example northern Asia and North America, a fact Kehoe (2000, 4) denies, arguing that that the spread of shamanism was due to commercial contact with Russian fur trade enterprises. However, diffusion cannot be the explanation for all occurrences. Winkelman's study (for example: 1990, 319f; 2006, 143) showed that shamans belong to societies where there was no political integration beyond the local level, that is hunter-gatherer and early pastoralist societies. In this, Winkelman (1990, 320) agrees with Hultkrantz (2007[1993], 12) as well as with the latter's (Hultkrantz 1966, 146) view that shamanism is an ecologically and socially determined belief system. Thus societies with such ecological backgrounds will have similar belief systems.

The moot point is how did Winkelman arrive at this conclusion? Although early societies were not regimented in form and as seen above, shamanism was a complex of beliefs and practices that were not consistent where practised, Winkelman's study (2004, 195) revealed that shamanism contained what he referred to as a number of universal characteristics, for example ASC, use of chanting, percussion, music and dancing; animal spirits and community rituals. The first-mentioned of these many believe has a fundamental similarity even though the inducer may be different (Winkelman 1986b, 178ff). How can these universals be accounted for? The answer lies in the workings of the brain. According to Winkelman (2002, 73ff; 2004, 197)

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<sup>25</sup> An empirical comparative study covering a timespan of approximately 4,000 years based on a final dataset for 59 magico-religious practitioners found in a stratified subsample of 45 societies selected from the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS), which comprises a 186 society sample judged to be representative of the geographical, social and cultural regions of the world (Conclusions: Winkelman 1986a; 1989; 1990; 2002; 2004 and 2006). For details about the Sample see Murdock and White 1969, 329-369, the list of societies included in the sample see pp. 333-336.

the neurological bases of these universals are neurognostic<sup>26</sup> structures and reflect fundamental brain operations and structures of consciousness, perception, awareness and cognition. Mithen (1996a, 151ff) postulated that the brain was capable of integrated thought from the Middle Palaeolithic Transition (Section 1.2.1). A specialized innate modular intelligence developed with specific functions: natural history; social intelligence, technical and linguistic intelligence (Mithen 1996a, 67, 166). Winkelman (2004, 196) believes that shamanic universals have the necessary cross-modal integration which are characteristic of this period of the emergent features of Palaeolithic thought and facilitated adaptations to the ecological and social changes of the Upper Palaeolithic. Processes such as singing, dancing and clapping and acting out displays, important in ASC, have their parallels among chimpanzees and great apes and therefore indicate the existence of an expressive system before language. Such episodic behaviour was apparent in early hominids (Donald 1991, 164) and thus would be present during the Middle Palaeolithic. Thus, shamanism could have played a role in cognitive and social evolution through analogical thought processes, visual symbolism and group bonding rituals that were central to the management of the cognitive and social consequences of the Middle/Upper Palaeolithic transition period and the emergence of modern human cognition. Thus, since humans from that time, until and including the present day, have similar neuropsychological systems, it can be argued that a comparison can be made between the prehistoric and modern day hunter-gatherers. It is natural that not all agree with Winkelman's study, for example Pharo (2011, 10), who argues that comparisons should be made on the special religious techniques used but it seems to me that from the list of universals given Winkelman (2004, 195) has incorporated these in an objective manner. Bahn (2002, 87), although focusing on the issue of shamanism and Palaeolithic rock-art, is also extremely critical of "...this deeply flawed and largely groundless theory..." although he offers nothing in return. However, the past is the past and there can never be ultimate proof but the fact that Winkelman uses a cross-cultural approach for his thesis (a fact that Bahn ignores), does, in my view, give credence to his conclusion. It provides good reasons why shamanism contains universals across the world and also accounts plausibly for its appearance at a very early stage in prehistory.

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<sup>26</sup> Neurognosis: initial organisation of the experiencing and cognising brain.

Whilst bearing in mind the difference between shamanism and totemism was highlighted in Section 3.4.3.2, Winkelman (2002, 75f; 2004, 203ff) argues there is a link between them and also with animism on the basis of psychological and cognitive similarities. His argument is persuasive. All three relate to human relationships with beings in the natural world. Animism is a universal concerned with the relations with beings in the natural world. According to Bird-David (1999; Section 2.2.1), the creation of supernatural entities formed a part of animism. Shamanism is about the development relationships with such entities and manipulation of these relationships by their internalisation within the shaman's psyche. This relationship is one of reciprocity; shamans during a ritual performance make use of their powers internalised within them as a means of achieving the desired result. In return the spirits benefit since such rituals emphasise their importance to the community through the shaman and they are objects of sacrifices to ensure continued assistance (Shirokogorov 1935, V3, 95). Totemism involves the relationship with the clan totem, often taken from the natural world representing the ancestral spirit. Winkelman (2002, 75f; 2004, 203ff) perceives these belief systems as natural symbolic systems which provide for an alternative identity of the internal self which is differentiated and manipulated in its interactions with spiritual entities.

#### **4.2.3 Main Tenets of Shamanism**

The central tenet of shamanism is the three tier construct of the world (see Table 4.1), although there may be further subdivisions. The boundaries between these worlds are permeable. Dreams enabled people to penetrate these boundaries (Pentikäinen 1998, 81) but only shamans have the ability to do this on behalf of others through rituals. This they achieved by entering a trance-like state or altered state of consciousness.<sup>27</sup> This does not mean the shaman is always unconscious but is sometimes in "a non-ordinary psychic state" (Reinhard 1976, 7). As Rozwadowski (2012a, 194) points out, although a trance state, no matter how essential for shamanism, cannot be equated with shamanism since individuals can enter a trance state for their own purposes. Shamans on the other hand enter such a state on behalf of the community and thus fulfil a societal need. Where trance like states were entered, the method used depended on the cultural background of the shaman.

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<sup>27</sup> Eliade (1964), possibly the first to believe that shamanism was diffused across the world, described shamanism as "archaic techniques of ecstasy". Hutton (2007, 110) believes there is no firm evidence that an altered state of consciousness was entered, rather 'state of consciousness' was a western concept.

Hallucinogenic drugs were therefore not the only means of achieving the state; other methods such as sensory deprivation, meditation, sensory stimulation for example rhythmic percussion for instance the use of drums and rattles, clapping, dancing and chanting have the same result. Evidence shows that trance induction techniques result in a common set of psychophysiological changes and that trance states share basic characteristics (Winkelman 1986b, 175).<sup>28</sup> Although the experiences of shamanic societies today can be used to understand those of remote times, the interpretation of shamanic experiences will inevitably be couched in terms of the relevant culture.

	<b>Lower World</b>	<b>Middle World</b>	<b>Upper World</b>
Jordan (2004)	Human dead and illness spirits	Humans and animals	Divine beings
Pearson (2002)	Spirits, ghosts and monsters	Humans. Spirits often inhabiting springs, caves, rocks and trees	Anthropomorphic and theriomorphic beings forerunners of animal species
Pentikäinen (1998)	Human dead	Humans	Deities
Ripinsky-Naxon (1993)	Mirror and converse images of middle world	Humans and animals. Master of the Animals (the shaman)	Powerful supreme spirits including the Mistress of the Animals
Vitebsky (1995)	Often subdivided into several levels. Realm of the dead	Humans	Often subdivided into different levels. Habitat of creator deity

*Table 4.1: The Three Tiered Cosmos*

#### **4.2.4 The Role of a Shaman**

The following captures the views of a number of scholars of the role of the shaman, which is accepted in this work but of necessity it can only be a brief résumé.

Shweder's (1979, 327-331) survey of shamans and non-shamans in Zinacantan, Mexico revealed that shamans had distinctive cognitive capabilities in comparison with the control non-shaman group. The shaman's predominant role was to act as mediator between society and the cosmos in order to maintain harmony; it was they who "... constitute the only agents empowered with the ability to enact change, ... the

<sup>28</sup> Winkelman's (1986b) paper gives a detailed analysis of this evidence.

sole responsibility for ensuring the community's security within a dangerous and hostile world" (Jordan 2004, 93). Unlike people with a mental illness, who sometimes believe they are possessed by spirits over whom they have no control, the shaman is considered to be the master of spirits (Shirokogorov 1935, V3, 95). Their role was to negotiate and mediate with spiritual entities to resolve a problem within the community. They were thought to have more than one soul, and it was one of these, known as the free soul that left the body when in a trance to make the journey to the other world. It was their decision to undergo the necessary rituals enabling them to communicate with the supernatural entities. Sometimes this involved having to penetrate a different realm of the cosmos. When in a trance state and on a soul journey, the shaman could be considered to be a shape-shifter in that he/she is thought to be able to change their spirit body into the form of an animal and to be imbued with its powers (Shirokogorov 1935, V2, 52; Vitebsky 1995, 67) although Hutton (2007, 103) argued that Siberian shamans usually retained their human form. The journey was perilous (Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 95) and was carried out when in a trance, when the shaman could be said to be in an ambiguous ontological or liminal state. This state was often likened to death (Guenther 1999, 427) or to swimming or drowning (Whitley 1998c, 14 and 21). Comparisons with flight were common and shamans are often associated with birds (Chippindale *et al.* 2000, 72).

Shamans were assisted by spirit helpers which, as noted previously, were often thought to take an animal form since they had powers that humans did not possess (Shirokogorov 1935, V2, 52; Vitebsky 1995, 67). A common form was a water bird which accessed in its daily life the three realms. However, these spirits could be part of the shaman's *alter ego* (Vitebsky 1995, 93; see also Hutton 2007, 67). Often the shaman made such journeys to retrieve the soul of a person that had gone wandering during a dream and for some reason had not returned to the body rendering the person to be ill.

Other responsibilities included leading the souls of the recently deceased to the land of the dead, the shaman was "...the psychopomp par excellence" (Eliade 1964, 182). Sometimes they were responsible for offering sacrifices (Hutton 2007, 57). Shamans had the ability to predict weather conditions, foresee natural disasters and warfare and seek intervention with the spirits (Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 64). They were also

responsible for interceding with the Master of Animals<sup>29</sup> to ensure prosperity for the community (Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 9) and also to release animals to ensure a successful hunt (Ingold 2011, 115; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 77; a further mention is to be found in Section 6.5.1). The shaman was also a major player in the performance of rituals which brought about the fertility and well-being of the community (McClenon 1997, 347). According to Ripinsky-Naxon (1993, 64), the shaman was the custodian of the community's sacred myths and traditions and their presence was essential at the rituals concerning rites of passage. Pentikäinen (1998, 63) maintained the shaman's daily status was that of an ordinary man but as shaman he played an essential political, social and religious role in the community. It should be noted though that in small societies, the shaman was most often at the apex of the "power hierarchy" (Pearson 2002, 71; Whitley 1994, 366; Winkelmann 2010, 166).

#### **4.2.5 Shamanic Regalia**

From an archaeological viewpoint, proof that shamanism existed during the prehistoric period can be deduced from the hard evidence of finds such as the remains of costumes and accessories. When acting in the role of shaman, the person donned accoutrements which were impregnated with spiritual qualities. Often an ornamented costume was worn, which linked the shaman to an animal form (Eliade 1964, 156). In cases where no such costume was worn, objects that were considered to be magical and formed part of the shaman's regalia substituted for the costume (Shirokogorov 1935, V3, 102) such as belts and headdresses. Percussion was deemed to be essential to aid transference and for the penetration of the various cosmic levels (Needham 1967, 607) and in some cultures drums were used. In Sami<sup>30</sup> shamanism, the drum was the key to their cosmology and formed a cognitive map to guide the shaman's journey to the spirit world (Pentikäinen 1998, 39). The drum transformed into an animal, usually the species from whose hide the drum membrane was made. The shaman rode on this animal to the other levels of the cosmos when in an altered state of consciousness (Rozwadowski 2012a, 196). Other percussion instruments included staffs and rattles. Masks often formed part of the

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<sup>29</sup> According to Ingold (1987, 245, 247) each species of animal had a spiritual master or Master of Animals. In respect of wild animals, the Master of Animals released animals to be hunted and killed as a result of the intercession of the shaman and is understood to be an act of renewal. The animals were sacrificed to enable their souls to be released back to the Master of Animals thus ensuring the future of the herds. A similar concept related to the sacrifice of domestic animals.

<sup>30</sup> The Sami, an Arctic people, dwell in northern Norway and Sweden, Finland and Russia (Pentikäinen 1998, 20).

ritual regalia. A mask is an agent of disguise or transformation (Pollock, D. 1995, 581f; Tonkin 1979, 240) and implies performance thus demarcating the wearer from the audience. In shamanic cultures it is believed that the mask transformed the identity of the shaman to that of the spirit of the being represented by the mask (Eliade 1964, 168; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 42; Vitebsky 1995, 82 but queried by Pernet 2006, 162). Some shamans have bundles containing diverse objects, for example small stones, crystals, herbs, animal parts, items which the shaman believed were imbued with power (Vitebsky 1995, 82) but which have no meaning to anyone else.

#### **4.2.6 Initiation of a Shaman**

The initiate is believed to be chosen by the spirits (Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 71; Vitebsky 1995, 59) and discovered this realisation through some inner personal crisis (Pearson 2002, 72; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 71). Superior skills or talent were thought to be a sign of shamanic calling, as was also an escape from great danger or illness (Pearson 2002, 72). One of the most important elements of initiation was the transmission of the mythical traditions by an old shaman (Pentikäinen 1998, 63f). One component of the initiation seemingly common throughout different cultures was the isolation of the initiate for a period (Hutton 2007, 74; Pearson 2002, 72). During this period the initiates were subjected to physical and/or psychological stress resulting in visions and dreams, which involved a journey to the upper level of the cosmos to meet helper spirits and to undergo a familiarisation of the realm, as well as to the lower level to meet the spirits of the dead shamans (Eliade 1964, 34; Vitebsky 1995, 59). However, significant features of these visionary dreams appeared to be blood and the dismemberment of the physical body into its component parts and the deconstruction of the body to its skeleton (Jordan 2004, 91; Ripinsky-Naxon 1993, 76). Accordingly, the initiates underwent a symbolic death and rebirth and thus conformed to van Gennep's (1977[1960]) view of a rite of passage. The initiate has to leave the community (separation), endure a period of isolation (liminality or transition or to use Turner's (1977, 95) expression "betwixt and between") and finally incorporation back into the community with a new status (reintegration). It is only through such a process that "shamanic enlightenment" was acquired (Pearson 2002, 73).

#### 4.2.7 Shamanism and Rock-Art

Most rock-art, which is a cognitive system, is attributed to prehistoric societies (Ouzman 1998, 31). These societies, as seen above, may have a shamanic character. However, arguments circle around such questions as to whether all rock-art should be considered to be shamanic; the dominance of shamanic cosmology over all other beliefs; and ASC, the three-stage trance which shamans are supposed to experience (see Section 3.4.3.1). The main protagonists in this debate are Bahn (2001, 52-58; 2002, 87; 2010, *passim*; 2011, 350), whose (2001, 52ff) view on the interpretation of rock-art is extremely negative: “Most of it is certainly a waste of time and effort, in my opinion...” and “How do we know about the state of mind or internal experience of shamans of past centuries or in faraway countries?”; a similar point was made by Díaz-Andreu (2001, 132). Bahn (2001, 52) does admit that as long as it is made clear that an interpretation is speculation, then no harm is done. He together with Helvenston (2003, 213-24) deny the three-stage trance model *contra* Lewis-Williams (2001; 2004b, c and d) an advocate of the condition. Solomon (1997; 1998; 1999 and 2000) took issue with Lewis-Williams’ (1980; 1998 and 1999; see also Lewis-Williams and Dowson 2000; Winkelman 2002, 71-85) position that shamanism lay behind the creation of a significant amount of San rock-art, purporting its aetiology was mythology. Some rock-art may sometimes depict hybrid human/animal figures which might be interpreted as shamans in mid-change (Vitebsky 1995, 28f). The stance taken in this work is that it is probable that some but not all rock-art depicts shamanistic beliefs and to determine whether it does, certain criteria must be applied. These comprise the location of the rock-art, that is whether it is found across large tracts of the landscape or in a more confined area, an area which may be thought to have potent powers; the type of motifs portrayed especially if they depict an entity which does not appear to be of this world and the number of the same or similar motifs and their placement within a single location.

Additionally, Wylie’s (1989 and 1993) cabling theory must be employed, that is various strands of evidence, which individually are not absolute in their interpretation, can therefore be woven together to make a strong “cable” of archaeological inference. Thus the strands must include recourse where possible to ethnographic studies related to the peoples who created the art or to ethnographic analogies; a consideration of the images and their juxtaposition, together with their

relationship to the landscape and comparison with other rock-art. For example, rock shelters and caves were favoured places for rock-art because they were considered to be imbued with supernatural power (Whitley 1994, 361; 1998c, 16-17) since it was believed that they were portals to the preternatural world (Ouzman 1998, 33). The more densely populated a site was with art the more potency it was thought to have (Lewis-Williams 2004a, 35; 2004c, 161).

Kinahan (1991, 42) in his work on Namibian rock-art concluded that the sites where there were significant amounts of rock-art were dry season aggregation sites around water resources. The rock-art was created possibly in times of scarcity since prolonged droughts were common and would result in stress (see Sections 5.2.5 and 5.2.5.3; also Hassan 1993, 279) when appeals would be made to the supernatural, for example, for rain. Thus the artwork could be pictorial representations of beliefs of the societies creating it, a belief in the supernatural.

It is accepted that shamanism does not underlie all rock-art but scholars believe that a significant amount, especially that produced by the San in South Africa is the result of such influence (Dowson 2007, 59; Lewis-Williams 1999, 142; McCall, G.S. 2007, 225; *contra* Bahn 2010, 136 who postulates that shamanic art cannot be differentiated from the non-shamanic). Lewis-Williams (2004c, 160) maintained that such artwork resulted from the shaman's ASC, a stance again queried by Bahn (2010, 136), but were created when the shaman had attained a normal state of consciousness.<sup>31</sup> The possibility of shamanic rock-art is discussed in Chapter 5 in particular with reference to Wadi Sura 1 and II, the Caves of the Swimmers and the Beasts in respect of rain shamans.

#### **4.2.8 Section Summary**

It has been established that a shaman is one who can interact directly with spiritual beings, often with spirit helpers, to maintain the welfare of the community. Although shamanism has been shown to be a belief system of hunter-gatherer and early pastoralist societies, it is generally agreed that it comprises a complex of rituals and practices that can differ from community to community. I have argued that since the modern day humans mindset is similar to that of prehistoric peoples, it is possible to

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<sup>31</sup> According to Whitley (1998b, 31) an altered state of consciousness results in short-term memory loss due to the drop in level of norepinephrine and serotonin. Thus rock-art is a means of capturing the supernatural imagery before it is lost.

reflect backwards and to suggest that aspects of shamanism of modern hunter-gatherer/pastoralist groups could be found in this much earlier period. From an evidence point of view, the proof that shamanism existed at an early stage can only be mooted from objects discovered, which could be deemed to have a shamanic use. Rock-art also provides evidence of shamanism. However, this is the most contentious of issues, especially that influenced by ASC. I accept that not all rock-art is shamanic but when taking the context and environmental conditions into account I believe that some certainly is shamanic. Whilst the next section focuses on the spiritual belief systems of the Nuer and Dinka, which include a hierarchy of spirit entities, and the role of cattle in these beliefs, I will highlight some aspects which I consider to have shamanic characteristics.

### **4.3 THE NILOTIC PEOPLES: THE NUER AND DINKA**

#### **4.3.1 Problems raised by Ethnographic Material**

Using ethnographic data concerning the Nuer and the Dinka is challenging. Chapters 2 and 3 referred to problems incurred by using ethnographic data for example the influence of Islam and Christianity in particular on indigenous beliefs, scholars' religious beliefs, the interpretation and comprehension of the indigenous languages and the gender of the ethnographer. In the case of the Nuer, much of the ethnographic material available to Evans-Pritchard was that produced in reports of the colonial administration which contained inherent biases. For example the Nuer were seen as truculent and aggressive, which Johnson (1981, 522) maintains was due to propaganda on the part of their rivals who wanted the colonial powers to assist them in their struggles. Evans-Pritchard (1940, 7f) thus had misgivings about making a study of the Nuer as "...Their country and character are alike intractable...that I would fail to establish friendly relations with them." and acknowledged that his account of the Nuer was "...sometimes scanty and uneven..." (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 9). Such an acknowledgement could be made in respect of other ethnographic works. Frequently, it appears that the only explanation the Nuer would give about particular customs was "...that our fathers have always done it." (Jackson 1923, 59). Such vagueness could well be deliberate in that certain rites or procedures were thought to be so sacred that details should not be divulged to anyone who did not possess the right to know. However, it is more likely that such responses were due to the government's known antipathy to various Nuer spiritual

beliefs that made them “embarrassed and taciturn when asked about their spirits” (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 29). The impression is also given that sometimes responses were deliberately contradictory, evasive and even misleading, possibly to maintain the secrecy of their mores and sacred rituals. The result would be that information was interpreted on different occasions in a subjective manner by ethnographers giving rise to discrepancies. However, the use of ethnography is not to identify *parallels* but to suggest *possibilities*.

#### **4.3.2 Background**

Both the Nuer and Dinka are egalitarian societies with transhumance cultures and whose economies are based on the familial ownership of cattle. Their territories are located in Southern Sudan (Fig. 4.1). During dry seasons, the cattle are driven to new pasturage where water supplies are found and temporary camps established. The subsistence of both is based on cereals, fish and the results of hunting. It is mooted that the Nuer and the Dinka shared a common ancestry (Jackson 1923, 70; Lincoln 1981, 14; Newcomer 1972, 7; Seligman and Seligman 1932, 206). However, the Nuer religious system differs in some elements from that of the Dinka.



Fig. 4.1: Satellite image of Nuer and Dinka territories in the first half of the 20th century as indicated in Seligman and Seligman, 1932 (Taylor, based on Google Earth)

### 4.3.3 Importance of Cattle

Cattle form the economic basis of the Nuer and Dinka and thus dictate a family's status. A person's wealth in cattle directly reflects the likelihood of remembrance of their name whilst the fertility of cattle reflects the man's fertility and the number of children he can expect (Lienhardt 1961, 26). Conflicts are resolved by the exchange of cattle; these also form bride wealth; compensation for homicide, blood feuds and adultery. The Nuer dedicate one or even more of their herd to the spirits and such cattle should not be disposed of. If any die, they have to be replaced (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 39). Cattle play an important role in the various rites of passage especially initiation. Nuer and Dinka boys are given an ox (or a bull calf which is

later castrated) at their initiation ceremonies.<sup>32</sup> The word *Ruath* meaning “bull calf” is applied to the youths during initiation whereas *Tut* denoting an adult bull and the strength that such animals have is a title accorded to adult males (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 4, 257). Initiates from this time on are not allowed to milk a cow. They adopt an ox name generally relating to their animals’ colour or patterning and are known by this name by their age-set. The oxen have their horns trained so that the left one appears to point downwards and forwards (*agon piny* – horn cut for the earth) and the right upwards and backwards (*agon nhial* – horn cut for the above) (Fig. 4.2). The process of cutting the horn so it grows against the cut is considered to equate to the cutting marks of manhood on the initiates’ foreheads. Such oxen, the *muor cien* of the Dinka, are considered to be the leaders of the herd. They are often dedicated to the spirits of departed ancestors or to the deities, in particular the Supreme-being *Nhialic* and the fertility-weather gods *Garang* and *Deng* (Schwabe 1984, 143). The trained horns are thought to form the cyclical representation of heaven and earth or the continuation of the family line after an individual’s death and that person’s enduring spirit (Schwabe 1984, 143). The young initiated man often danced with his arms imitating the deformed horns of his ox thus entering into a relationship with his ancestors, the guardian spirits of his family and with the Supreme-being.



Fig. 4.2: Ox with a trained horn. (Source: Evans-Pritchard. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1998.34.266.2))

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<sup>32</sup> According to Gatkuoth (2010), a living member of the Nuer community, Nuer initiation ceremonies are frequently witnessed by females of the community. This puts pressure on the initiates as the striations on their foreheads are being made to be still and thus show courage, any movement results in ridicule. Any movement would result in uneven cuts, which would be a permanent mark of the initiate’s fear.

#### 4.3.4 Sacrifice

Oxen<sup>33</sup> are generally used for sacrificial purposes because they do not partake in sexual activity. They are considered to be between the spirits and creation, belonging to neither and to both, whereas a bull, especially to the Nuer, embodies manliness and vitality (Beidelman 1966, 454ff). However, cattle of all kinds were thought to have been given by the Supreme-being and therefore the sacrificed animal was theoretically being returned to the original donor. The act of sacrifice is said to be central in both Nuer and Dinka religions (Evans-Pritchard 1951b, 112; Lienhardt 1961, 10). The Dinka officiants prior to the sacrifice work themselves into a frenzy, in a manner paralleling the muscular fasciolations of a butchered limb, which are understood to denote the presence of *Ring* a divine force. The Nuer believe the spirits are thought to cause the spasms of the dead animal's flesh making it seem as though it was alive (Evans-Pritchard 1951b, 115). Parts of the "living flesh" are cut off and eaten to denote communion with that force (Schwabe no date). Sacrifices were made on a number of occasions. For example collective sacrifices occurred at all rites of passage; at the time of the change of the rainy and dry seasons and when the cattle are brought back from the feeding grounds at the end of the dry season; family/personal sacrifices were made to ask the Supreme-being to remove misfortune, most frequently sickness, or in gratitude of the Supreme-being's benevolence to a person. Milk is used as a libation (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 208; Lienhardt 1961, 137, 256). The parts of the body are distributed according to the division of the people. With the exception of the killing of a cow in milk for the spirit of a deceased person with status which is the greatest sacrifice a person can make (Evans-Pritchard 1953, 194), cattle are only slaughtered for meat in exceptional circumstances, such as famine (Evans-Pritchard 1953, 192). However, Seligman and Seligman (1932, 209) noted that young male Nuer sometimes kill a beast and eat it in order to increase their sexual power. Nonetheless, the overall nutritional importance rests in the provision of milk and blood.

Cattle, as well as forming the economy of the people, therefore can be considered to play an important role in their spiritual lives, a theme running throughout this work. They are believed to be the means of communicating with the spirits through their

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<sup>33</sup> If a person cannot afford to sacrifice an ox, other animals are acceptable as are cucumbers (*Cucumis prophetarum*) and the fruit of the sausage tree (*Kigelia aethiopica*) (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 202f).

sacrifice. They also act as a shield between the spiritual and earthly worlds. Some of the shrines of later Nuer prophets were erected over the carcasses of sacrificial oxen. Such shrines were thought to house spiritual power and continued to attract devotees long after they had fallen out of use (Johnson 1990, 50). Cattle are considered to be as valuable as humans, thus their sacrifice can also be interpreted as being the substitute for humans especially in the procedures for sacrifices concerning expiation or atonement. The Dinka believe cattle to be perfect sacrificial victims (Mbiti 1989, 61). Every sacrificial rite anticipated the death which the Dinka expected and feared and in carrying out such rites deflects death thus demonstrating their power of survival (Lienhardt 1961, 297). According to Jackson (1923, 94), the bull could be compared to the Nuer owner's guardian spirit as it is the bull to whom he turns in times of stress and difficulty. Evans-Pritchard (1953, 182) interprets Jackson's words as meaning the Nuer venerated their cattle, which he refutes. However, he does agree that the Nuer religion is focused on cattle and believes that their attachment to the animals could "almost be called religious".

#### **4.3.5 Spiritual Beliefs**

##### **4.3.5.1 *The Supreme Supernatural Being***

The Nuer and Dinka believe in a myriad of supernatural beings. As can be seen from Fig. 4.3 at the apex is a single spirit, a Supreme-being: *Kwoth* (either *Kwoth nhial* or *Kwoth a nhial* – spirit of the sky or spirit who is in the sky (Nuer)<sup>34</sup> and *Nhialic* meaning "in the above" (Dinka). Both supernatural beings were thought to be creators and responsible for sending rain. *Kwoth* was said to be formless (Evans-Pritchard 1951a, 5). *Nhialic* was seen in all the unexplained facets of nature and justified all supernatural phenomena (Deng 1972, 127).

According to the Nuer, *Kwoth* was omniscient and was revealed through such manifestations as pestilence, lightning and rain and by means of these intruded into the sphere of creation (Beidelman 1966, 454). Both the Nuer and Dinka believed the Supreme-being gave and took life. They believed that the heavens and the earth were originally connected by a rope but the connection was severed as a result of either greed (Nuer) (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 10) or a hyena cutting the rope (Dinka) (Lienhardt 1961, 33f).

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<sup>34</sup> Evans-Pritchard (1956) with his Christian background translates *Kwoth* as God thus emphasising the Nuer religion as being monotheistic but the Nuer believe in many other spirits.

#### 4.3.5.2 *The Lesser Spirits*

The most important lesser spirit for the Dinka is *Deng*, who is closely associated with, and is thought by some Dinka to be, *Nhialich* (Butt 1952, 131), an emanation of him or his offspring (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 179). However, Deng (1972, 127), states that *Deng*, who is associated with thunder (his voice), lightning (his club) and rain is the closest spirit to, thus indicating separateness of, the Supreme-being. It is believed by some of the Dinka that it was *Deng* who severed the link between heaven and the earth. Also it was believed by some that in human form, he had ruled a tribe and thus equated to a superhuman ancestor (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 179). The Dinka celebrate the rain-making and harvest ceremonies at the various shrines of *Deng* (Seligman 1931, 6).

Other lesser spirits include *Macardit*, the Great Black One, who presides over the ending of human life and fertility (mainly of women). Sacrifices to this spirit can take place in the forests thus emphasising the connection between what is essentially an anti-human spirit and the wild. *Garang* is a spirit which represents the power of the sky (Lienhardt 1961, 81ff).

The most important of the lesser spirits for the Nuer are the *gaat Kwoth*, the children of the spirit who live in the air and sky. They are superior to other spirits because they are free. Some birds are also *gaat Kwoth* because they fly high in the heavens and are symbols of the Supreme-being.

The Nuer concept of *Colwic* refers to the spirits of those who have died in unusual circumstance for instance killed by a lightning strike, or who are well one day and dead the next. These are held in great reverence and fear because the Supreme-being has taken them. Many cattle are slaughtered by the person's family in order to placate the spirit, otherwise the relatives of the person and the cattle will be in danger. According to Evans-Pritchard, (1949b, 8), it is difficult to determine whether the person killed by lightning is revered or whether it is *Col*, the spirit of lightning and manifestation of the Supreme-being, which is also associated with rain and with the *yir nhial*, the river that runs through the sky.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> There is no indication whether it was thought this was just a sky river or referred to a simulacrum of the Nile or thought to be the Milky Way.

#### **4.3.5.3 Totemic Spirits**

The Nuer spirits of the below, *kuth piny*, are earth spirits and may take the form of birds, animals or even inanimate objects. These are totemistic (relating to one person) or totemic or clan spirits, which make themselves known through the emblematic object. It is interesting to note that the flora and fauna considered to be most useful are not regarded as being totems (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 80). The Dinka also have totemic spirits and it is thought that a number of these infiltrated the Nuer system through intermarriage. A number of clans have secondary totems which are associated in some way with the principal one (Butt 1952, 129; Evans-Pritchard 1956, 80). Animal totems are believed to be one of twins, the other, a human, was the clan ancestor (Beidelman 1968, 123; Butt 1952, 129; Seligman 1931, 18). Neither the Nuer nor Dinka will kill their totemic animal and will refrain from eating it, although some Dinka will eat the flesh if the animal has been killed by a member of another clan (Butt 1952, 130). Great respect is accorded to the clan totem; sacrifices are made to them and the milk of cattle dedicated to the totemic spirit can only be drunk by clansmen.

#### **4.3.5.4 Human Spirits**

Both the Nuer and Dinka believe in ancestral worship. The Nuer refer to the ghosts (*jook*) of the dead, who exist among the living until all the mortuary rites are completed and then depart to the community of ghosts (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 160) (See Section 4.3.7). Ghosts are thought to wreak vengeance on those who have slighted them when living. They are at their most powerful immediately after death. (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 175). The spirits of the long dead powerful ancestors (*jok*) of the Dinka are distinguished from the spirits of the recently deceased (*atiep*). *Jok* are believed to bring sickness and death and can act as mediators between humans and another spirit. They are thought to have particular characteristics which are manifested through personal experiences (Butt 1952, 130; Deng 1972, 127; Seligman 1931, 16; Seligman and Seligman 1932, 186). The *atiep* is thought to jump from the body at death and their wanderings are a common source of dreams (Butt 1952, 130; Seligman 1931 16; Seligman and Seligman 1932, 184). Their powers are strongest just after death, presumably because at that point there is a strong association between them and the living. Funeral feasts are held to placate them so they would not make demands on the living.

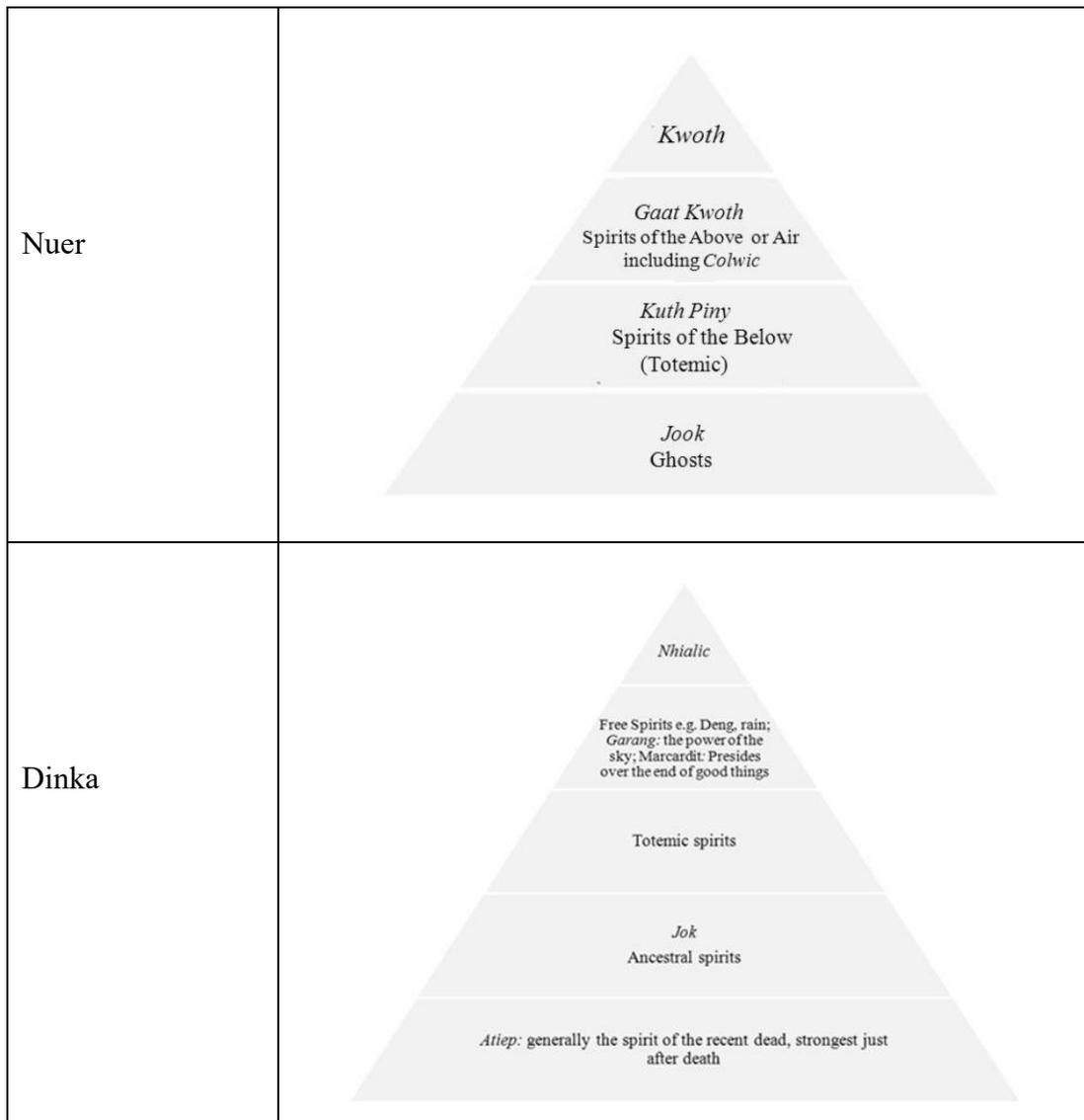


Fig. 4.3: Hierarchical Structure of Supernatural Beings ( Author)

#### 4.3.6 Shrines

Both the Nuer and Dinka have erected permanent shrines which have played an important role in the social, political and religious lives of the Nilotic peoples as focal points for aggregation at significant times in their lives. The religious appeal of these shrines often transcended both political and linguistic boundaries. The shrines ensured the continuance of spiritual authority, of access to the divinity or divinities concerned and provided for the maintenance and continuation of life. For the Nuer and the Dinka who, of necessity have to form temporary camps seasonally in order to secure pasturage for their cattle, such shrines provided cohesion. According to Johnson (1990, 46) there were regular and annual sacrifices for rain, crops and fertility. The main Dinka shrines are the *Luang Deng* (the cattle byre of Deng) and the *Luang Mayual*, both are mound shrines. The latter, mythologically, was supposed

to have been built from humans but the people later rebelled and the shrine was constructed from conventional materials provided by the various sub-tribes (Mawson 2006, 349). Thus the building of the shrine, which occurred approximately every eight years, was a communal project, enacting out the mythological action of the sacrifice of those involved in the building. The most famous Nuer shrine is that of the Nuer Ngundeng. Again a mound shrine, some 20 m high and 50 m in diameter, surrounded by elephant tusks and surmounted by a fishing spear decorated with an ostrich egg and feathers. According to Morant (1905, 140) the mound was also supposed to contain numerous ox bones, the animals having been slaughtered for the occasion. This mound became a cult feature of eastern Nuer. Although destroyed in part by the British administration in 1928 (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 306), the mound, which resembled a cattle byre (Johnson 1994, 332), continued to be a spiritual focus for the people.

#### **4.3.7 Death, Burial and the Afterlife**

The Nuer and the Dinka appear not to talk about death (Lienhardt 1961, 289) but view it as being "...the most dreadful of all dreadful things." (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 154) and "...a dreadful end..." (Deng 1972, 136).

Both Nuer and Dinka are buried in a flexed position with one arm under the head, the other over (Nuer) or with the right hand under the head (Dinka). Males are buried naked.<sup>36</sup> The Nuer male, except those killed by lightning, is shaved beforehand in what could be a mimicry of birth, and the Dinka is anointed with oil. Both lay on his/her right side between two hides; the right being a sign of strength and order whereas the left is identified with weakness and misfortune (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 245; Johnson 1994, 112). Evans-Pritchard (1956, 145) was informed that the Eastern and Western Nuer inter the deceased males facing different directions, towards the West (death) like the Dinka and East (life) respectively: women are all buried facing west.<sup>37</sup> The woman's skirt, which is integral to her social personality, is tied between her legs. The Nuer and Dinka burial parties have their backs to the grave when filling it as they do not wish to witness the final interment (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 145; Lienhardt 1961, 289). The deceased's possessions are distributed amongst family

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<sup>36</sup> Nudity is a feature of the rites of passage; it would seem to equate to the discarding of one role in life and the assumption of a new one.

<sup>37</sup> According to Deng (1972, 131), the deceased Dinka is laid facing east where the sun rises and new life begins.

members. Both the Nuer and Dinka observe a period of mourning which is terminated by a ceremony at which cattle are sacrificed. The purpose of these ceremonies is to placate the spirit of the deceased so it will not haunt the family or bring misfortune. For the Nuer, this is known as the removal of the *cuol*. The Dinka occasionally erect, it is thought for men of status, a shrine or memorial, with cattle horns (Fig. 4.4), often called a *buor*, not over the grave which is located by the deceased's house but in a compound nearby.

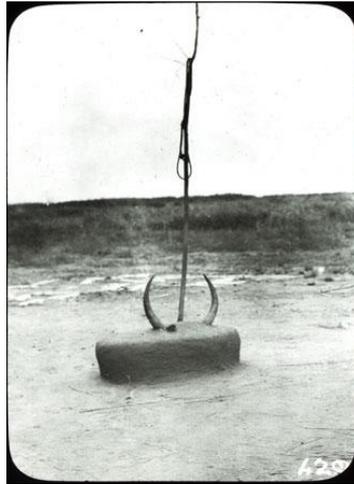


Fig. 4.4: A Buor shrine/memorial depicting cattle horns.  
(Source: Seligman. Courtesy Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1967.26.156))

The Nuer believe in an afterlife. They avoid using the word “die” preferring to think of the deceased as having “disappeared” and departed for good and become ghosts (*jook*) (Fig. 4.3). Where these ghosts reside is uncertain – sometimes, and according to Evans-Pritchard (1956, 159) this appears to be the general view – it is thought they lived under the earth and followed the same sort of life when living. Another belief is that they have joined *Kwoth* or become his people.<sup>38</sup> The Dinka do not believe in an afterlife as such but that life is continued through their children; “...Your father is not dead since he has borne you...” (Deng 1972, 136).

#### 4.3.8 Magic

Magic, although often linked with belief systems (Chapter 2), appears to play only a relatively small role in the beliefs of the Nuer and Dinka. Those that carry out evil

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<sup>38</sup> Since Evans-Pritchard (1956, 159) translates the word “*Kwoth*” as “God”, it is possible that this is an example of the influence of Christianity on the Nuer or else it is Evans-Pritchard’s own beliefs influencing his understanding.

magic, if discovered, could be put to death (Butt 1952, 133). The Nuer and Dinka *tiet/tyet* is believed to be able to communicate with the spirits and their powers are attributed to a minor spirit (Butt 1952, 133; Evans-Pritchard 1956, 95; Seligman and Seligman 1932, 187). The *tiet* specialises in the identification and treatment of illness by using herbs or by pretending to remove the foreign object causing the illness from the sick person's body (Butt 1952, 132; Jackson 1923, 90). They also provide advice on missing cattle and on accidents in daily life (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 96; Seligman and Seligman 1932, 188). Those that act as diviners are said to be able to enter a trance like state and assume the role of unseen forces and act as the medium with humans (Butt 1952, 133, Deng 1972, 130). These would appear to carry out a shamanic role. Magic plays a role in the hunting of hippopotami by the Dinka whereby a male goat, preferably red because that is thought to be the colour of a hippopotamus, is sacrificed as an appeal to *jok*. The war-chief will also practise magic to ensure success in battle (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 194). The *jalyat* (man of herbs), generally a monorchid,<sup>39</sup> practises black magic using body parts or by making effigies of the person to carry out his deeds (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 99).

#### **4.3.9 Persons of Spiritual Prominence**

Both the Nuer and Dinka were acephalous societies but within each were persons who were thought to have special abilities in certain situations and who had an influence on their respective beliefs.

##### **4.3.9.1 *The Nuer***

- The leopard-skin priest or chief, (*Kuaar muon*) wears a leopard-skin over the right shoulder. The leopard-skin is symbolically associated with the earth (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 291). However, there may be a shamanic connotation. Many shamans' costumes included attributes of animals related to their spirit helpers. By wearing the skin, it may be that the leopard-skin priest was understood to be in a transitional state between human/animal and that skin imbued him with the power and guile of the animal. Thus ontologically the leopard-skin priest was neither man nor beast but both. The imagery of dappling also gives rise to the idea of two beings, one belonging to the

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<sup>39</sup> Only having one testicle: Brown (ed.) 1993. *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 1

human world, the other to that of the spirits (Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 180). The leopard-skin priest has no political authority (Butt 1952, 142), a view which is contested (Haigh 1972, 1313-1318). His main role is that of mediator in feuds, especially blood feuds and to perform the necessary rituals to cleanse those who have committed serious incest with for example a close kinswoman.<sup>40</sup> He is not considered to be a priest in his own clan (Montzka 2009, 131), nor does he possess the “breath” of the people unlike the Dinka Spear chief. Johnson (1981, 521), however, argues that the leopard-skin priest had a comparable role to the Dinka Spear chief (see Nuer prophets below and Section 4.3.9.2). The leopard-skin priest is believed to have a mystical association with the earth and has the ritual power to bless or curse it. It is he who determines when the fields are to be dug and breaks the first sod. He prays to *Kwoth*, the Supreme-being, to bless the seed. Although he is not considered to be a rainmaker, according to Evans-Pritchard (1956, 298f), he might be asked to make a sacrifice or to carry out a ritual for rain. However, it appears the Nuer do not place much importance on such procedures. Overall, they appeared to be uninterested in the subject, unlike other peoples in that part of Africa. There was no ceremonial killing of the leopard-skin priest when it was felt his powers were waning (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 215). On his death, his body was placed between hides on a light platform which had been erected in a grave in his hut (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 291).

- The cattle chief or the *wud ok* or *kwor ok*, whose role is to maintain the well-being of the herd, using magic if need be (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 217). The *wud ok* is also responsible for determining the dates into which an age-set fell and was also responsible for the initiation ceremony.
- The war magician (*ngul* or *gwan muot*), decided when war was to be undertaken and the fighting methods to be employed. He is also said to possess hunting magic (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 217) and is said to “sing his spear” thus ensuring a successful outcome to the hunt although he does not take part in the hunt himself.

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<sup>40</sup> The Nuer rules on the prohibition of sexual activity cover a wide variety of social relationships; however, for the more distantly related, especially if living in different districts, the taboo is less stringent (Evans-Pritchard 1973, 38-44).

- The prophets (*gwan kolang*) are charismatic and are the mouthpiece of the spirits or *kolangi*, a category of the *kwoth piny*. Their concerns lay with the community as a whole. Through the prophets the spirits assisted in the diagnosis and cure of illnesses and the transmittance of fertility to women and cattle together with the securing of an abundance of crops. Sacrifices made by a prophet were supposed to be particularly effective. Even though sacrifices made by prophets were thought to be especially efficacious, those carried out for rain, like those of the leopard-skin priests, were viewed ambivalently (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 299). Thus the prophets were the creators and protectors of life; the corollary being that their curses were supposed to bring about death. The prophets also carried out exorcisms and could foretell the future (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 308). The prophets tried to turn people away from magic by declaring the powers useless. Evans-Pritchard (1956, 45, 308) had maintained that the main role of the major prophets was warfare against the Dinka, slavers and the administration. Whilst Johnson (1994, *passim*) concurs they had a political role, he (1994, 327) argues such a view diluted their roles in Nuer religion and their attempts at creating and maintaining a moral community. Johnson (1994, ix, 31f, 114) also cavils against the view that the prophets rose in times of crisis, in the vein of the Old Testament prophets.

Evans-Pritchard (1954, 30; 1956, 291ff) argued that the prophets were greater than the leopard-skin priests because they were inspired and imbued by the spirits and act as their interpreters to the community; they spoke to the community, whereas the leopard-skin priests have a symbolic association with the earth and speak to the divinities on behalf of their communities. This is rebutted by Johnson (1981, 521), referring to the lack of religious data on the part of Evans-Pritchard due to requirements of his research to focus initially on social and political aspects, a point which Evans-Pritchard (1956, v) had acknowledged. Johnson believed the leopard-skin priests equated to the Dinka spear chief and were representatives of divinity on the grounds that the spiritual basis of the leopard-skin priest rested in the *kuoth rieng* (divinity of the flesh) and that of the Dinka Spear chief lay in his clan divinity “Flesh”.

#### 4.3.9.2 *The Dinka*

- The most important position in Dinka village society is that of the Spear chief, also known as the Master of the Fishing (or sacred) Spear, the *bañ bith*. It is believed each Spear chief has within him the spirit of a great ancestor which gives him great powers and wisdom (Butt 1952, 123). Although the Spear chief has administrative duties such as the settlement of feuds, according to Deng (1972, 113) he is considered to be the spiritual father whose task is to mediate between the physical and spiritual worlds when there is a disaster or epidemic; in other words he has to maintain the equilibrium. The Spear chief is also the rainmaker. Such responsibilities as seen in Section 4.2 belong to the shaman and I would therefore argue that the role of the Spear Chief incorporates shamanic characteristics. He generally did not practise magic but invoked *Nhialic* for intervention (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 142). His badge of office, the sacred fishing spear, is used in ritual activities and to cure illness or to kill by cursing a person by means of the spear being waved before them (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 142).

The Spear chief determined when his powers waned that he should be killed because his waning powers would have an adverse effect on the welfare of the people, animals and land. It was thought that if the Spear chief died a natural death the spirit within him died, whereas if he were killed the spirit looked after the people until a new Spear chief were chosen and into whom the spirit entered (Butt 1952, 124; Deng 1972, 133). Lienhardt (1961, 316) argued that the Spear chief was buried alive “with his breath” since his breath was the symbol for the life of his clan. The close identification with the Spear chief allowed for rituals surrounding his death to be a celebration of the clan’s continued existence.

Different procedures were followed by the various Dinka tribes for killing the Spear chief such as suffocation by being buried alive (*Agar Dinka*), a practice prohibited by the British (Deng 1972, 132) and strangulation (*Niel Dinka*) (Seligman 1931, 197). According to Lienhardt (1961, 310), an ox was buried alive with him. The killing of a Spear chief against his will is rare but not unknown (Huntington and Metcalf 1979, 180). Cattle figurines were

suspended from the roof of the byres built over the shrines of the western Dinka Spear chiefs (Johnson 1990, 54).

Seligman (1931, 12) likened the Spear chief to the Frazerian concept of the divine ruler. According to Frazer (1911, 9ff) the divine ruler, with the spirit of a great ancestor within him, was put to death because the course of nature was inherent within him and gradual enfeeblement would have deleterious repercussions for his people.<sup>41</sup> Thus, he must be killed as soon as his powers began to decline so that his spirit before it has begun to decay could pass into the divine king's successor, the eldest son, but not necessarily so. The examples that Frazer uses show that in some societies the king determined when he was to die and in others it was the elders who made the decision.

- The other person of importance was the *bañ wut* or cattle chief, who is responsible for the well-being of the cattle. He is also the war leader and practises magic to ensure success.

#### **4.3.10 Differences between the Nuer and the Dinka**

The Nuer had no centralised administration and Evans-Pritchard (1940; 1956) presents them as an egalitarian society, within which certain individuals have special responsibilities. The leopard-skin priest is treated as any other person and is not regarded with any importance, nor does he symbolise in any way unity of the people (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 172ff). Others are deemed to have special powers, through which they gain an influence in their local society but authority only in specific situations. Although the Nuer believe in spirits as well as a Supreme-being, they would appear to have a strong dependence on the latter and this dependence is on a personal basis. Only the Supreme-being can ameliorate situations. The Nuer believe themselves to be foolish in comparison. However, it is difficult to determine whether this is an original belief or was influenced by missionary work. Only the prophets were thought to be influential because they were believed to embody the spirits. As the prophets were regarded as being the mouthpieces of divinities in addition to simultaneously fulfilling a political function, they could be regarded as leaders of the Nuer.

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<sup>41</sup> Firth (1955, 13) cynically suggested that any society would become disillusioned with the rain maker and that the Dinka could well have felt that sooner or later he deserved to be strangled.

The Dinka were considered by the Seligmans (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 178) to be the most religious of peoples in the Sudan; all events were considered to have religious significance and worthy of a sacrifice being carried out. Theirs was a more collective attitude towards the spiritual world; it was rare to see an individual Dinka beseech the spirits (Lienhardt 1961, 219). They also believed that the local Spear chief was responsible for the life of the community; he had the power to influence events and nature, hence he could be regarded as a “leader”. He was seen as the intermediary between the above and the below and sometimes was referred to as the “master of the above” and was the representative of the Supreme-being. By the very fact of according the Spear chief such an influential role, the Dinka made the postholder *de facto* a leader within an egalitarian society.

#### **4.3.11 Discussion**

Whilst accepting that the chronological gap between early Predynastic Egypt and the Nuer and Dinka is great, it may be possible to identify aspects of the respective belief systems, which might be thought to have a commonality. Points of potential identification will be discussed further in Chapter 6. At this point it will suffice to highlight the important traits of the two societies in question.

A comparison of the Nuer and Dinka societies reveals there are a number of areas of similarity within their belief systems. This would accord with Hultkrantz’s (1966, 147-148; 1978, 23) view that religion is rooted in the culture in which it was formed, thus similar cultures should form similar religions. According to his thesis, cattle keeping cultures should have similarities in their belief systems. This correlation is most obvious between the Nuer and the Dinka. There appears to be general agreement that the two societies originally formed a single polity or that the Nuer formed a sub-polity within the Dinka and if that is the case such parallelism is not surprising (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 3; Jackson 1923, 70; Jok 2011, 79; Lincoln 1981, 14; Newcomer 1972, 5-11; Seligman and Seligman 1932, *passim* but especially, 206).

The beliefs of the societies in question especially those of the Nuer and Dinka are based on the supernatural beings forming a hierarchical structure, the apex being a creator spirit, who is responsible for the sending of rain, the essence of life. Although the Nuer and Dinka have an intimate relationship with their herds

especially oxen; for example males are given an ox<sup>42</sup> together with an ox name at their initiation, a number of early ethnographers (Jackson 1923, 94; Morant 1905, 140; Westermann 1931, vii) believed this bond in general was tantamount to being a religious attachment. However, if this were a deep religious bond, it is therefore surprising that none of the spiritual beings were consistently considered to have a bovine form. It is suspected, therefore, that this attachment is emotional rather than religious. Rather, cattle are believed to be the gift of the Supreme-being and that the present herds are descended from this original gift. Some cattle are dedicated to spirits and will only be killed in honour of those spirits. In songs, bovine metaphors are occasionally made in respect of the spirit in question for example *Nhialic* is referred to as the “white one”, the Dinka word “*mabyor*” meaning literally “white ox” (Lienhardt 1961, 38) and the free spirit *Garang* as “The great bull...” (Lienhardt 1961, 87).

The most important aspect of the belief systems of the Nuer and Dinka would appear to be animal sacrifice, in particular that of cattle, especially an ox. Whilst other offerings may be made, they are always regarded as being a substitute. Oxen are used for major sacrifices. Sacrifices are made on a number of occasions such as rites of passage, seasonal sacrifices, to honour the spirits and in times of crisis for example when murrain strikes the cattle or there is illness in the village. The latter type of sacrifice results in the sacrificial animal being seen as the “scapegoat”.

However, the interpretation of sacrifice by ethnographers has to be analysed carefully because often their understanding is influenced by their own religious beliefs. There is a need also to accept that an ethnological explanation may not always be a sound archaeological explanation. An example is the perception of Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard of the Dinka and Nuer attitudes to sacrificial animals and their sacrifice since it is one that could be problematical for the interpretation of the role of cattle in other contexts. According to them (Evans-Pritchard 1953, 192; Lienhardt 1961, 296) all cattle (in particular bulls and oxen) were destined ultimately to be sacrificial animals. Thus it could be argued that they are sacred animals since they are accorded religious significance from the beginning. In a sacrificial setting they take the place of humans and die in their stead. The concerns and fears of

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<sup>42</sup> Sometimes they are given a bull calf, which is then castrated – Section 4.3.3.

humans or the community are transferred to the sacrificial animal whose death ensures the continuance of human life. Each animal represents the community (Lienhardt 1961, 23). Wengrow (2001, 93) points out the dangers of a religious or psychological approach to animal sacrifice and its conclusions for archaeological interpretation. He, Wengrow (2001, 93) believes the animal could be understood as the primary agent which was, citing Gell (1998, 36), "...endowed with the capacity to initiate actions/events through will or intention...". He also highlights the problems anthropological theory can create for archaeology and instances that of Durkheim (2001[1912], 36ff), relating to the sacred and the profane. Such an interpretation would pose problems for archaeology as cattle would no longer be interpreted against their contextual background but rather according to religious symbolism since they belong to the sacred world.

I believe Wengrow's argument that a sacrificial animal could be interpreted as a primary agent is a *non sequitur*. It is the people who charge the animal with their concerns; it is they who carry out the initiating action which results in the sacrifice. The animal is the means of achieving their aims. The reference to the problems raised by using theoretical approaches is inherent throughout archaeology and anthropology; interpretation is dependent on the theoretical school to which the interpreter belongs. Thus diverse schools of theoretical thought arrive at different reasoned conclusions to the exclusion of all others when considering the same problem.

#### **4.3.12 Nuer and Dinka Belief Systems: Animism or Totemism or an Amalgamation**

It is important to consider whether the beliefs of the Nuer and Dinka can be termed animistic or totemic,<sup>43</sup> since that could provide a clue as to the type of beliefs held by the early Predynastic Egyptians.

As stated in Chapter 2, Tylor (1871a, 385f) believed animism, which comprised the continuance of the soul after death and the destruction of the body together with other subordinate spirits and controlling deities, to be the earliest form of beliefs. In the same chapter I have referred to the critical review of animism in recent years (Bird-David and responses 1999), the result being a lack of consensus of opinion.

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<sup>43</sup> Animism and totemism are discussed in Chapter 2.

However, Ingold (2006, 10) points out that there is no universal acceptance of what is alive or not and therefore there is no universal discrimination between animate and inanimate things. Thus, what appears to be clear is that the concept is relational and reactional. Animism is therefore concerned with living in, and responding to, the known world.

Durkheim (2001[1912]) viewed totemism as a basic form of a belief system (Section 2.2.1). Totemism involves the belief in the spirit of the clan's ancestor that is manifested generally by an animal or plant or even natural phenomena or created object, the totemic symbol. Totems are revered and respected so much so that there is usually a taboo against killing or eating them or part of them. Rituals are held to honour them. Durkheim (2001[1912]) viewed the totem as being a religious force, the bonding force of the clan and therefore it was also a societal issue. In addition to the main totem, a clan may also have an associated secondary totem. Ingold's (2011, 113) interpretation of totemism has its basis in the land's relationship with the ancestors; the land which continually generates life as long as it is looked after properly and which is the enduring form of their presence. Perhaps this is too general a definition. Whilst he is correct that the land has links with each generation and not on a generational basis, it is rather that the people see the connection with the ancestor as manifest through the totemic animal/flora/natural phenomenon or made object. The totems generally have no economic significance for the clans. The origin of a totem is often shrouded in myth – the totem was one of twins, the other being a human who became the ancestor of the clan and the animal the totem (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 64ff; 83; Seligman and Seligman 1932, 142ff). Other times, the genesis resulted from an experience an ancestor had with an animal or object and ordered its respect henceforth (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 68ff; Lienhardt 1961, 118f). As well as group totems, individuals could also possess a totem, with which they had an intimate relationship (Frazer 1910, 49ff). It was believed by some that the totem possessed protective qualities (Frazer 1910, 20; Lienhardt 1961, 107).

On the basis of the above, the belief systems of the Nuer and Dinka peoples are totemic, but whether they can be interpreted as being animistic in the Tylorian sense is more difficult to determine. They do believe in humans having spirits after death (see Fig. 4.3), with mortuary feasts being held to appease these spirits; a series of supernatural beings, with a Supreme-being, which is one facet of animism. However

whether they believed that all animate and inanimate beings had spirits is difficult to determine. Yet, as noted above, there are different interpretations of animism depending on the commentator of the environmental situation. Nonetheless, based on the view that animism can be construed as being relational and reactionary to the environment, it can be said the Nuer and Dinka's beliefs were also animistic.

#### **4.3.13 Shamanism**

As has been seen in the previous section on shamanism (Section, 4.2) shamans have responsibilities for interceding with the supernatural world, including the ancestral spirits, on behalf of their communities in order to maintain the equilibrium. Whilst this review of the Nuer and Dinka has focused on the spiritual hierarchy of the Nuer and Dinka, the role cattle played in those beliefs and on beliefs in death and the afterlife, it has also revealed importantly that the roles of a number of personnel within their societies incorporate seemingly shamanistic aspects. Yet neither Evans-Pritchard (1956) nor Lienhardt (1961) refer to shamans or shamanism or to trance states, although references had previously been made to shamanism elsewhere in Africa by other scholars. It could be that their own religious backgrounds and the political environment in which they carried out their work prevented them from so doing. Frobenius (1913, 561) during his African travels<sup>44</sup> identified what he termed to be the African variety of shamanism, which appeared to have a link with animism. This shamanism originated from Persia, the neighbour of Ural-Altai<sup>45</sup> shamanism (Frobenius 1913, 572). He gave very little information thus making it difficult to determine whether these shamans do conform to the definition used in this thesis, although he does state the shaman is chosen by the spirit, which does comply. However, Eliade (1964, 334, fn. 116) relegated the subject of shamanism and Africa to a footnote. Nadel (1947, 440) identified shamanism among the Nuba of Sudan, which corresponded to the classical shamanism of North America and Central Asia and conformed to the definition in Section 4.2.1. The shaman entered a trance state, which could be either voluntary or otherwise but Nadel (1946, 25) stressed that it was more often self-induced. In such a trance through the mastering of the spirits, the shaman could foretell events; determine procedures for making rain or to avoid famine and to identify the causes and cure of diseases (Nadel 1946, 26).

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<sup>44</sup> The former French Sudan in the West across to the former Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in the East; and further south Angola and the Congo State (Map facing p. 34, vol. I).

<sup>45</sup> This includes Siberia and the Tungusic peoples.

Winkelman's (1986a; 1989) later study has shown that shamanism was a world-wide phenomenon and that it was not a fixed set of values but a complex of practices that could differ from shaman to shaman.

Thus on the evidence above and that put forward by Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt in particular, it is my view that the Nuer Prophets and the Dinka Spear chiefs fulfilled a role of a shaman in ensuring the well-being of the crops and people by interaction with spirit entities especially if the statement of Johnson (1994, 24) is correct that rainmakers in southern Sudan were originally considered to be shamans. The Nuer leopard-skin priests were also involved in maintaining the health and welfare of their communities and acting as an intermediary between the people and the spirits. The fact an actual leopard skin was worn could imply shamanic powers. It can be argued that the Nuer and Dinka *tiet/tyet*, especially those who can be categorised as diviners and who enter trance states and interact with spirits also show shamanistic tendencies. Thus, I believe that both Nuer and Dinka societies show features of being shamanistic societies.

#### **4.3.14 Section Summary**

Thus the purpose of the overview of the belief systems of the Nilotic cattle herding peoples, the Nuer and Dinka, has been to gain an understanding of the thought processes which led to their development. Several issues have been identified in Nuer and Dinka beliefs in the main, which could have a correspondence in early Predynastic Egyptian beliefs: the nature of the beliefs - animism or totemic (Chapter 6), the sacrificial importance of cattle (Chapter 5), and the role of magic (Chapter 6); the importance of the ancestors (Chapters 6). This section also highlights the importance of places of aggregation for non-sedentary peoples (Chapter 5). As has been seen in the previous section on shamanism, shamans have responsibilities for interceding with the supernatural world, including the ancestral spirits, on behalf of their communities in order to maintain the equilibrium. This review of the Nuer and Dinka also revealed that the functions of a number of personnel are similar giving rise to the view that these societies are shamanistic in nature (Chapters 5 and 6).

#### 4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided the background necessary to understand the belief systems of egalitarian societies which can be utilised to determine the belief system of early Predynastic societies. Shamanism is shown to be a very early belief system comprising a complexity of rituals and practices which can differ from society to society. The shaman is understood to be an important member of the society, who has the special ability of being able to directly contact the spirit world for the benefit of the community. Sometimes that contact might take the form of a soul journey; only a shaman has the ability to undertake such a journey. The difference between a shaman and someone who has a mental illness who believes they are possessed by spirit entities is that the shaman is in control of those spirits and the shaman decides when contact needs to be made for the benefit of the community. Archaeological evidence of shamanism takes the form of the accoutrements of the shaman and instances of rock-art. Regarding the latter, the rock-art has to be seen in its total physical and environmental context and ethnography also needs to be used to help in reaching the conclusion. Chapter 5 is concerned with the consideration of evidence of shamanism in the Western Desert from *ca.* 6,000 BC. The major part is concerned with an examination of the rock-art of Wadi Sura II and of Dakhleh and environs. The final section relates to Nabta Playa and deliberation is given as to whether this megalithic site could be considered to reveal traits of shamanism.

Given that there is no anthropological/ethnographic history that can be resorted to in the case of the early Predynastic Egyptians, recourse is made to anthropological /ethnographic analogy, that of the Nuer and Dinka despite the separation in geography and temporality. The examination of their beliefs has resulted in the conclusion that both societies have shamanic traits. It is accepted that no one-to-one correlations can be made but since it is believed that the early Predynastic Egyptians, in particular the Badarians, had similar ecological economies, the analogues of the Nuer and Dinka could suggest possibilities as to the nature of early Predynastic belief systems.

## Chapter 5

### INFLUENCE OF THE WESTERN DESERT

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

During the Holocene Wet Phase (*ca.* 9000-5000 calBC), temporary lakes or playas in the Western Desert were created by the run off from the rains (Bubbenzer and Riemer 2007, 611). During the dry seasons up to 5m depth of water could be lost through evaporation (Riemer 2007, 30). The sedimentary evidence shows that the rains were episodic and variable across the area. Thus the need for water forced the people to traverse to areas where water could be found. Therefore, occupation strategies would have depended on mobility and flexibility (Bubbenzer and Riemer 2007, 609ff). Prior to the desiccation, which created the desert, it is calculated that territories of up to 300 km across were traversed by the transhumant populations (Riemer 2007, 33). The desertification of the Western Desert resulted from a change in the climatic conditions during the mid-Holocene (5300-3500 calBC using Bubbenzer's and Riemer's 2007 dates) due to a shift in the earth's orbit which impacted on the earth's atmosphere (Herath 2010).<sup>46</sup> This climatic change caused the migrations or "exodus"<sup>47</sup> of the local populations to *inter alia* the Nile Valley in order to find permanent water supplies and pasture for their herds (Kuper and Kröpelin 2006, 803-807) (Map 5.1). As a result of these movements, over time the beliefs of these peoples could well have been imposed on, or integrated with, those already dwelling in the Valley. Much of the material cultural evidence lies in rock paintings and engravings located in two main areas: the first in the Gilf Kebir<sup>48</sup> in the south and the second group around the Dakhleh<sup>49</sup> and Kharga<sup>50</sup> Oases and their environs (Riemer 2009, 35). Since this work focuses on the development of beliefs, it is not intended to cover all rock-art sites – that would constitute a separate work in itself – but to give an overview of those sites which may be interpreted as depicting the beliefs of the local populations. A third site to be taken into consideration is Nabta Playa<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The shift caused the monsoons to decrease and the vegetation to gradually disappear. Consequently as plant life died away, water to be released into the atmosphere was not retained, thus the rains progressively decreased.

<sup>47</sup> Nicoll 2001, Fig. 6.

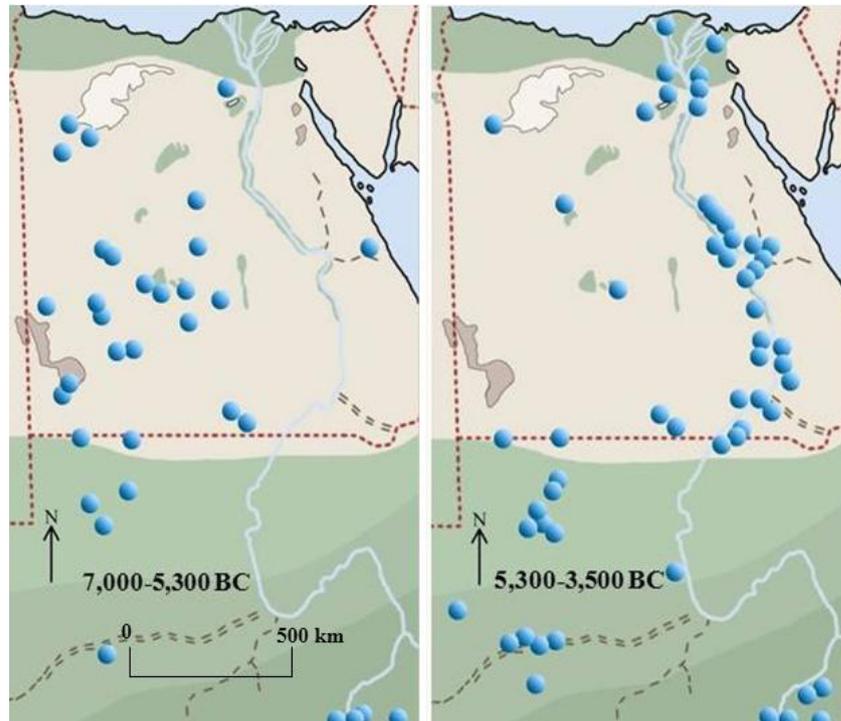
<sup>48</sup> GPS co-ordinates: N 23° 27' 08.24", E 25° 52' 25.35".

<sup>49</sup> GPS co-ordinates: N 25° 28' 01.10"; E 28° 58' 57.61".

<sup>50</sup> GPS co-ordinates: N 25° 26' 56.04"; E 30° 32' 24.36".

<sup>51</sup> GPS co-ordinates: N 22° 32' 0.2358", E 30° 41' 59.9928".

about 100 km west of Abu Simbel. This site is of especial interest due to the discovery there of the burial of cattle and its possible links to the Nile Valley especially Badari, where, according to present knowledge, was situated possibly the first Predynastic settlement. Fig. 5.1 indicates the sites in question.



Map 5.1: Movement of settlements eastwards to the Nile Valley or to the south. (Taylor, after Kuper and Kröpelin 2006, Fig. 3)



Fig. 5.1: Satellite image showing the main Western Desert sites mentioned in the text. Luxor is a locational point. (After Google Earth)

Červíček (1986, 89) believed rock-art to be “...an artistic expression of certain primitive religions...”<sup>52</sup> that is the motifs represent religious ideas. It was in this vein that the rock paintings found at the Gilf Kebir received a great deal of attention in particular during the last decade. Both Bárta (2010; 2014) and Le Quellec (2005; 2008) believe that the origins of Egyptian religion are to be found in two rock shelters located there. This chapter will consider whether evidence from the Western Desert that can be dated to the early Predynastic period can in fact be regarded as being important for the development of early Predynastic Egyptian beliefs.

## **5.2 EGYPT’S WESTERN DESERT: SOUTHERN SECTOR: ROCK-ART**

The Western Desert contains numerous rock-art sites; over 800 (Zboray 2009) have been recorded since Hassanein Bey (1924, 355) discovered engravings of “...lions, giraffes, ostriches all kinds of gazelles, and perhaps cows...” at Gebel Ouenat in 1923.<sup>53</sup> Since the 1980s members of the University of Cologne have been undertaking extensive research on settlement history of these sites.<sup>54</sup> According to Kuper and Kröpelin (2006) the earliest date of human occupation was the beginning of the Holocene Wet period approximately 9000 calBC, when the desert became a savannah-like biosphere populated with wild animals with episodic rains resulting in unpredictable quantities of surface water. Thus subsistence strategies depended on finding water sources, which necessitated a transhumant lifestyle.

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<sup>52</sup> The term “primitive religions” suggests that such religions were inferior to the later complex religions and that they were the religions of those who were intellectually inferior to humans of the present day. Thus Červíček would appear to follow the tradition of Tylor and Frazer (Chapter 2). Such a thought today is regarded to be extremely pejorative. As noted in Chapter 1, the human mind-set has not changed since the middle Palaeolithic period; concepts are developed through experience and experimentation in an ever changing environment.

<sup>53</sup> Explorations were undertaken in 1925-1926 by Prince Kemal el-Din (1928); in 1933 by the *Deutsche Inner-Afrikanische-Forschungs Expedition* (Rhotert 1952) led by Frobenius, Rhotert and Almásy during which a large number of sites were discovered including that of the Cave of the Swimmers and in 1938 by the Bagnold-Mond expedition, which included Hans Winkler, a rock-art researcher, who explored several areas on foot resulting in the discovery of a number of new sites (Winkler 1939). For a detailed history of the exploration of the Gilf Kebir and Gebel Ouenat see Zboray (2009) section on ‘Exploration’; Le Quellec, J-L 2009, *Les images rupestres du Gebel el-Uweynât, Archéo-Nil*, 19, 13 – 26, esp. 13-16.

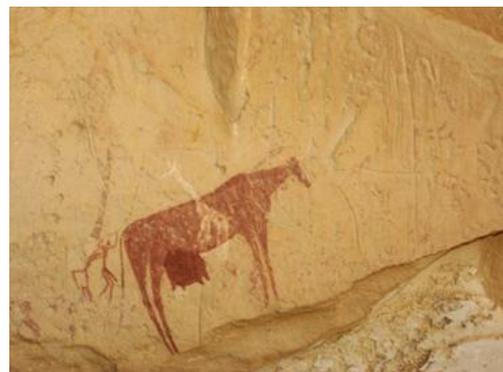
<sup>54</sup> The University of Cologne has been involved in two major projects concerned with the settlement history of the Sahara: 1) BOS - Beseidlungsgeschichte der Östsahara and 2) ACACIA - Arid Climate, Adaptation and Cultural Innovation in Africa. Members of these projects together with the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Kairo have been undertaking research in the Gilf Kebir since 2009 carrying out an in-depth survey of the Wadi Sura in order to put the rock-art into context.

### 5.2.1 Gilf Kebir: Wadi Sura

The Gilf Kebir area contains a number of decorated rock shelters usually related to settlement camps. These no doubt related to the perennial search for water on which life was dependent. Those located in the piedmont areas reveal evidence of playa sediments indicating episodic availability of water (Kuper *et al.* 2010, 22). The shelters on the plateau tend to be engraved whereas a number of those on the piedmont and lowland areas on the Southwest of Gilf Kebir are painted (Kuper *et al.* 2009, 19). Overall, the dominant style is that of cattle herders with about 80% of all known paintings in the Western Desert being of cattle of various colours and with different horn shapes (Zboray 2009). These images appear to emphasise the udders of cows (Fig. 5.2 and Fig. 5.3) as though stressing the importance of milk for the herding communities (see Sections 4.3.4 and 6.5.1). The images could also be artistic metaphors for life; the cow being equated to a nursing mother, both provide milk and ensure that life continues. Horns also can have a many layered meaning including: the movement of the sun through the sky; heaven and earth; a metaphor for life; the continuation of the family line and the deceased's enduring spirit (Schwabe 1984, 143) as well as the transition of the soul (Paden 1992, 119). Human images in various poses form the next largest category. Other fauna depicted include goats, giraffes and ostriches.



*Fig. 5.2: Northwest Gilf Kebir: Site WG35; Left of a small rock shelter: Location: WG35\_02o\_0924 (After Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)*



*Fig. 5.3 Painting of a cow overlying one of a giraffe Northwest Gilf Kebir: Site WG61. Main Panel, Left centre of the right wall of the rock shelter: Location: WG61\_03f\_0656 (After Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)*

The paintings of two of the shelters: the Caves of the Swimmers and Beasts or Wadi Sura I and II<sup>55</sup> respectively located in the Northwest Gilf (Fig. 5.4) form the basis of Le Quellec's and Bárta's theories and thus are the focus of this section. The dominant motifs of these two rock shelters are arresting and thought provoking. They include hand stencils, hybrid beasts of varying sizes and swimmers; whilst the first two image types are found in other shelters in the Gilf, it is only in these two locations where they are brought together with the swimmers (Le Quellec 2008, 27). The style of art is known as the Wadi Sura style. The art decoration in these two caves has given rise to the thought that they portray very early sacred beliefs. Le Quellec (2008, 35) dates the rock-art to  $4500 \pm 500$  BC, whereas Bárta (2010, 25) dates them slightly later to 4300-3300/3200 BC. Both Le Quellec (2005 and 2008) and Bárta (2010 and 2014)<sup>56</sup> interpret the cave paintings as reflecting ancient Egyptian religion as known from much later Dynastic texts.

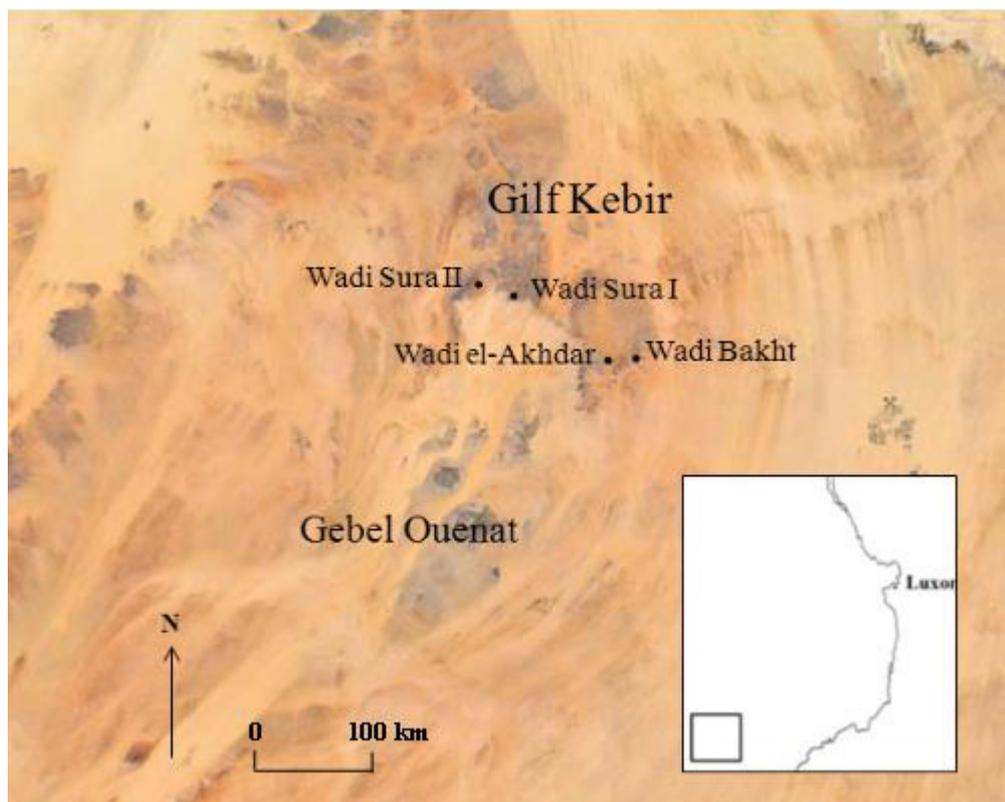


Fig. 5.4: Satellite image showing the locations of Wadi Sura I and Wadi Sura II in the Gilf Kebir and other sites mentioned. (After Google Earth)

<sup>55</sup> The terminology used by of the University of Cologne. Zboray, who has produced a catalogue and bibliography of over 800 sites in the central Libyan Desert, refers to these two rock shelters as WG52 and WG 21 and his annotation has been retained when referring to his references in the captions of the images used in this work.

<sup>56</sup> This thesis is also accepted by Anselin 2011, 44.

### 5.2.1.1 Wadi Sura I: The Cave of the Swimmers

The main interest in Wadi Sura I related to about sixteen figures with distended bodies and seemingly floating along with their hands outstretched towards a beast (see below: Wadi Sura II for comment) which is bound with mesh (Fig. 5:5). The reaction of Almásy (1936, 79) on seeing these figures is understandable:

*“ Je fus impressionné par une fresque représentant des nageurs, dont le dessin donne une excellente interprétation de la distorsion des corps vus sous l'eau. Quelle curiosité de voir des images des nageurs au Coeur du desert de Libye, à un endroit où aujourd'hui, à plusieurs centaines kilometres à la ronde, il n'ya meme pas d'eau!”<sup>57</sup>*

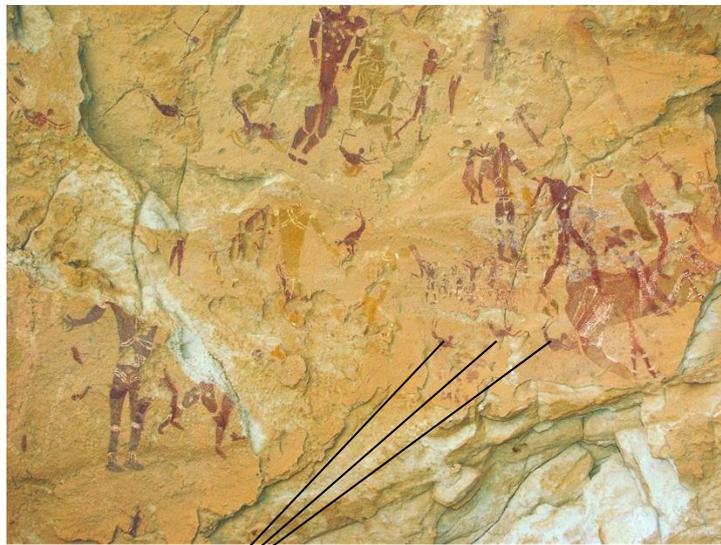


Fig. 5.5: Wadi Sura I: figures with distended bodies swimming towards a beast. Lower Centre, WG52\_02o\_1049 20 (After Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)

In addition there are images of fauna, including giraffes, as well as the universal rock-art motif of negative hand stencils. From the time of the cave's discovery in 1933 by Almásy, attention was focused on the images of the swimmers and their possible meaning.

### 5.2.1.2 Wadi Sura II: The Cave of the Beasts

Wadi Sura II, discovered in 2002, contains some 8,000 figures. In some instances, older paintings have been removed as a result of grinding the rock surface as though

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<sup>57</sup> “I was impressed by a fresco of swimmers, whose depiction gives an excellent interpretation of the distortion of bodies seen under water. What a curiosity to see these images of swimmers in the heart of the Libyan desert, in a place where today there is no water for several hundred kilometres” (Trans. Author).

there was an intentional attempt at surface preparation as other figures were painted on the new surface (Kuper *et al.* 2009, 14). The decoration also includes a few hunting scenes, and a number comprising pairs of humans, families or groups, which the current German Joint Expedition believe could portray festive and/or ritual occasions. However, the most striking images are those of hands, human figures, “swimmers” and beasts; sometimes human figures can be seen in conjunction with one of the beasts (Kuper *et al.* 2010, 13). Not all images are painted; a number are engraved (Fig. 5.6 and Fig. 5.7).



Fig. 5.6: Engraved giraffe (After Kuper (ed.) 2013, 536)

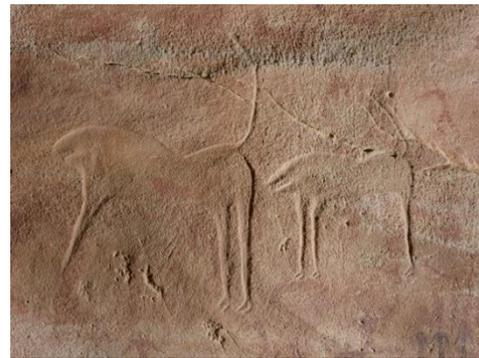


Fig. 5.7: Two engraved beasts. (With kind permission of Riemer 2011, personal communication)

Although there are variations in the depictions of these enigmatic beasts, there are certain commonalities: uneven protuberances at the head end with presumably a mouth in-between, since two beasts are depicted as swallowing human torsos; a sloping back and a tail, often upright, some with a bulbous end, others bi-tri-furcated (Le Quellec 2005, 68f; 2008, 25ff). The majority of beasts appear to have three legs, but this could be stylistic, some have two and others four. The foreleg is frequently bent backwards as in the present day hobbling of camels. However, the extremities of the legs differ for example some have hooves, others human feet or none at all. One image of a beast appears to have been deliberately damaged (Fig. 5.8) although when this occurred has not been determined (Kuper *et al.* 2009, 14). Some of the beasts, which face different directions, are depicted devouring individuals, whilst other beasts are touched by the figures on their ‘mouths’, undersides, genitals and tails (Fig. 5.9 and Fig. 5.10). The beasts are mainly reddish-brown in colour, but

other colours used are yellow and white;<sup>58</sup> images in the two latter colours were painted later (Förster and Riemer 2011).



*Fig. 5.8: Beast with one seemingly human leg and foot and one cloven hoof. Site: WG21. Middle Lower Left Section. Location: WG21\_03f\_040.1 (After Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)*



*Fig. 5.9: Image depicting a beast seeming to devour a person. Site: WG21. Right Lower Right Section, WG21\_03f\_027 (After Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)*

*Fig. 5.10: Figures touching the mouth, front and genitals of a beast. Site: WG21. Middle Lower Centre Section. Location: WG21\_06m\_067 (After Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)*

### **5.2.2 Le Quellec's and Bárta's Interpretations of the Paintings**

Wadi Sura I and II are in reality rock-shelters and not caves as Le Quellec states. Whilst rock shelters were thought to be entrances to the spirit world, Le Quellec's identification of them as caves<sup>59</sup> suits his theory; in later Egyptian religion, caves

<sup>58</sup> Infra-red spectrometry was used for analysing the pigments and the preliminary results show that they comprise dark and pale red, yellow and white, pigments that are identical to samples from natural outcrops both in colour and mineralogical composition. No charcoal or organic substances were used as binders (Kuper *et al.* 2010, 12). According to Riemer (2011, personal communication) the colours are produced from pigments that naturally occur in the area.

<sup>59</sup> A rock shelter is an overhang of rock caused by erosion. A cave is a natural underground cavern, whose interior is protected from the external climatic effects (Renfrew and Bahn 2004, 63).

formed the underworld as depicted by the *Book of the Caverns*<sup>60</sup> (Hornung 1999, 83-95), which is divided into six sections (caves or caverns), each containing ordeals which the sun god Re‘ had to overcome during his nocturnal journey in the Netherworld in order to be reborn. The book also details sufferings of the damned. Thus caverns or caves could be understood as places which enabled the transition to a new life, the afterlife. According to Le Quellec (2005, 70), following Rhotert (1952, 105), the decorations are related to a cult of the dead. His thesis is that there is a link between caves, water and the dead. To substantiate his theory, Le Quellec refers to the *Coffin Texts*<sup>61</sup> (dated to the Middle Kingdom *ca.* 2055-1650 BC) in which the “swimmers” are thought to be deceased souls:

*“I am taken to the cavern of the Foremost of the Westerners<sup>62</sup>...”* CT II §253

*“The door of the cavern of those who are in the Abyss is opened, the cold waters of those who are in the sunshine are thrown open for you...”* CT VI §170

*“The dead cry “...water is above me...”.* CT III §360

Le Quellec (2005, 71) also refers to the New Kingdom text of the tenth hour lower register of the *Amduat*<sup>63</sup> which refers to Horus speaking to the drowned, the overturned, those who are in Nun, that is the people of the underworld:

*“ O, drowned ones, who are in the dark in Nun, whose arms are by your faces*

*O, the capsized ones with faces in the Duat, whose backbones are on the surface of the water,*

*O, (you), who paddle through Nun as those on their backs, whose faces are behind their souls!*

*Breath is your soul, it does not cramp you; your arms like paddles, without being restrained*

*You paved the (way) in Nun with your feet, without that your knees would be impeded*

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<sup>60</sup> Earliest, nearly complete version is found in the Osireon at Abydos and is dated to the reign of Merenptah of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty *ca.* 1203-1213 BC (Hornung 1999, 83).

<sup>61</sup> All quotations from the Coffin Texts are taken from Faulkner 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Khentyimentiu, a jackal deity, the leader of the dead.

<sup>63</sup> Oldest fragments are to be found in KV38, the tomb of Tuthmosis I (*ca.* 1504-1492 BC) but these probably should be dated to the reign of Hatshepsut (Hornung 1999, 27).

*You come out on the surface of the water, you approach the surf, you swim in the great inundation and land by its banks*

*Your body does not rot, your flesh does not decay. May you take possession of the waters and breathe what I have assigned to you.*

*You are they, who are in Nun, who are drowned behind my father. May your souls live.”* (Hornung 1963, *Das Amduat*, II, 169;  
Translation: author)

Other of his evidence includes later New Kingdom texts including *the Book of the Gates*<sup>64</sup> where the dead or the weary ones float in the primeval *Nun* (second hour) (Hornung 1999, 59, figs. 27 and 31; Zandee 1960, 83); *the Book of the Night*<sup>65</sup> in the second hour of which the dead are depicted as swimmers (Hornung 1999, 124f, fig. 72; Zandee 1960, 83) and are referred to as *nni.w* ‘the weary or tired ones’ (*nni* – ‘tired’, ‘weary’, *WB* II, 275) and the aforementioned *Book of the Caverns*.<sup>66</sup> Le Quellec (2008, 32) also believes that the figures depicted upside down at Wadi Sura are also dead on the basis of the portrayal of the dead in the *Coffin Texts*, for example, III §47-8 which states :

*“I will not eat faeces for you, I will not drink urine for you, I will not go upside down for you....”*

This theme is also taken up in the New Kingdom *Book of the Dead* as denoted by the rubrics of Chapters 53 and 189.<sup>67</sup>

The depictions of the hybrid human/animal beasts confirm this theory for him. In CT IV§ 314-315 reference is made to a god who lives by slaughter...who swallows shades...whose face is that of a hound and whose skin is that of a man, his name is ‘Swallower of myriads’. Such monsters are referred to in the *Book of the Dead*: in

Chapter 30b, the weighing of the heart, the monster  ‘*mmi.t*

<sup>64</sup> Earliest but incomplete version is found in KV57, the tomb of Horemheb (*ca.* 1323-1295 BC) of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty but the first full version is to be found on the sarcophagus of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty king Seti I (*ca.* 1294-1279 BC) (Hornung 1999, 55). The sarcophagus is now in Sir John Soane’s Museum, London.

<sup>65</sup> Earliest but incomplete version is inscribed on the ceiling of the sarcophagus chamber of Seti I in the Osireion. The first full version is to be found in KV9, the tomb of the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty king Ramesses VI (*ca.* 1143-1136 BC) (Hornung 1999, 122).

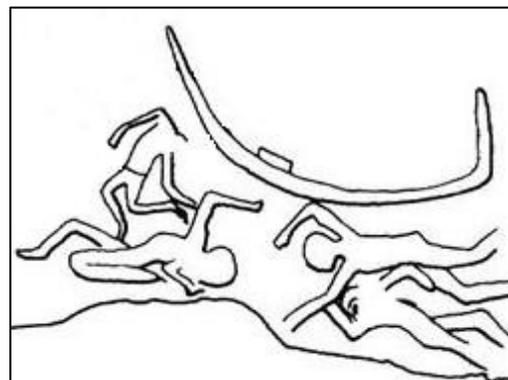
<sup>66</sup> Earliest version is in the Osireion at Abydos dating from the reign of Merenptah, *ca.* 1213-1203 BC (Hornung 1999, 83).

<sup>67</sup> Chapter 53: Rubric = Chapter for not eating feces or drinking urine in the God’s domain; Chapter 189: Rubric = Chapter for preventing a man from going upside down and from eating feces. (Faulkner 1998a, pp. 105 and 134 respectively).

waits to devour the heart of the person who fails the test. Chapter 163 also refers to a monster who is the eater of souls. In addition, a number of the beasts and a number of “swimmers” in the caves appear to be wrapped in what could be identified as nets which evokes the use of nets in Chapter 153 of *The Book of the Dead* to catch spirits and Sethian creatures.

According to Le Quellec (2008, 35) the correspondence between these cave paintings and later Egyptian texts would indicate that at a very early stage (4500 ± 500 BC) in the development of Predynastic history, ancient religious beliefs were beginning to be formulated.

Bárta (2010, 59ff; 2014, 196) agrees, based on Rhotert and Le Quellec’s textual evidence, that the “swimmers” represent the deceased. He (Bárta, 2010, 63) accepts that the “swimmers” could be literally dead bodies like those depicted on the Battlefield palette and the images at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman (Fig. 5.11 and Fig. 5.12). However, he also believes that “swimmers” are deceased souls making their journey to the afterlife during which they have successfully to undergo trials if they are to be reborn.



*Fig. 5.11: The bottom part of the recto of the Battlefield palette. Greywacke. Late Predynastic. Provenance: ?Abydos. British Museum EA20791 63057 (After <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection> [Accessed 3 May 2015]) © The Trustees of the British Museum*

*Fig. 5.12: Element from Gebel Sheikh Suleiman dated to the Late Predynastic period/1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty showing motifs of the dead. (Author. After Wilkinson, T.A.H. 2001, Fig. 5.3:2)*

Bárta (2010, 41ff; 2014, 194) also supposes that some of the images can be identified as members of the ancient Heliopolitan Ennead. He suggests the white beast could be interpreted as an early representation of the sky goddess, later known

as Nut (Fig. 5.13). In the burial chambers of Ramesses IV (*ca.* 1156-1150 BC) and VI (*ca.* 1145-1139 BC), this goddess is depicted as arching across the ceiling. The white beast is depicted in a similar stance. That the beast had spiritual qualities is deduced from the fact that offerings were being brought to it by figures Bárta (2010, 51) identifies as desert dwellers.

This identification with Nut is *seemingly* further strengthened by his interpretation of the figure beneath the beast on the left as being Geb, on the basis that it appears to be reclining on one arm, with the other touching the breast of the beast (Bárta 2010, 51; 2014, 194). Thus the earth god was supporting his sister/wife Nut. His reasoning is based on §1142 of the *Pyramid Texts*, which date to the 5-6<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (*ca.* 2375-2181 BC):

‘...while Geb, with one arm to the sky and the other to the earth...’<sup>68</sup>

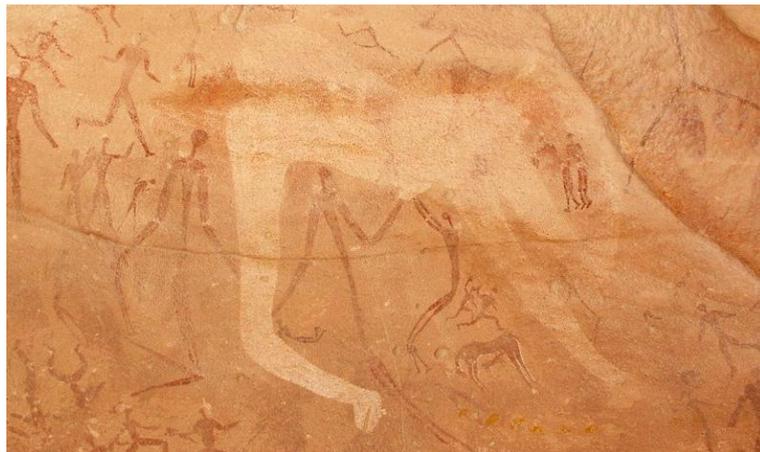


Fig. 5.13: Image of the white beast identified as Nut by Bárta., Upper Centre Section, WG.21\_03f\_0339 (Zboray, 2009. With kind permission of Zboray, personal communication)

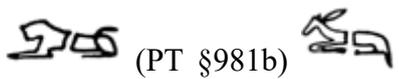
Bárta (2010, 51; 2014, 194) also identified the second figure beneath the beast who is holding up both arms to the beast’s breast together with the figure depicted in front of the beast as being nascent representations of the two gods later known as Shu and Tefnut, the parents of Nut and Geb.

Since the ancient inhabitants of the desert would be aware of the Milky Way, the white beast may have been thought to be an early anthropomorphic representation of that astral phenomenon (Bárta 2010, 51), which has been identified with the sky goddess Nut. Astronomical evidence shows that the Milky Way at the winter solstice

<sup>68</sup> Quote taken from Faulkner 1998b.

in Predynastic Egypt would have stretched across the predawn sky (Wells 1992). Additionally, on the basis that the white beast is considered to be an inchoate Nut and since, in Dynastic belief, the process of resurrection and rebirth guaranteeing the deceased eternal existence took place within Nut's womb,<sup>69</sup> Bárta (2010, 67) therefore interpreted the rock shelter as being "...the place from where one could start his passage to the afterlife."

Both Le Quellec and Bárta's views that the decoration of the two rock shelters represents inchoate concepts of later dynastic Egyptian belief are supported by d'Huy (2009, 125-126). He argued that the damage done to the beast in Fig. 5.8 is akin to the mutilation of some animal hieroglyphs found in the *Pyramid* and *Coffin Texts*. Examples of ritually mutilated animal hieroglyphs in the *Pyramid Texts* are

 (PT §981b)  (PT §1082a). Such hieroglyphs were found in the royal burial chambers<sup>70</sup> as it was believed if left whole they could represent potential harm to the deceased (Lacau 1914, 1; Picardo 2007, 234). Their mutilation meant their powers were neutralised and any possible danger was thus eliminated. D'Huy used this argument to place the rock-art in a mortuary setting. If d'Huy is correct, then it might be expected that at least other beasts of a similar size would display similar mutilations. D'Huy (2009, 126) also argued the heads of the beasts may have been deliberately omitted thus rendering them harmless. This argument I find difficult to accept since it is clear that several appear to be devouring human figures.

Bárta's identification of certain images depicted in the Wadi Sura II as being the origin of ancient Egyptian deities must also be queried. It is not feasible to associate

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<sup>69</sup> For example see *PT* §1344 Nut suckles the king; this forms part of a resurrection text. §1607 Nut assists and protects the dead king §2171 Nut carries the dead king to the skies. §Nut bears the sun god Re, to whom the king is assimilated, daily. This latter evokes the decoration of the ceilings of the tombs of Ramesses IV and VI. *CT* §III 264, 372 and 398 Nut is responsible for the rebirth of the deceased. She is also one of the tree-goddesses providing life giving water for the deceased. See Billing (2002) for an in-depth analysis. Of the New Kingdom Books of the Afterlife (Hornung 1999, 113ff; 122ff) the *Book of Nut*, which provides an understanding of the heavens that appears in the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos and in the tomb of Ramesses IV in both instances in association with the depictions of the goddess on the ceiling of the tomb chamber referred to above. The *Book of the Night* appears in the same location plus the tomb of Ramesses VI and instances the sun's (Re) journey from being swallowed by Nut throughout the night until it is reborn in the morning. The *Book of the Day* found in the tomb of Ramesses VI, represents the sun's (Re) diurnal journey. Depictions of Nut are also found on the insides of coffin lids and on sarcophagi lids, whereby it was believed the deceased became united with the goddess from whom the deceased would be reborn (Wilkinson, R.H. 2003, 162).

<sup>70</sup> The Coffin Texts date to the Middle Kingdom and are to be found mainly on coffins. The mutilation of hieroglyphs was based on the same principle as that of the *Pyramid Texts*.

the beast, which is dated to the period 6500 – 4400 BC, as being a nascent form of Nut based on evidence dating to the Dynastic period, the earliest of which being the late Old Kingdom *Pyramid Texts*. Bárta also refers to the fact that deities identified were members of the Great (Heliopolitan) Ennead but the actual relationship between the gods of the Heliopolitan Ennead is first described in the much later 4<sup>th</sup> century BC papyrus Bremner-Rhind III, the Book of the Overthrowing ‘Apep.’<sup>71</sup>

Part of Bárta’s argument for identifying Nut with the Milky Way is based on Wells’ (1992) astronomical work. However, Wells was using data relating to a much later period that is *ca.* 3500 BC; thus the acceptability of his argument here must be questionable. The identification of Nut with the Milky Way in general is not secure. The “winding waterway” of the sky or *mr nhꜥ* of the *Pyramid Texts* (e.g. §340, 594-7) is generally identified as the Milky Way (Davis 1985, S102; see also Wells 1992, 308, fn. 5). Admittedly some do associate Nut with the Milky Way (e.g. Kozloff 1992, 331-364; 1993, 169-176; Maravelia 2003, 55-72; Wells 1992, 305-321). The invocation to Nut in Chapter 177 of the *Book of the Dead* to ensure the deceased does not perish or is destroyed has led to her identification with the Milky Way since, the deceased in the preceding chapter (176) states:

*“I abhor the eastern land... I pass through into the midst of the Milky Way...” (Book of the Dead, 176).*

Yet the deity who is associated with the “winding waterway” is *Mḥt wrt* who in turn is associated with Hathor (see Pinch 2002, 137 and 163; Wilkinson, R.H. 2003, 174) (see vignette of Chapter 186, *Book of the Dead*).<sup>72</sup> Thus the astral phenomenon may equally be associated with Hathor. Detailed debate lies outside the scope of this thesis; my purpose in referring to the problem of identification is to indicate that Bárta’s identification of Nut with the Milky Way is not robust.

However, the most critical evidence against Bárta’s interpretation rests on the anatomy of the beast, which he believes to be female. He (2010, 63) accepts that the round protuberances of the bodies of the beasts represent the head end. The ‘breast’

<sup>71</sup> “I had spat out Shu, I expectorated Tefnēt (26: 23) ...Shu and Tefnēt begat Gēb and Nūt, and Gēb and Nūt begat Osiris, Seth, Isis and Nephthys from the womb, one after the other...”. (27: 5) (Faulkner 1937, 172).

<sup>72</sup> This linkage is also seen on the sarcophagus of Khonsu, son of Sennedjem (Cairo Museum JE 27302) and discovered in the latter’s tomb (TT 1) at Deir el Medina, whereby a depiction of a recumbent cow referred to as *Mḥt wrt* has the name *ḥwt ḥr* inscribed on the counterpoise of her *mnit* (Desroches-Noblecourt 1976, 200, pl. 45).

is situated far down on the beast's torso. According to Zboray (2011, personal communication), who made a most detailed study of Saharan rock-art (Zboray 2009), all images that can be clearly identified as beasts are male and have penises. The 'breast' is in fact a penis. On that basis identification with Nut is not possible. In addition, an overall examination of the images in the rock shelter reveals that a number of human and animal figures were painted white, thus the white beast was not unique in the sense of colouration.

### 5.2.3 Dating of the Rock-art

Whilst Bárta's and Le Quellec's theories about the meanings of the decoration of the two rock-shelters are interesting, I also believe that they are not tenable on the basis of the proposed relative chronology, which is based on datable artefacts found in close proximity to the shelters. A number of sites in Wadi Sura have yielded pottery. Preliminary analysis of that in Wadi Sura II has shown that approximately 95% of potsherds and 80% of the pottery inventoried relates to Khartoum-style, mainly undecorated<sup>73</sup> and is attributed to the hunter-gatherer Gilf B phase, 6500-4400 calBC (Förster *et al.* 2012, 203; Kuper *et al.* 2010, 17; Lindstätter 2007, 36) (see Fig. 5.14 - Fig. 5.16). A small number of potsherds of an entirely different type of ceramic at Wadi Sura II was dated to the subsequent Gilf C phase (4400-3500 calBC)<sup>74</sup> (Riemer 2013a, 39),<sup>75</sup> when pastoralism appeared (Lindstätter 2007 36; Riemer 2009, 42). Le Quellec and Huyge (2008, 90) dated the pastoral images to the 4th millennium BC. During this period cattle were introduced (Linstädter 2007, 36; Reimer 2013a, 39). They formed a dominant motif in the artwork of this period both in the Gilf Kebir and the Gebel Ouenat thus giving rise to the art style being termed the "Cattle herders style" (Kuper *et al.* 2010, 17). The ceramic evidence indicates that the major occupation period in Wadi Sura was Gilf B. The "cattle herders style" is rare in the Wadi Sura, which is dominated by the "Wadi Sura style" the defining feature being the beasts (Zboray 2012, 228). Whilst it is acknowledged that some rock-art in the region might date even earlier, the Gilf A phase is not well represented at Wadi Sura. Based on the extensive work of the Wadi Sura project, which involved the survey

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<sup>73</sup> Decoration when applied comprised packed dotted zigzag (rocker stamp decoration) and also dotted and incised wavy line). The undecorated style was linked to the Khartoum-style by the types of temper used (Förster *et al.* 2012, 203 and Fig. 10).

<sup>74</sup> Gilf C pottery is thin-walled with incised decoration (Kuper *et al.* 2009, Fig. 18).

<sup>75</sup> The Wadi Sura project (see footnote 54) base the datings on those of Lindstätter (2005, 55) who identified four phases A-D in the Gilf based *inter alia* on ceramic types in his earlier work in Wadi Bakht (Gilf Kebir).

and comparison of a large number of desert sites (>340 sites by 2010 – Kuper *et al.* 2010, 17) sixty of which had art decoration and were associated with pottery (Förster and Riemer, 2011), their dating, for this work, is accepted for the rock-art at Wadi Sura and not the later dates proposed by Le Quellec and Bárta (see Section 5.2.1).



*Fig. 5.14: Khartoum type pottery with 'Packed Dotted Zig Zag' decoration; Gilf B phase. Provenance: Wadi Sura. (After Förster et al. 2012, Fig. 10)*



*Fig. 5.15: Khartoum type pottery with 'Dotted Wavy line' decoration. Gilf B phase. Provenance: Wadi Sura. (After Riemer 2013a, Fig. 1)*

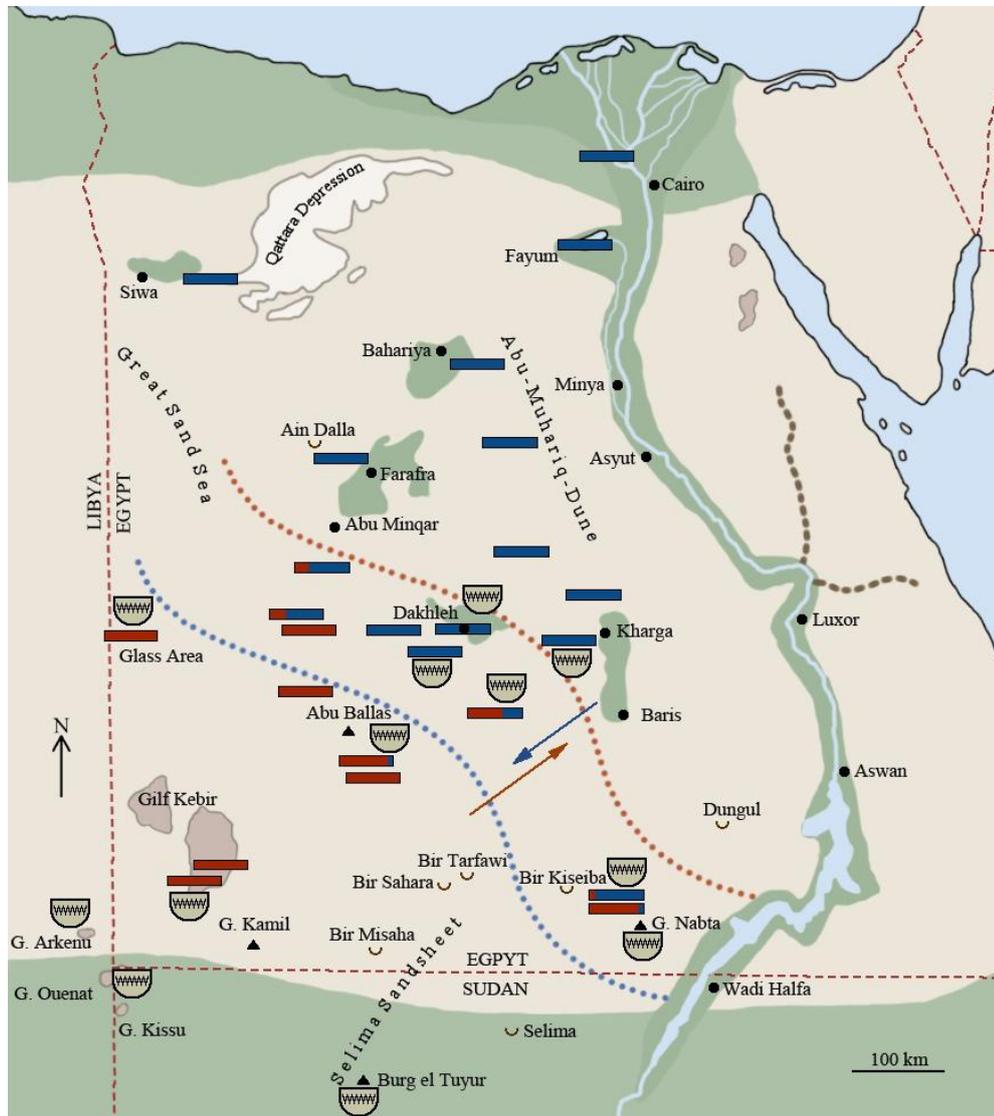


*Fig. 5.16: Undecorated Khartoum type pottery. Gilf B phase. Provenance: Wadi Sura. (After Förster et al. 2012, Fig. 10)*

#### **5.2.4 Contacts**

The question must also be asked as to why it took a minimum of 2000 years for these concepts to be developed in ancient Egypt. Prior to the onset of the desiccation of the Western Desert, seasonal migrations would have brought transhumant groups into contact resulting in the exchange and spread of artefacts and beliefs. Once the monsoonal rains started to move southwards by 5300 calBC, there appears to have been gradual migration of desert populations to areas where permanent water supplies were available, although the Gilf Kebir was still sufficient in water (Kuper and Kröpelin 2006, 805). If the newcomers to the Nile Valley had a belief system that incorporated such beings as headless beasts, it is likely that such beliefs would become subsumed to a greater or lesser extent in those of the original populations. Thus it would be expected that there should be some evidence of this. However, the archaeological evidence argues that there was no direct contact between the Gilf

Kebir and the Nile Valley; rather there was a cultural divide across the centre of the Western Desert (Map 5.2 and Zboray 2011, personal communication).

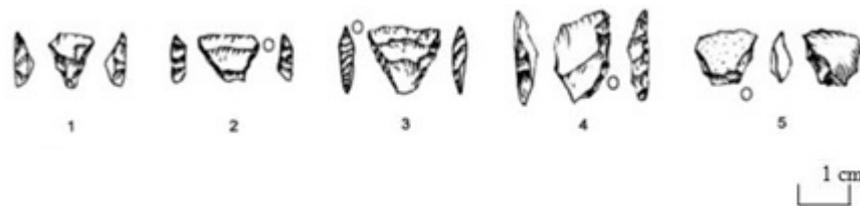


Map 5.2: Showing the spread of Khartoum type pottery to the north and the overlapping arrowhead types: brown transverse and other microlith types; blue: bifacial arrowheads. (Taylor after Riemer 2007, Fig 3)

Khartoum type pottery has been discovered in all the three sites covered by this chapter: Dakhleh Oasis and environs, the most northerly point (Hope 2002, 41) to Nabta Playa, the most southerly point and Wadi Sura and Gebel Ouenat in the Southwest of the Western Desert (Map 5.1; Nelson 2002, Fig.2.1; Riemer and Jesse 2006, 63-72; Warfe 2003, 83). The ceramic evidence is discussed in detail by Riemer and Jesse (2006, 63-72) who conclude that such ceramic ware originated at Nabta Playa in the early Neolithic (Riemer and Jesse 2006, 63 and Fig.1). Certainly Hope (2002, 41) postulated that some of the ware discovered at Dakhleh may not have

been made there on the grounds that the quartz rich fabric without shale temper was not characteristic of other ceramics found in the Oasis and also the decoration linked it with the Khartoum-style. Quartz-rich fabrics were ubiquitous elsewhere in the Western Desert so the origin of the sherds at Dakhleh cannot be determined. Such discoveries would suggest that the nomadic populations were part of a network of contacts across the southwest and southern Western Desert including the Oases. These contacts could have involved, in addition to the exchange of goods, the exchange of ideas and beliefs.

The most telling evidence is that of the arrowheads. Transverse arrowheads found at the Wadi Sura (5 examples are shown in Fig. 5.17) (Förster *et al.* 2012, 205), were characteristic of the area southwest of the Oases and were characteristic of a southern tradition. The stemmed or the leaf-shaped arrowheads prevalent in the Oases were characteristic of a northern tradition (Riemer 2006, 501).



*Fig. 5.17: Transverse Arrowheads. Gilf B phase. Provenience: Wadi Sura 09/1-2. (After Kuper et al. 2009, Fig. 16)*

It is argued on the basis of arrowhead typology that the inhabitants of Gilf Kebir very rarely traversed the large distance to the Oases; the arrows and dotted lines on Map 5.2 show the approximate extent of movement of people towards the Oases from Gilf Kebir and people from the Oases westwards. If the Khartoum-style pottery discovered at Dakhleh was not made there, its presence does suggest a contact albeit indirect. What is clear is that, on present evidence, there was no direct contact between the Wadi Sura and the Nile Valley (Map 5.2). There appears to have been a cultural divide on a Northeast/Southwest basis, with the Oases forming a transitional zone. Within these areas contacts would have been made, as well as the exchange of goods, ideas and beliefs.

The archaeological evidence is supported by the climatic changes in that the northeastern divide was affected first. As a result of the desiccation process from approximately 5,300 calBC, plus a second drying spell around 4,500 calBC, there

was a more rapid retreat from that northern sector into the upper Nile, which coincides approximately with the Neolithic settlements at Merimde and in the Fayum *ca.* 5000 BC and the Badarian period settlements. However, in the southwestern sector part, habitation continued in ecological niches such as the Gilf Kebir, which continued to receive sufficient rainfall overall to support life (Kuper and Kröpelin 2006, 803). During this successive Gilf C period *ca.* 4400-3500 calBC, in the south, microliths became rare and a thin walled pottery often finely incised or impressed was introduced (Lindstätter 2005, 364ff). The economy was based on specialised cattle pastoralism,<sup>76</sup> which later became the norm in sub-Saharan Africa. At the end of this phase the climatic conditions deteriorated further resulting in a migration over time following the southward retreat of the monsoonal summer rain belt during the 5th to 3rd millennia BC into Sudan and Nubia, rather than into the Egyptian Nile Valley (Riemer 2011, personal communication).

### **5.2.5 An Alternative Interpretation**

If the scenes in the two rock shelters are not to be interpreted as evidence for the beginnings of ancient Egyptian beliefs as known from textual evidence, how should they be interpreted? The present theoretical approach is that the life of the hunter-gatherers was not one of hardship, they knew their food resources and their environment and were capable of carrying out whatever actions were necessary to ensure that they had sufficient nourishment (Lee and Devore 1968, 6). Sahlins (1968, 85-89) went further and referred to them as forming "...the first affluent society". Sahlins' and the general theory may be able to be upheld elsewhere, but is not accepted here. Since rain is essential for life and as the amount of rainfall was inconsistent, even in the Gilf Kebir, the desert peoples would be constantly aware of the effects of the climate on their lives. Ethnography shows that many African peoples carried out rain rituals and I suggest that the rock-art in Wadi Sura I and II represents such practices. In determining this I will use theories relating to landscape, rock-art, ASC, ritual, shamanism as well as ethnographic analogy.

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<sup>76</sup> It is not an aim of this work to determine the origin of ancient Egyptian cattle, which has been the subject of protracted debate. However, it is pertinent to state that mitochondrial DNA testing originally supported the theory that the African *Bos primigenis* (aurochs) was the primary source of early Saharan cattle rather than their having an Asian origin (Bradley *et al.* 1996, 5131-5135; 1998, 79-86). However this conclusion appears to have been disputed by later research (Ajmone-Marsan *et al.* 2010, 150) and the issue is still a matter for debate (Vigne 2011, 174).

The first issue that needs to be addressed is the landscape, which can provide vital pointers to the meanings of the scenes.

The landscape is formed by its inhabitants as a result of the activities of their everyday lives (see Ingold 1993, 152-174). Hunter-gatherer and early pastoralist societies because of their total reliance on the land would have had a very intimate knowledge of the world that was their cosmos which would be their *axis mundi*. The landscape, therefore, gives meaning to the lives of its inhabitants. The landscape was not just about the present but the past as well; a landscape is also a place of collective history, memories, beliefs, traditions and conventions to which its inhabitants have access and contribute. Many peoples believe that the world was populated with the dead ancestors and other spiritual entities. For some such as the Australian Aborigines, the whole landscape is considered sacred since it was created by mythical beings as they traversed across it leaving their spiritual essence behind in rocks, water-holes, and mountains (Berndt 1974, 8). The Cree also believed their land was inhabited by spirits and supernatural powers (Tilley 1994, 56). Others understood that certain topographical features were deemed to be imbued with sacredness as they were perceived to respond to people's spiritual needs (Klassen 1998, 69; Whitley 1998c, 21f). The feeling of sacredness was perpetuated by the holding of rituals and ceremonies at such places (Rapoport 1975, 43; Taçon 1990, 29). Lim (2010, 109ff) notes that the Sandawe of Tanzania perform rain rituals in rock shelters. Gould (1969, 104) interpreted this belief as being "...nothing less than the theme of existence...".

Early beliefs included a spiritual world beyond the veil of rock surfaces with natural crevices and tunnels being considered to be entrances to this world (Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 15, 46; Helskog 2010, 169; Morris, D. 2010, 42; Ouzman 1998, 33; Taçon and Ouzman 2004, 39). Rock shelters were also deemed to be entrances to this world (Lewis-Williams 2004a, 33) and were 'natural' settings for shamanic performances (Haaland and Haaland 2011, 27). Many, whilst being occupation sites, also contained rock-art with many repetitions of motifs and the main figures generally being in a dominant central position (Flood 2004, 196ff; Layton 2001, 324). Rock-art is also found on other rock formations and that on isolated boulders have a variety of motifs (Layton 2001, 324). Rock-art represents the externalisation of thought and the cognitive values of those involved in its

creation. As noted in Section 3.4.3, much rock-art was considered to represent belief systems (Whitley 2011, 307). A site was chosen with regard to its specific ritual and religious significance and power such as that at Brandberg (Lenssen-Erz 2004, 144). Lenssen-Erz (2004, 148) argues that the rock-art was located in areas of ritual activities, which increased if the group was facing crises such as drought. Kinahan (1991, 42) maintained sites with significant amounts of rock-art were aggregation sites and the rock-art was created as a result of appeals to the supernatural in times of stress, such as periods of drought. Such rituals were performed for the whole group, suggesting the cause for ritual affected the whole group. The position of the rock-art in the landscape would therefore be important as to its meaning. Shamanic art tends to be characterised by a small number of species functioning as guardians or vehicles for spiritual encounters (see Section 3.4.3.2 and 4.2.7). It is also possibly differentiated by a high frequency of certain motifs.

On the basis of the above, I maintain that the local population of the Western Desert also accorded similar attributes to their landscape. That the rock shelters held great significance to the inhabitants of the area is confirmed by the large amount of decoration accrued over a long period of time, resulting in the depiction of thousands of images that would suggest the decoration had a deeper meaning for the desert populations who created the artwork. This would render the location, despite evidence of occupation,<sup>77</sup> a feeling of sacredness and power (Tilley 1994, 31-33).

The rock-art appears to focus on the figures of humans,<sup>78</sup> who appear to be in small groups, and more particularly on the composite beasts of which in 2013 there were forty-four in Wadi Sura II (Förster 2013, Fig. 7). Since there is a preponderance of unidentifiable, unworldly beasts within a restricted location, I suggest this is evidence that they are of shamanic nature (see Layton 2000, 182), being part of the stage three hallucinations of ASC. The meshing depicted on some beasts could be construed as entoptics. Although they form stage one of the hallucinatory experience entoptics can also be visible in stage three (Section 3.4.3.1). There is evidence of the removal of some decoration and its replacement by other images. The reason for the

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<sup>77</sup> A similar situation pertained with the San (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 2000, 36).

<sup>78</sup> There are over 8,000 figures in total. These recordings to date have focused on one panel, panel D, which is the central, and most heavily decorated (approximately 100 figures per square meter) section of the wall. According to Förster (2013, 51ff), panel D contains 1877 figures, of these 1099 or 58.6% are human and 8.0% animal.

erasure of images cannot be known, whether they were thought not to be conceptually charged, to create more space, or that a particular part of the rock was charged with a special meaning.

In my view, the rock-art did not depict hunting magic because the beasts do not represent any known species of animal. Their representation also implies they were not images of totems or territorial markers since there were numerous depictions of the beast in one location and in prominent positions on the surface of the rock shelter. The fact that they are extraordinary composite figures, similar overall but differing in detail, would suggest that they had a special meaning. This is reinforced by the fact of its numerous representations within a confined space. It is doubtful if they were information systems to assist in stalking strategies (discussed by Mithen 1996b, 84ff). Rather, I believe they are shamanic in character. Additionally, the fact that the style of the human beings appears hurried and caricaturist can be considered to be supplementary evidence that the art is shamanic (see Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996, 50). I will argue later that these rock shelters, particularly Wadi Sura II, were areas of ritual.

Kuper *et al.* (2010, 15) have deduced that the majority of hand stencils<sup>79</sup> are the earliest representations, which Förster and Riemer (2011) have dated to *ca.* 9000 calBC. The large number of stencils, I believe, is evidence that the rock shelters were deemed to be important at a very early stage at the start of the occupation of the area. The reddish-brown images of beasts dated from 6500 calBC, whilst those painted in yellow belonged to a later phase. Since no charcoal has been used in the pigments, no C<sup>14</sup> dating can be undertaken; thus dating of the images must be relative. It is the conviction of this work that the rock-art in Wadi Sura I and II represents complex conceptual spiritual beliefs in pictorial form as will be discussed further in Section 5.2.5.3. The reasoning for this is based on the depiction of the beasts, which conform to no known animal species or genus. The beasts must therefore have played a special role in the imagery since they are so prominently displayed. The fact that the beasts are hybrid must also have had a special meaning for the desert population, since deliberate decisions must have been taken about their composition.

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<sup>79</sup> In Panel D, which is the panel that has been analysed, there are 186 stencils most of which are hand stencils (Förster 2013, 53). It should be noted that panel C contained the most handprints.

It is not possible for this work to consider the artwork in its totality; therefore several aspects of it will be examined, in particular the hand stencils because I believe they indicate that the rock shelters were regarded as sacred places from an early age, and the beasts and the “swimmers” because they are the focus of Bárta’s and Le Quellec’s premises for which I offer an alternative explanation.

### **5.2.5.1 Hand Stencils**

Hand stencils have been made for almost thirty thousand years in various cultures across the world.<sup>80</sup> The stencils are either in positive or negative mode. In Wadi Sura I and II, the majority are negative, Negative hand stencils are made by the hand (whether palm or back of the hand) being placed on the wall and pigment blown over it onto the wall or around the fingers. There are >900 hand prints in Wadi Sura II<sup>81</sup> (two examples are shown in Fig. 5.18), which include instances of a child’s hand being superimposed onto an adult hand. Of those hand prints that are easily discernible and not abraded, there is a predominance of left hand prints which appears to be the norm in rock-art (Dobrez 2013, 290). There are also unusually several negative images of feet. The fact that there are so few suggests that they were not considered to be as important. Hands were the easiest part of the body to stencil on a wall. It is usually accepted that the person themselves was responsible for this action but it could well have been someone else. It has been suggested that the hand stencil was just a marker to show that a particular person had been in the cave, in a sense an autograph.



*Fig. 5.18: Examples of children’s hand stencils superimposed on adult hands, Wadi Sura II, Panel C, D:12. (After Kuper (ed.) 2013, p. 211)*

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<sup>80</sup> Examples include: Argentina, Tasmania (Bahn and Vertut 1997, 29 and 33 respectively), France (Chauvet *et al.* 1996, 32 and fig. 25 and 26), Namibia (Lenssen-Erz and Vogelsang 2005, 54) and South Africa (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 2000, 108).

<sup>81</sup> Most of the emphasis is on the rock-art in Wadi Sura II because of the detailed reports produced by the Cologne Wadi Sura Project. The number of handprints in Wadi Sura II is deduced from Förster 2013, Fig. 7.

However, is that a satisfactory answer? As previously stated (Section 5.2.5), rock faces are considered to be the membranes or veils between the physical and spirit worlds. The hand stencil is the result of a deliberate act and a marker of a personal event. The hand is an organ of communication. The result of covering the hand with pigment was that it melded into the wall and became one with it. Possibly it was thought the palm of the hand was communicating with or had even entered the spirit world. Thus, was the person trying to reach into the spirit world? Or could another reason be that it was thought that carrying out such an action would result in the curing of illness by the spirits, the spiritual renewing of a person's depleted power. If so, the depiction of children's handprints is perhaps not surprising. However, a child's handprint could signify a continuing relationship with the spirit world over the generations. Yet, the hand can also be interpreted as though it is inside the rock facing out into the physical world. Maybe this should be understood as being a dual image; the hand is a synecdochal representation of the person, whose presence is therefore constant and whose essence is constantly imbued through the conduit of the spiritual hand with power from the supernatural world. Whilst it is impossible to know the exact meaning of these handprints, I do believe that they are related to very early spiritual beliefs. If the dating of the hand decorations to *ca.* 9000 calBC is correct, then it would appear that the two rock shelters were considered sacred places from an extremely early period.

#### ***5.2.5.2 The Composite Beasts and the Swimmers: Ethnography***

As there is no ethnography relating to this area, I am using ethnographic analogy to assist in the interpretation of these motifs. The rock-art that I consider to be analogous is that of the San of southern Africa, hunter-gatherers who live in relatively small groups. The ethnography used for the interpretation of San rock-art appears in a multitude of publications, in the main by Lewis-Williams<sup>82</sup> who uses this data as the basis of his work. His reports appear to vary slightly, in that different information is given either additional or the subject is examined from a different viewpoint. The following is in essence a summary of these various reports. Lewis-Williams used two strands of historical evidence and one recent, which led him to the conclusion that there were pan-San concepts. The interpretation of rock-art in the

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<sup>82</sup> For example, 1980, 467-482; 1982, 429-449; 1987, 166-172; 2002, 136ff; 2004a, 18-21; 2004c, 136-143.

southern Malouti-Drakensberg during the 1870s was by Qing, apparently the last remaining member of the Maluti people. Qing was assisting Orpen, a colonial administrator, who made copies of the art and Qing's interpretations. These copies were sent to Bleek, a philologist living in Capetown, who was undertaking research into the /Xam, a San people who lived in the Cape Colony some 800 km distant from the Maluti. Orpen's copies were shown to Diä!kwain, of the /Xam culture and although he was not aware of Qing's responses, Diä!kwain's interpretations were in essence conceptually the same.

Reference was made to a rain animal and persons associated with the beast as being full of supernatural potency, to humans undergoing transformation into animals (Lewis-Williams 1987, 168), and to trance dances; the trance state was not brought on by the ingestion of psychotropic substances but by prolonged dancing, drumming and the like (see Sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.5).

The /Xam recognised different types of medicine men: healers, of game, of rain and those who use their powers to cause harm (Lewis-Williams 1982, 433). Additionally, Lewis-Williams undertook fieldwork with Biesele, who was known for her work with the San people, the !Kung of the northern Kalahari. They are linguistically different to the southern San peoples and do not create rock-art. The !Kung and the /Xam held similar cognitive beliefs relating to potency and power used by medicine men (Lewis-Williams and Biesele 1978, 130). The !Kung hold trance dances, sometime when in a deep trance, the person Lewis-Williams (1980, 479) identifies as a shaman<sup>83</sup> collapses and undergoes an out of body experience, which can later be described. The Maluti, the /Xam and the !Kung mythology referred to the dance causing death but charms would bring about resurrection, which has been understood to mean entering into an altered state of consciousness and the eventual return to normal consciousness. The similarities between the !Kung trance performance and the same performances by the Maluti San as described by Qing, strongly suggest that the rain-making rituals were carried out by those who entered an altered state of consciousness. Such explanations are understood to be a revelation of what happens in the other world (Lewis-Williams 1980, 479). Vinnicombe (1972, 192-204) also acknowledged a similarity in cognitive beliefs despite linguistic differences between

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<sup>83</sup> There is no similar wording across the San peoples for the ritual specialist.

the southern and northern San peoples. From essentially these three strands of evidence of parallels in the rituals and cosmologies of the three San cultures, Lewis-Williams deduced that there were pan-San concepts as McCall, D.F. (1970, 18) had proposed in respect of hunting and mating which were expressed in different ways but corresponded in significance.

### **5.2.5.3 *The Beasts and Swimmers***

The forty four enigmatic beasts in Wadi Sura II appear to be part human and part animal or composed from several animals. They have powerful sloping bodies, which have been identified variously as being that of a giraffe, a baboon, a bovid, a canid or a feline (Le Quellec 2008, 33). As stated in Section 5.2.5, I believe the beasts represent stage 3 of ASC and thus are culturally influenced (Section 3.4.3.1). It could be argued that these beasts are imaginary images from deep within the psyche of the local population. However, although they cannot be identified with any known animal, they could represent parts of animals, whose qualities were admired, and which when combined produced an extremely powerful being. Hybrid beasts are also connected with the state of transformation since they are neither one animal nor another and therefore lack boundaries of being. Consequently, their mysterious appearance conveys a sense of spirituality and they are often regarded as arbiters between life and death. The beasts fall into Lévi-Strauss's (1964, 89) category of animals that are "good to think", in that their images are an embodiment of conceptualisation of ideas and relations based on empirical observation on the part of the local population.

That population would live in relative isolation in the wide expanse of what has become the Western Desert. Life would appear to be in the simplest terms a continuum of birth, maturation and death but death was not an eradication of life since birth continued to take place. The Wadi Sura may have been an aggregation area, where the peoples came together to renew ties and to carry out *inter alia* rituals to ensure their continued existence. Rock-art provided the evidence of such areas (Kinahan 1991, 42; Straus 1980, 625). Citing from the proposed definition of a belief system in Section 3.6.1:

*Belief systems are derived from the reaction of bewilderment or fear of the unknown; in other words they are a human and emotional response to the challenges of the world. These beliefs give meaning to the inexplicable...*

these paintings could well be a reaction to the complexities of life and the need for reassurance. The images could represent living animals in a fantastic way since they are anomalous as well as perfect; the beasts conform to no species of known animals and their creation opposes the norms of scientific taxonomy and also that of folk taxonomy; the composition of the beasts would be the result of careful thought so that the resultant images assumed the qualities and powers of their various component parts of the animals/beings admired for their prowess. They were obviously created to fulfil a need in the lives of the local population. Since they are the product of human thought processes, it is suggested that the local population believed that the images were imbued with extra-special powers to which they could turn when in need. According to landscape theory, caves and rock shelters were liminal places and were considered to be entrances to the underworld or the afterlife and hand stencils are considered to be a method of reaching into that world, the beasts at a later period could also play a part in achieving that. A number of the beasts have been painted very near to crevices or fissures in the rock face, which, in shamanic thought, are believed to form entryways to the other world.

The beasts in Wadi Sura I and II are often associated with the so-called “swimmers”. Those in Wadi Sura II have been shown, as a result of colour enhancing techniques to be red ochre but the bodies have yellow spots.<sup>84</sup> I have mentioned in Section 4.3.9.1 that spots or dappling could refer to the idea of two beings and transformation of states, a concept of shamanism. Kuper (2002, 2) acknowledges that the swimming figures could represent the actual activity since water was available in close proximity to the shelter. However, if that were so, why did such images not appear across the region? Not detracting from the idea of shamanism but building on Kuper’s suggestion, another hypothesis may be offered. The yellow dots on the bodies of the swimmers could be indicative of grains of sand. Water was as a means of entering the spirit world (Dowson 1998, 80) and the shaman’s trance journey was often compared to swimming. If there was little water in the playa basin,

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<sup>84</sup> Förster 2013, 53, Fig. 6. D-Stretch or Decorrelation stretch: an image enhancement technique that can bring out faint pictographs invisible to the naked eye.

it may be thought that entry to that world could still be gained through a gateway in the same location but through the different medium of sand. Sand has both fluid and solid properties (Sharpe *et al.* 2013, 260-274). In the former state, when dry and friable, it can be considered to be analogous with water, in that it permits movements or “swimming” within it. Whilst it cannot be concluded with any certainty, the concept of a shaman when in a trance state swimming through sand should not be discounted.

Although the image of beasts devouring humans might be thought to signify the triumph of death over life, as for instance the Tarasque of Noves<sup>85</sup> in southern Gaul dating to approximately the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Aldhouse-Green 2004, 126), the human figures depicted in the Wadi Sura scenes involving the beasts do not appear to be afraid of them, since many appear in close proximity to them. Deliberate decisions would have been taken into deciding the composition of the beasts with the purpose of according them special powers. Based on that premise, I suggest, therefore, that the beasts at Wadi Sura are not destructive but are generative in that they are a means of transformation from “death” to “life” or a means of enabling life to continue.

I believe that these rock-art motifs have shamanic characteristics and reveal the hallucinatory scenes of the shaman as a result of an altered state of consciousness. Entoptics, such as dots and v-shapes are included in the artwork. Additionally some of the beasts have what appears to be meshing wrapped round them (for example Fig. 5.8), which can also denote entoptics (Figs. 3.2 - Fig. 3.4), which form stage one of the process of ASC and are often present in stage three. The meshing might denote the capture of the animal (see Fig. 5.19 for a San comparison). Layton (2000, 182ff) in his analysis of shamanic and totemic art concludes shamanic art focuses on a limited number of species which are replicated with high frequency. This is the situation in Wadi Sura II in particular. Shamanism is thought by many (Section 4.1 and 4.2) to have formed part of hunter-gatherer/early pastoralist beliefs. De Flers *et al.* (2007, 55) dismiss the theory of shamanic art on the grounds that no hallucinogenic plants grew in the region and the fact that there is no reliable evidence that shamanism was responsible for any parietal art. However, the first

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<sup>85</sup> The beast holds two severed human heads and is eating a human arm. The piece is dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

criticism can be countered by the fact that hallucinogens are not necessary to enter a trancelike state; drumming, stamping of feet rhythmically and chanting can all produce the same result. Secondly, the result of cabling between the ethnographic analogy and the rock-art motifs in Wadi Sura, I believe presents a strong argument that the latter was produced as a result of shamanic trances. The art work is not carried out when in a trance but images are retained. They can be reproduced up to a period of six-months later (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978, 297). That could explain the differences in the depictions of the beasts. According to Lewis-Williams and Dowson (2000, 36), shamans often looked at the paintings when in a trance to heighten their level of potency.

It is therefore suggested that the swimmers are a depiction of a shaman or shamans in a trance since accounts of trance experiences likens that state of existence as being in the water. Using ethnographic analogy, in South African San thought (Dowson 1998, 77), the rain animals are caught under water. The shaman, when in a trance, entered the spirit world and captured the animal. The shamanic trance is likened to swimming. This animal, two examples of which are seen in Fig. 5.19 below appears to be either a hybrid or mythological beast. Like the Wadi Sura beasts, although the San rain animals are similar, no two are identical and are formed from a combination of features (Dowson 1998, 80). Thus, perhaps a parallel can be drawn. The swimmers represented the shaman(s). The beasts, rain bulls and the various human images, who could perhaps be spirit images, possibly ancestors, were carrying out



*Fig. 5.19 Examples of San “rain animals”. (Source and copyright holder: Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, [www.sarada.co.za](http://www.sarada.co.za). Ref. RARI-LEE-RSA-FLO3-2 and RARI-LEE-RSA-REE1-28 respectively)*

some form of rain dance. This idea also fulfils the definition of belief system used in this work as it is a response to one of the challenges of the world - existence. Since the local populations depended on the rain (according to Riemer 2009, 34, the estimated maximum annual rainfall during the climatic optimum was 100 mm, and possibly slightly more on the mountainous regions) for their continued survival, such a suggestion is feasible.

#### ***5.2.5.4 Identification of Ritualistic Elements in Relation to Rappaport's Analysis***

Reference has been made (Section 3.4.3) to the fact that there is thought to be a correlation of the amount of rock-art in an area to the number of rituals performed and was indicative of critical conditions. Section 3.4.1 outlined the nine elements that according to Rappaport (1999, 23-68) were essential in any ritual. The following is an analysis which I believe shows that the Wadi Sura II paintings do represent a shamanic ritual. Rock-art depicting the hallucinatory journeys was painted after and not during the event. Thus, the causative event that resulted in these paintings had already taken place. To establish whether the rock-art at Wadi Sura objectifies a shaman's ritualistic visit to the spirit world, I consider the applicability of the shaman's experience and the nature of the rock-art motifs in the light of Rappaport's framework, for which I indicate the relevant pages. Reflecting on the two issues in tandem enables linkages to be made between them, the result being a stronger cable of reasoning.

#### *Encoding by others than performers (pp. 32-33)*

Rituals follow a particular sequence; each sequence is particular to the type of ritual. Each sequence contains elements specific to that sequence. The decisions as to what each sequence and element comprised will have been made at some point in the past and because the ritual has been enacted overtime, it has credence. Regarding Wadi Sura rock-art, this element could be applied to the procedure followed by the shaman to enter an altered state of consciousness; this would follow an overall similar pattern but it is possible that procedure is peculiar to one shaman alone. Rappaport does allow for such deviation within a ritual. The other application would relate to the production of the rock-art and the decisions to be made in respect of pigments to be used and their preparation and the location of the motifs following the guidance of the shaman. Thus, there could be variations within an overall concept.

*Formality i.e. Decorum (pp. 33-36)*

According to Rappaport, behaviour in ritual tends to be punctilious and repetitive. Ritual sequences are composed of conventional, even stereotyped elements, for instance stylized and often decorous gestures and postures and the arrangements of these elements in time and space are usually more or less fixed. Regarding a trance ritual, certain formalities are observed in particular the preparation of the shaman to enter an altered state of consciousness with possibly the collaboration of the community if this is brought about by rhythmic percussive sounds. A rain ritual would take place when either the rains were expected to encourage their arrival or when they failed to come. As stated above, the rains when they did come were not consistent across the area. There would be thus no set date. Such rituals would fall into Titiev's (1960, 293) critical category. The ritual would probably take place in the area in front of the rock shelter. As seen in Section 5.2.5, rock shelters are often viewed as sacred places even if they are settlement areas. That it is a specialised place is suggested by the number of motifs.

Formality would apply to the motifs themselves. Images in rock-art tend to be formalised and generally easily identifiable. However, those produced as a result of ritual will contain characteristics specific to that ritual and thus result in complex iconography including elements not readily understood in the present day but meaningful to those creating the image. The beasts with their differing attributes, which are not always immediately apparent, together with their unusual overall form suggests that they encode concepts of a supernatural rather than the natural world.

*Invariance (More or less) (pp. 36-37)*

Whilst stages and elements of rituals may be set, it is inevitable that changes occur, if for no other reason than human nature. The motifs appear to be the same, or invariant, because they are of a similar typology. However, there are differences in colour and in the details of the beasts, which are probably due to the instructions of the shaman(s) or because they were painted sometime after the event.

*Performance (pp. 37-46)*

Without a performance by actor(s) there can be no ritual. Liturgical orders may be written down but that does not make them rituals, it is the enactment of those orders that transforms the written word into performance. On that basis, the rock-art is not a

ritual *per se*, rather it is the objectification of a ritual. Performance indicates a potential audience. The rock shelters at Wadi Sura are generally linked to large open-air camps; the shelters, too, were places of habitation (Riemer 2013b, 54). The rock-art would therefore be on “public” display as would its creation. It is possible that the performance took place at times of aggregation.

*Formality (pp. 46-50)*

Rituals are often connected to the state of the world of those performing. Those related to beliefs focus on other-worldly forces and differ from rituals dealing with daily activities. Rock-art resulting from an altered state of consciousness will be formal in character since it represents a journey to the spirit world and depicts other than human beings. The symbolism of the motifs can be complex with many layers of meaning. Thus they are differentiated from everyday motifs.

*Communication (pp. 50-52)*

Ritual is one means of communication but in two directions. The first is to the supernatural to which the ritual is dedicated and the second is to those participating in the ritual whether as actor or audience. A shamanic ritual involving trance and altered state of consciousness generally involves the community. Whilst not affected in the same manner as the shaman, the community is cogniscent of the various elements of the ritual and is participating by providing the necessary ambience to bring about a trance state. The shaman, as denoted by the swimmers, as the actor communicates the needs of the community through his/her trance with the powers of the spirit world. The rock-art illustrates this two way communication; the continuing communication with the spirit world and because of continuing visibility to the community over the generations. The fact that there are a large number of beasts portrayed in Wadi Sura indicates that it is a place of special power.

*Self-Referential/Canonical Messages (pp. 52-54)*

Rappaport understands self-referential to refer to the actors’ physical, mental and social states at the time of the ritual. The shaman is regarded to be healthy but during a trance state he/she would be mentally fragile. The rock-art shows the shaman to have transformed into a swimmer. His/her mental state had been projected into a new form. The canonical messages, that is those that have been determined from the beginning, are transmitted by the actors. Rock-art motifs are symbols which purvey

an encoded meaning defined by convention and which are understood by those who see them. Similar motifs indicate that the message remains the same.

*Symbols (pp. 54-58)*

Symbols are the means of transmitting encoded messages. Rock-art motifs are symbols or signs that relate by convention to that which they signify, the referent. Symbols in ritual concerned with beliefs can be regarded as being spiritual. However as Turner (1970, 20ff) has pointed out a symbol can have several meanings. It is the circumstances in which it is used that dictates which is the correct meaning for the situation. In view of the inconsistency of rainfall, the audience would understand the meaning of the motifs of beasts and swimmers as being connected to a need for rain.

From the above, I believe that the rock-art in Wadi Sura II contains the universals identified by Rappaport that all rituals contain.

### **5.2.6 Section Summary**

Based on relative climatic uncertainty resulting in rainfalls that could be spasmodic or inconsistent in coverage with some areas benefitting more than others in different years, it is my belief that the paintings in Wadi Sura I and II represent shamanic rain rituals. This conclusion results from the cabling of a number of strands of evidence. The early inhabitants of the area around the Gilf Kebir would have faced periods of anxiety when water and food resources were scarce. Thus thoughts about life and death would be constantly present. It is my belief that the Wadi Sura was a place of aggregation where the local desert peoples congregated to renew ties, establish new relationships and to perform rituals to ensure their continued existence. The rock shelters accord with landscape theory that they were sacred places and were identified as such by the significant amount of rock-art found there, which would result in a psychological emanation of power. Additionally, according to Layton's (2000) rock-art theory, these depictions fall into the category of shamanic art. The strange depictions of beasts suggest hallucinatory beings, conforming to stage three of ASC. Thus the artwork in the Wadi Sura I and II could well represent the results of the peoples' anxieties. Symbolism and symbolic art is a feature of all cultures especially of hunter-gatherer societies – for example the San and indigenous Australians – to express their beliefs. Using the rock-art of the San as a cabling device it is, therefore, my belief that the two rock shelters were the foci of rituals to

invoke rain. That they represent rituals is supported by the fact that they comply with the schemata of Rappaport who listed nine universals as being essential for a ritual. Such an interpretation I believe gives a better understanding of the aetiology and *raison d'être* of the rock-art as it sets it in a definite context of the climatic conditions of episodic and variable rainfalls that pertained at the time (Section 5.1). Thus, I believe that Le Quellec and Bárta have over-interpreted the images as the beginnings of ancient Egyptian religion. Too much has been read into the symbolic imagery for the following reasons. The chronological divide between this rock-art and the Heliopolitan Ennead, of which the deities Shu, Tefnut, Nut and Geb referred to by Bárta form part and which appears to have its origins in the *Pyramid Texts* of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (see PT §1655), is suggestive of there being no linkage between the two. The fact also that there is no evidence of any cultural link between the Gilf Kebir and the Nile Valley in early Predynastic times (Riemer 2009, 43; Zboray 2011, personal communication) also would negate the theories of Le Quellec and Bárta. The transhumant populations from the Gilf Kebir migrated to Nubia and Sudan; those north of the Gilf area traversed to the Nile Valley – Map 5.1 (also Reimer 2011, personal communication,). Artefactual evidence also indicates such a division with the Oases forming transitional zones (Map 5.2). Thus the genesis of early Predynastic beliefs must lie elsewhere.

In the next section the rock-art in the Dakhleh Oasis and environs is examined to determine whether it relates to the themes of water, fertility and life and to ascertain whether shamanism plays a role in the beliefs of the indigenous populations. The rock-art is of a very different nature to that in Wadi Sura but as has been demonstrated there was no direct contact between the Wadi Sura and the Oasis, which may have given rise to different art styles.

### **5.3 DAKHLEH OASIS AND ENVIRONS**

If the Sahara was to have any influence on early Predynastic Egyptian beliefs, that influence probably originated with the inhabitants of the eastern part of the desert since lithic and ceramic evidence reveals that a number of artefact types were shared by the Dakhleh and Kharga Oases and the Nile Valley (this thesis, Section 5.3.2; Hope 2002, 39-61; McDonald 2002, 114, Table 1; 2009a, 11; Riemer 2011, personal communication). According to Riemer (2009, 35f) the rock-art in this area is

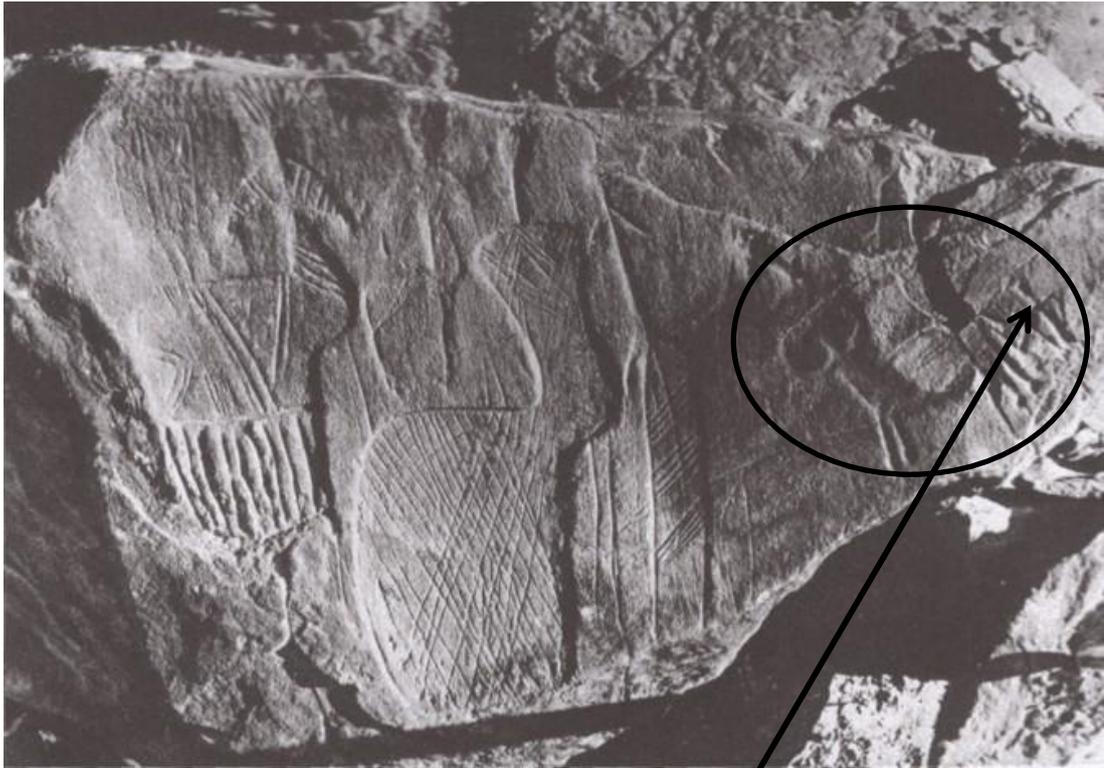
dominated by images that have been pecked or carved. It is generally to be found around the Oases and their environs, in particular the sites of Chufu and Meri (see Fig. 5.1); however, much of that discovered outside the Oases is poorly documented, or unpublished. This section will focus in the main on this rock-art which is very different to that found in the Gilf Kebir. The theoretical approaches to be employed are the same as for Wadi Sura. However, I make reference to a number of ethnographic analogies to support the argument. Again, it is only by cabling together the results of the various theoretical approaches that conclusions can be drawn.

### **5.3.1 Rock-Art Motifs**

The first systematic recording of the rock-art of the Oases and environs was undertaken by Winkler (1939).<sup>86</sup> In five recorded sites (nos. 62, 63, 64, 66 and 67 – Winkler 1939, 7-8) in a depression near the Ghubâri Road running from Dakhleh to Kharga, he discovered some very unusual engravings. Some (Fig. 5.20) were elaborate, which Winkler (1939, 29f) argued depicted a single deity; others were more schematic (Fig. 5.21, Fig. 5.22 and Fig. 5.23), which he deemed represented statuettes of pregnant women and were possibly connected to the concept of a fertility goddess. Most images appear in profile but some are depicted frontally with breasts portrayed (Fig. 5.23). Some of the figures appear to be seated but one image (figure on the far left of Fig. 5.21) depicts the legs of the person showing its knees and feet. In general depictions show anthropomorphs with small unfeatured heads, long necks, short or even no arms, a longish body with a small protrusion at about hip level, extremely wide hips or large buttocks, completely out of proportion to the rest of the body. The lower part of the body is generally patterned indicating clothing.

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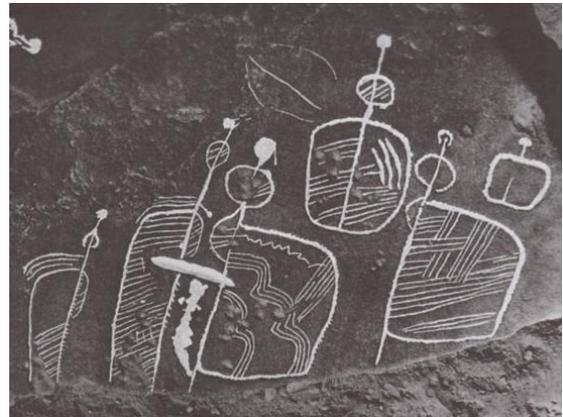
<sup>86</sup> Winkler only published a small selection of his findings.



*Fig. 5.20: Human images in sunk relief plus smaller figure with a bovine.  
(After Winkler 1939, Pl. 39: Fig. 1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society)*



*Fig. 5.21: Female figure depicted with knees and feet. (After Winkler 1939, Pl. 43: Fig.1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society)*



*Fig. 5.22: Schematic anthropomorphs (After Winkler 1939, Fig. 41: Fig. 1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society)*



*Fig. 5.23: Schematic anthropomorphs, the largest one depicted with breasts.  
(After Winkler 1939, Pl. 42: Fig. 1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society)*

Three more elaborate engravings of women who appear to be wearing necklaces, bracelets and leg bracelets, though the markings could be tattoos, were discovered in 1988 (Krzyżaniak and Kroeper 1991, 59) (Fig. 5.24). Again the breasts of one of the females were depicted. An analysis of the line drawing (Fig. 5.25) led James (2010, 78) to believe that pubic hair was also depicted on this figure. The face and arms of this figure seem to be depicted in the same manner. The central figure also appears to have a navel and pubic hair. However, a close examination of a reproduction of Krzyżaniak and Kroeper's photograph (Fig. 5.26) suggests that his drawing is not accurate. It can be argued that the face of the woman depicted with breasts appears to be unworked. In addition, her breasts seem to be of the same decoration as her arms and throat, which appear as being unmarked in his drawing. The navel and pubic hair on the second image are not clear either. The photograph is not high-resolution and therefore interpretation is rendered difficult. Despite that, it is suggested that it is not possible to identify these features in such precise detail from the images available.



*Fig. 5.24: Human images, eastern part of the Dakhleh Oasis. (After Krzyżaniak and Kroeper 1991, Fig. 2. Courtesy of Kroeper)*



*Fig. 5.25: Line drawing of Fig. 5.24 above.  
(After Krzyżaniak and Kroeper 1991, Fig. 3. Courtesy of Kroeper.)*



*Fig. 5.26: Close up view of the main figures in Fig. 5.24 above*

A number of schematic images have also been discovered at the Dakhleh Oasis including at the sides of a major wadi in the centre of the Oasis named the “Painted Wadi” by Dakhleh Oasis Project (henceforth DOP); at site 99/36 at Meri, about 50 km southwest of Dakhleh dubbed “Ladies” Hill because of the number of female images of the simpler style found there and its environs – see Fig. 5.27 (Riemer 2006, 497ff); on the hills at Chufu, approximately 80 km southwest of Dakhleh and in the Kharga Oasis (Ikram 2009a, 75) - Fig. 5.28.



*Fig. 5.27: Human images, “Ladies Hill” panel C, outlined and fully pecked, Meri 99/36. Male identified by penis or penis sheath. (After Riemer 2006, Fig. 4.1)*



*Fig.5.28: Female figure depicted with giraffes. Split Rock, Kharga Oasis. (With kind permission of Ikram, personal communication)*

Some images appear facing each other. They are not mirror images as can be seen in Fig. 5.22 and Fig. 5.27, with one of the figures being much slimmer around the hip/buttock area. In the former, the two figures are joined by a bar, which could be interpreted as a depiction of the sexual act, or could evoke the idea of the life-giving flows: semen, water or rain. The majority of images have no distinguishing sexual features, which accords with the results of an analysis of 129 figures undertaken by James (2012, 80). Using the criteria of Ucko and Rosenfeld (1972, 177)<sup>87</sup> to determine anthropomorphic forms, he concluded that the sex of the majority of the figures cannot be determined.

### **5.3.1.1 Discussion**

The discussion is based on the images that appear above, which comprise only a small proportion of the total but which provide an overall picture of the different types of images. As can be seen from the illustrations, the figures differ in presentation from being very ornate with much detail to schematic with little or no detail whatsoever.

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<sup>87</sup> Primary sexual characteristics: penis (presumably a penis sheath would also count as such), breasts and vulva; secondary characteristics: beard and sexual triangle.

### 5.3.1.1.1 *Dating*

It is extremely difficult to date the rock-art; the reasons are detailed in Judd (2009, 75-84). Dating rock-art on style has been criticised for example by Muzzolini (2006) but Pettitt and Bahn (2003, 134) have stressed that such a method does play a valuable role. However, some of the rock-art in the Oases apparently dates to the Old Kingdom period and images of both Predynastic and Dynastic can be found in close proximity.

Using style as his criterion, Winkler (1939, 32f) associated the ornate depictions to what he termed the Early Oasis Dweller and the cruder images, which he thought were poor copies of those of the deity, with the Early Hunter period, with the two periods overlapping. Červíček (1986, 83, 92; 1992-3, 45, 47) allocated the skirted female anthropomorphs to his Horizon C (*ca.* 2100-1400 BC) on the basis of Nubian C-Group pottery decoration in Nubia and the Libyan Desert. Krzyżaniak (1991a, 62) of the DOP, referred to Winkler's dating of the Early Oasis Dwellers but later gave a more precise dating as being most probably the 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC (Krzyżaniak 1992, 82). The images of female anthropomorphs at Dakhleh were originally discovered in a depression east of the Oasis (Winkler 1939, 27),<sup>88</sup> which is now known as the Southeast Basin where Bashendi B culture (*ca.* 5650-3950 calBC) was evident (McDonald 1990, 44ff; 2006, 3). The Bashendi B peoples, on the evidence of open air sites and hearth mounds, are believed to have been mobile pastoralists (McDonald 2002, 114f; 2006, 3f). It was at the beginning of this period that the rains started to fail and the process of desiccation began. On the basis of evidence of Bashendi B culture in the Southeast Basin and the fact that the incised decoration on bone and ostrich shells dating to the period Bashendi B were reminiscent of the geometric designs of the skirts of the ornate anthropomorphs, McDonald (2003, 46) mooted that the images belonged probably to the Bashendi B phase. The petroglyphs of animals<sup>89</sup> were also dated to this period, a dating seemingly accepted by Huyge (2003, 68). More recently female anthropomorphic images have been discovered in a location known as the "Painted" Wadi in central Dakhleh (Kuciewicz *et al.* 2007b,

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<sup>88</sup> Later Krzyżaniak (1987; 1990; 1991; 1992; Krzyżaniak and Kroeper 1985; 1993) focused his work on the rock-art within the Southeast Basin.

<sup>89</sup> McDonald (2003, 44) argues that Winkler's Early Hunter and the Early Oasis Dweller material was produced by the Bashendi people; there is little evidence of other Dakhleh cultures in the areas where the rock-art is located.

306), which, based on similarities in style and representation, in all probability dated to the same period.

Images also appear in the outlying sites in particular at Meri and Chufu, southwest of Dakhleh. Both sites became depopulated in *ca.* 4500 calBC and (Riemer 2009, 39f) believes that the *terminus post quem* date for these anthropomorphic images is 5300 calBC based on the first period of aridification. Thus they would fall into the Bashendi B period. Ikram (2009a, 75) agrees with this dating for the images in the Kharga Oasis. Ceramic evidence at Chufu dates to the Sheikh Muftah period (*ca.* 3950-2200 calBC)<sup>90</sup> (Kuper and Förster 2003, 28), which succeeds Bashendi B. Berger (2008, 144) has used this evidence to date the images but Reimer (2009, 41) discounts this on the basis that the evidence base is small and represents “very sporadic and short-termed activities during the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium”.

If the garments in Fig. 5.20 and Fig. 5.24 are made from textiles with such decoration, it is more than probable that these images do not date from the Predynastic Period (Vogelsang-Eastwood 2011, personal communication). If the images date to the Predynastic Period, the garments would be made more likely from animal skins but again such complex patterning might be deemed unlikely in the early Predynastic and no animals have such markings. However, a leather pouch dating from the Tasian period<sup>91</sup> discovered at Wadi el-Hôl<sup>92</sup> has similar style decoration (Darnell 2002, Pl. 92). Some decoration appears to reflect an image of water, for example Fig. 5.20, a motif common on C-ware, which dates in the main to Naqada I. Yet, the decoration can also be interpreted as being created from entoptic signs and thus is shamanic in character. Additionally the site’s datable artefacts need to be taken into account for determining a time frame and if relevant set against a regional context (Förster *et al.* 2012, 202).

The rock-art in the Oases and environs also focuses on the local wild fauna such as antelopes (*Oryx gazelle dammah* and *Addax nasomaculatus*), ostriches and in particular giraffes. The depictions reveal a detailed knowledge of the animals as the emphasis has been placed on attributes which identify the animal. This would

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<sup>90</sup> The Sheikh Muftah period overlaps with the later part of the Badarian period (*ca.* 4350-3750 calBC).

<sup>91</sup> The view now seems to be that the Brunton’s Tasian period represented a desert culture concurrent with the Badarian culture *ca.* 4350-3750 calBC (see next chapter, section 6.2.1).

<sup>92</sup> On the Farshût Desert Road, Qena Bend (Darnell 2002, Fig. 2).

suggest that the rock-art was carried out by those with intimate knowledge of the wild fauna, namely hunters. This could therefore reflect an association with the Bashendi B inhabitants, who were hunters because gazelle and hartebeest remains together with arrowheads have been found on their sites (McDonald 2002, 118).

Whilst no definitive linkages can be made, I believe that the theory of cabling would argue that a relative timeframe can be adduced. I therefore suggest that although there is no incontrovertible evidence, the figures belong to a period when rains were scarce resulting in the Oasis supporting increasing populations as a result of the increasing aridity of the desert. Taking the dating of the associated sites into account, together with decorative style, I suggest that the images date to the Bashendi B period (5650-3950 calBC). If the middle image in Fig. 5.24 is wearing a mask as Krzyżaniak and Kroeper (1991, 60) proposed, this might support the idea that the representations have shamanic qualities, since masks, as seen in Section 4.2.5, are often part of shamanic regalia.

#### **5.3.1.1.2 Goddesses?**

Krzyżaniak (2000, 250f; 2003, 183) also perpetuated Winkler's (1939, 28ff) interpretation of the images as representing "goddesses" although in 1991 he, and Kroeper (Krzyżaniak and Kroeper 1991, 60), did query their meaning suggesting they might be totemic, female sorcerers or elite women as well as possibly goddesses. That they are images of females is accepted by Ikram (2009a, Fig. 10) who refers to them as "fat ladies"; Judd (2009, 52); Kuciewicz *et al.* (2006, 321) and Riemer (2006, 499).

The depiction of the human form in these petroglyphs raises many questions from what messages about the relationship of the various body parts were being made to how these were understood by those viewing them. Heads are the ways people conceive themselves as being similar to, or different from, others (Bailey 2005, 120). The lack of emphasis with regard to the heads, where depicted, in relation to the rest of the body was a deliberate decision on the part of the creators suggesting that they did not view them as being important to the message that was being imparted. Many of the heads resembled pin-heads. Such miniaturisation resulted in the neutralisation of the face as did the wearing of masks (Bailey 2005, 194). The intention of the creator was to focus the attention on the lower parts of the body and indeed the

viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the depiction of the extremely large hips and buttocks. Thus, the suggestion is that meaning of the images rests with the interpretation of those specific body parts.

Some of the figures, for example that shown in Fig. 5.27, have what appears to be a band hanging down in front of the lower body which has been interpreted as a belt (Berger 2008, 138). It is the view of this work that rather than portraying a belt, these images in fact depict males possibly wearing a penis sheath. Another distinctive feature of the male images (another is shown in Fig. 5.22) is that the buttocks are not as pronounced as those of other figures. In other hunter-gatherer cultures, such as the San, men have different types of fat deposits from women and in artistic representations their buttocks are often emphasised but less so than those of the females as can be seen in Fig. 5.29.



*Fig. 5.29: San rock-art depicting men dancing with sticks and women clapping. (After <http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/rari/page6.php> [Accessed 16 June 2012]. Courtesy of the Bradshaw Foundation)*

However, figures believed to be asexual, that is without breasts or a penis, do have hips and buttocks that are disproportionate to the rest of the body. In view of the fact that the males depicted have slimmer hips and buttocks, it is suggested that these asexual figures are female for the following reason. All the definite female figures have the same characteristics of large hips and buttocks. The focus of the asexual images rests on those parts of the anatomy which are considered to be the site of fertility. Scientifically the storage of fat, an energy source, is vital in order to cope not only with food shortages but in the case of women for pregnancy and lactation (Brown and Konner 1987, 43; Norgan 1997, 742; Singh 1993, 303). Thus the woman has to store more fat than her male counterpart. Such fat is stored in the main on the

buttocks and thighs. According to Singh (1993, 303) it is only after the woman has developed sufficient fat to cope with food shortages, does her reproductive sequence occur. A low waist : hip ratio suggests a high level of fertility (Skamel 2003, 188). Thus body fat has an impact on the fertility of a woman. Whilst the schematic petroglyphs are not accurate depictions of the human form, I believe that those showing figures with large buttocks and hips may have been depicted thus to indicate the concepts of fertility, fecundity and nurture. On that premise it is unlikely that any were meant to represent those who were not capable of reproduction.

Ethnographic/scientific records show that a number of societies believed that fatness equated to beauty and fertility. The following, mainly from the African continent, are just a few examples. In Mauritania (Thompson 2014, 172) prepubescent and pubescent girls were sent to fattening huts where they were force fed to fatten them resulting in the early onset of menstruation and the appearance of being fully developed when married, usually at an early age. The Nigerian Annang believed that women should be fattened to ensure ease of conception (Brink 1995, 81). In the Pacific society of Nauru the provision of an increased food supply to women, and particularly to young women at puberty, was believed to enhance chances of conception, thus contributing to the reproduction of the communities (Pollock, N.J. 1995, 358). Fattening and the maintenance of a fat body in Tuareg society is a sign of fertility (Walentowitz 2011, 89). The young Azawagh women of Niger are also fattened in the belief that they would be able to bear children sooner (Popenoe 1999, 5); the Moroccan Saharawi women entered the fattening period as a preparation for marriage (Rguibi and Belahsen 2006, 623). In rural Egypt in the 1950s a woman was considered to be “an envelope for conception” and one who was fat was considered to be the ideal as she has more room to bear the child, lactates abundantly, and give warmth to her children.” (Ammar 2002[1954], 94). Whilst modern day beliefs cannot be used as definite comparators, such evidence could suggest that the depictions of female anthropomorphs in the Oases and environs were related to fertility and fecundity especially as the evidence shows that it was during Bashendi B that the rains started to fail. Although the Oasis was on the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer, the water levels were dependent on the volumes of water flowing into the Aquifer and these were affected by rainfall. Thus there could have been periods when there was a shortage of water.

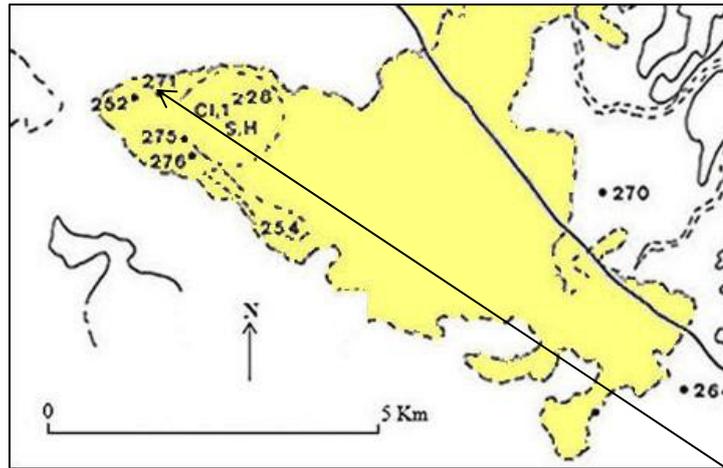
However, female fertility is non-productive without the male principle, hence the depiction of male with female images to provide the energetic forces required for creation. Mindful of James's (2010 and 2012) caution about the need for objectivity to be built into interpretation of these figures, it is also essential to try to understand why time and effort was put into creating the images, to try to ascertain what their purpose was. In other words to quote Renfrew and Zubrow (1994b, xiii) "... to make the 'mute stones speak'."

### **5.3.1.2 Interpretation**

Rock-art should not be interpreted in isolation but the historical and archaeological context and environmental setting needed to be taken into account (Huyge 2003, 70). The main aim of humans is to live; the main fear of humans is that the conditions are such that this is not possible without a desperate struggle. The life giving substance that allows people to live is water. Although the Oases had a permanent supply of water from the Nubian sandstone aquifer system, the levels would fluctuate depending on the recharge rates (United Nations Environment Programme, 2010, 110). McDonald (1999, 120f; 2002, 117; 2009a, 26) has shown that whilst in Late Bashendi A, although no site has been found so far in the Oasis proper possibly because the Oasis was too wet, there was evidence of increasing sedentism in the Dakhleh Oasis during which wild sorghum was harvested; goats and cattle may also have been herded at this time. The Bashendi A population disappeared probably as a result of the retreating monsoon rains. The successor population, Bashendi B, comprised nomadic pastoralists, with open campsites who herded cattle and goats. These pastoralists also lived outside the Oasis and made seasonal visits there either because of the climate with its increasing aridity and because water was essential for the maintenance of herds or because it was a place of aggregation, one of its purposes being the locus of ritual and ceremony (McDonald 1999, 120f; 2002, 117). Site 271 (Map 5.3), a flat topped mound (18 x 15 x 0.6m) in the Southeast Basin, with pits containing animal, particularly cattle,<sup>93</sup> bones is thought to be a ceremonial area (McDonald, 1998, 134, 137f). There is rock-art in the area (McDonald 2013, personal communication) which according to Straus (1980, 625; see also Kinahan 1991, 42) provided the best evidence for identifying a site as such.

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<sup>93</sup> Both mature and juvenile animals (McDonald 1998, 134).



Map 5.3: Dakhleh Oasis Southeast Basin showing location of aggregation area 271  
(After McDonald 1998, Fig. 2)

Thus, from this, it may be concluded that water sources would be at the forefront of the nomads' minds, especially at times when rainfall was scarce. Both the Meri and Chufu sites were dependent on natural rainfall (Riemer 2006, 522), which began to be spasmodic in *ca.*5300 calBC (see Section 5.3.1.1.1). In hunter-gatherer/pastoralist societies – for example the San, and the Nuer and Dinka – appeals are made to the gods for them to send rain to enable the vegetation to grow. Perhaps a parallel can be made here and the female images with large buttocks and hips were representations of these people to the rain entity.

Winkler (1939, 27ff) argued that the schematic figures with obvious stomachs in fact represented pregnant women, a symbol of fertility. James (2012, 80) argues that the existence of the pronounced stomach does not necessarily correlate with pregnancy. Berger (2008, 138) accepts Guthrie's (2005, 349) argument that in Palaeolithic art a female whose abdomen is depicted high in a forward arc rather than drooping can be said to be pregnant rather than fat. However, Guthrie also maintains that a pregnant abdomen is depicted disproportionately large in comparison with other bulges of the body. That is not the case with the schematic style of image. It is agreed that the protrusion at the front is too low down to be a breast, the distension could represent a large stomach rather than pregnancy. Some images appear to have two "stomach" protrusions (Krzyżaniak 1987, Fig. 3) for which no explanation has been given. Could it be those protrusions represented a vulva or were a means of drawing attention to the female sexual area? The emphasis of the figures rests on their enlarged hips and stomach. Fatness according to Guthrie (2005, 335) was highly

esteemed amongst hunter-gatherer societies and it can be argued that fatness is linked to fertility as seen from the ethnographic records. According to Winkler (1939, 29) many of these figures were depicted face-up on horizontal surfaces; some were engraved in cups scooped out of the rock. Winkler believed they were connected to the fertility of the earth and that the ornate figures such as those depicted in Fig. 5.20 represented a deity. In this image, the bovid which is held by its tail by a human was a possible sacrifice (Winkler 1939, 29).

It is very tempting to interpret these figures as having nuministic powers. Winkler (1939, 36) admitted that his interpretation was influenced by female figurines found in Crete and Western Asia. These figurines had extremely exaggerated lower bodies, often with their vulva on display. Some of these figures were masked as Krzyżaniak and Kroeper (1991, 60) believed the middle figure in Fig. 5.24 to be. Mellaart (1962, 57) referred to those discovered at Çatalhöyük as representing a goddess of fertility and abundance, a mother goddess. Ucko (1962 and 1968) analysed numerous figurines from Predynastic Egypt and Crete and concluded that they could have fulfilled a number of purposes; they did not provide proof of the existence of a belief in a “mother goddess”. However, although the theory continued to be perpetuated by Gimbutas (1974, 152-200) and later by Cauvin (2000[1994], 71f) it is now generally discredited (Green 1999, 1f; Hutton 1993 in particular 4, 19 and 37-44; Wood 1999, 8-25). Female figurines at Çatalhöyük are now believed to be related to everyday life rather than to religion (Hodder 2010a, 15f).

### **5.3.1.2.1 Cupules**

In addition to the anthropomorphic figures, cupules were cut into the rock faces, which Winkler (1939, 29) deemed to be querns. Some of these cupules had female anthropomorphs engraved inside. Any rubbing action would have led to their gradual obliteration, unless they were created when the quern fell out of use. From Winkler’s description these particular anthropomorphic depictions would appear to be located on the tops of hills. Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2009, 114) believed that vulvas, here cupules, in rocks could be interpreted as the rock giving birth. It was the fecundity of the membranous intermediary walls that the vulvas referred to and not fertility as conceived by the western world. However, I do not think this view is applicable in this instance. Winkler (1939, 29) suggested that as some images were found etched into the bottom of a cup scooped out of the rock (Fig. 5.30) and in one

case the engraving had been damaged by grinding action, "...the pregnant figure was connected with the fertility of the earth". His (Winkler 1939, 29) opinion was that the pregnant figure represented a deity. However, rather than depicting a goddess, I suggest that overtly female images reflect a fertility principle, emphasised by the fact that cupules are often interpreted as wombs. Thus, the male principle, the rain, metaphorically impregnated the cupule and as semen, impregnated the figure and thus by extension ensuring the fertility of the land and people. It is feasible that since the locations of such images were in prominent positions on top of hills (Winkler 1939, 29) that it could be so.

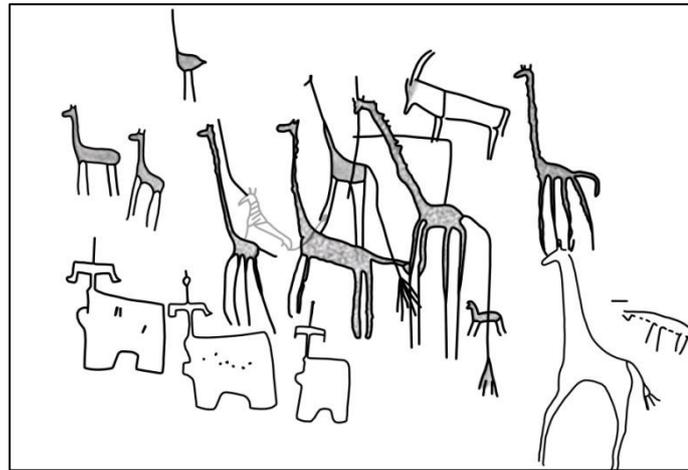


*Fig. 5.30: Engraving of a female in a cup scooped into the rock face.  
(After Winkler 1939, Pl. 44:Fig. 1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society)*

#### **5.3.1.2.2 Giraffe Depictions**

Many of the anthropomorphs are depicted with animals including the giraffe, which is frequently represented. It represents approximately 80% of all faunal depictions (Kuciewicz *et al.* 2007a, 7). The giraffe motif is very common in rock-art sites in the Western Desert; it is an animal that can exist for some period of time without water. Giraffes, for the obvious reason of their height, may have also been regarded as an animal that could reach the other world and thus would have been charged with

spirituality. The fact that giraffes are often associated with these “female” depictions – example at Fig. 5.31 – I believe suggests that there is a connection between them.



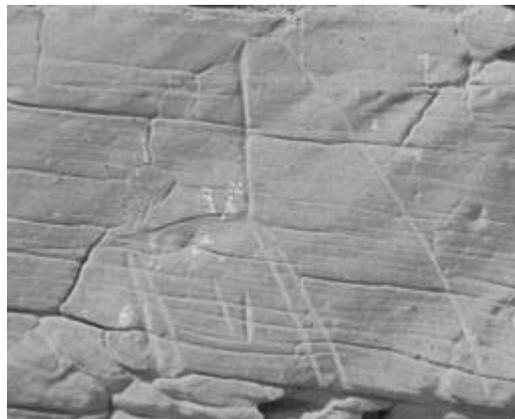
*Fig. 5.31: Line drawing of female and giraffe images with a superimposed Dynastic figure of Seth. Painted Wadi, Dakhleh, site 4/05. (Taylor after Kuciewicz et al. 2006, Fig. 5)*

In many parts of southern Africa, the giraffe is seen as a potent rain animal (Ikram 2009b, 270; van Hoek 2003, 60). Can a similar attribution be made here? In view of the constant desire for rain, especially when rainfall was becoming increasingly infrequent after 5300 calBC, is it possible that the images of the giraffes (rain) in close proximity to those of women, signifying the matrix of life (earth) were connected with rituals for creating rain? As noted above the images depicted in the cupules and on horizontal planes would have had a special potency. Ikram (2009b, 269) is hesitant to accept such an interpretation of the giraffe in view of Huyge’s (2002, 199f) belief, based in part on that of Westendorf (1966a, 539; 1966b, 37, 84-5), that it was considered to be a heliophorous being in that its role was to bear the sun god.<sup>94</sup> However, the giraffe images in the Oases appear in many sites to face in different directions. As the sun rose relentlessly affecting the fertility of the land, it is therefore suggested that the rock-art discussed above was created by a population concerned about the decreasing rainfalls and the effect that had on their herds as well as on themselves. Some depictions show lines descending from the giraffes’ necks. These could be related to blood streams from the animal involved in the ritual acts and represented the concepts of rain and by extension fertility (see also next section).

<sup>94</sup> Huyge (2002, 199f) reaches this conclusion in his discussion about the giraffes depicted on the Vulture Rock at El Kab. Almost all face to the left, thus indicating the rotation of the sun. He dates these images to the Middle and late Predynastic (Huyge 2002, 197) and thus outside the period of this thesis.

### 5.3.1.3 Aspects of Shamanism

Rock-art was a means of communicating with the spiritual world in supplication for life-giving properties. The very act of pecking or carving the rock face constituted an attempt to reach into the spiritual world. The rock itself would be considered to be charged with potency. Walker (2010, 69f) posits that a link to shamanism cannot be discounted since their formation would create the sounds of chipping, grinding and drilling, which would have added to a charged atmosphere. Percussive action was one of the means whereby shamans entered ASC (see Section 4.2.2). Additionally, the physical exertion and shock waves of striking or rubbing stone on stone would have added to emotional stress when approaching trance state.



*Fig. 5.32: Image of giraffe with a ?lead, site 4, Painted Wadi, Dakhleh Oasi. (After Kuciewicz et al. 2005, Fig. 4 top)*

The numerous depictions of giraffes, both in the Oases and at Ladies Hill, Meri as well as at Chufu, also adds to the argument for shamanism. I have referred above to the fact that some of the giraffes appear as though they have a lead hanging down from their necks, either loosely (Fig. 5.32) or held by a human. Krzyżaniak (1990, 96) determined that such images represented hunting scenes. Such scenes could represent hunting or the characteristic Neolithic concept of the domination of the wild, the desire to control the wild. However, I suggest that may not be so here on the basis that images of giraffes found elsewhere in Africa, in particular Namibia are associated with rain making rituals (van Hoek 2003, 59).<sup>95</sup> Giraffes are deemed to be associated with shamanism. Their pelts are interpreted as having entoptic values (Stage 1 of ASC – see the image second from right on the middle row in Fig. 3.4)

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<sup>95</sup> In San rock-art, elands, considered to be shamanic animals, are also depicted on occasions with blood pouring from their nostrils.

(Lewis-Williams 1988, 7-11). It is said that a shaman when entering a trance, often suffers a nasal haemorrhage (Dowson 1998, 77; Lewis-Williams and Dowson 2000, 40). Also it is believed that shamans were thought to transform themselves into animals. One type of shaman was that of rain (Lewis-Williams 2004a, 32). During rain making rituals, the shaman is transformed into an animal with such powers. Thus, the leads could represent a shaman as a giraffe bleeding from the nose. Furthermore, besides its entoptic connotation, the giraffe's dappled pelt also gives rise to the idea of two bodies, one spiritual and one corporeal, thus the shaman was ontologically both man and beast (see Section 4.3.9.1).

Other motifs would support a shamanistic interpretation such as spirals, zigzags and lines, which are also found on the dress of the ornate anthropomorphs. Winkler (1939, 29) also stated that the rock-art included wavy lines, rectangles, circles, spirals and other curvilinear representations. Riemer (2006, 499) reported that a large number of non-figurative elements and symbol-like objects such as crosses and rows of lines were depicted at Ladies Hill, Meri. Such motifs are known as entoptics, which are seen during the first stage of a shamanic trance (Section 3.4.3.1). Another motif could also be said to confirm a shamanic influence; Fig. 5.21 depicts what could be interpreted as a ladder or steps. In shamanic thought, the spiritual world was above the earth. The ladder or steps could be interpreted as a means of access to this world. Beside the ladder is an unidentifiable beast, whose forepart is similar to one of the entoptic shapes in Fig. 3.2.

Rock-art was not created for one single occasion. It was created for a purpose; it was the externalisation of shamanic communication both with the supernatural entities and for those viewing it. It has been said that this purpose was to entertain but since so much thought and planning must have been expended in deciding on the various scenarios and energies put into creating the scenes, it is mooted that the art work had a far deeper meaning for those creating it. "...works of art did not ... have a single function" (Baines 2007, 301). As art can be interpreted at a number of levels, (Derchain 1976, 7), it is accepted that superficially it was probably seen to be a depiction of the world about. However, at a deeper level, it can be argued that it was a powerful agent in bringing about change. It was therefore dynamic to those who viewed it. With the climate becoming increasingly uncertain and even hostile, the

local populations would be more concerned about ensuring supplies of nutrition for both themselves and their animals. The ethnographic parallels of these cattle herders are the Nuer and Dinka, among whom, as noted in Section 4.3.9.1 and Section 4.3.9.2, are persons considered to be rainmakers and who regard rain as being the manifestation of a spirit (Nuer = *Kwoth*, Evans-Pritchard 1956, 2; Dinka = *Deng/Dengit*, Lienhardt 1961, 91f). These rainmakers have characteristics of shamans. Johnson (1994, 24) further noted that all rainmakers of southern Sudan were considered *to be* shamans. Thus, although there is a considerable chronological divide between the Predynastic ancient Egyptians and the Nilotic tribes in question, it is possible to draw an analogy in that the very early Predynastic Egyptians would have regarded the powers of nature as being controlled by spirits. Therefore, it is probable that the rock-art was viewed by the local populations in a different way to the Western eye of today. Even though the anthropomorphs were also discovered in the environs of the Oasis this does not suggest to me that they represented totems, which tend to be animals or flora.

As noted for Wadi Sura, the landscape plays an important role in the placing and interpretation of rock-art. In the Dakhleh Oasis *per se*, on present evidence, the rock-art appears to be confined to the Southeast Basin and to the central “Painted” Wadi. It is my view that these areas in all probability held a special meaning for the people. A site was chosen with regard to its specific ritual and religious significance and power (Lenssen-Ertz 2004, 144). It is believed that the Southeast Basin contained an area of aggregation, to which the nomadic communities would congregate at certain times of the year, for example, to renew allegiances, carry out trade and perform rituals. Such an area would be potent with meaning. As wadis were the watercourses for the life-giving waters resulting from the run off from heavy rainfalls it is likely they were considered to be places of reverence and mystery. Thus at a time when the rains were receding, and rainfall was becoming more scarce, the rocky outcrops of the wadi would be an apt place in which to place depictions of these anthropomorphs. Lenssen-Ertz (2004, 148) argues that rock-art was located in areas of ritual activities, which increased if the group was facing crises such as drought. Thus the placement of anthropomorphs and giraffes within a wadi system (for example Fig. 5.31) could suggest too that it was a ritual place for rainmaking. That the rock-art was located on rocky hills, on exposed vertical planes or on flat rocks

on, or near, the summits facing the sky or on flat rocks in their original positions (see Krzyżaniak and Kroeper 1991, 59; Kuciewicz 2013, 108; Winkler 1939, 8) would support that argument. Such placements could be indicative of rain rituals because the rain spirit(s), who needed to be appeased, would probably be deemed to reside in the upper world, since it was from there that rain fell. The rock-art, like that at Wadi Sura (Section 5.2.5.4), fulfils Rappaport's (1999) schemata for rituals (Section 3.4.1). The ritual would follow a particular sequence; there would be a formality about the process with the rock-art representing the essence of the ritual; although Rappaport stipulates invariance, the anthropomorphs do, in my view, represent the same theme; performance was involved; the focus was on the other world; the engravings communicated with that world, whilst symbolically they communicated an encoded message to those able to see it.

Such rituals accord with the definition of a belief system that I proposed in Section 3.6.1: a response to a challenge to life resulting in an appeal to a supernatural entity for assistance and which involved the use of symbols. The appeal to the supernatural also accords with the role of a shaman, who as seen in Sections 4.2 and 4.2.4, by means of special rituals, contacted the spirits on behalf of the community and appealed to them, in this instance for life-giving rain, with the community itself in all probability taking an active supporting role.

That similar anthropomorphs were discovered in the environs of the Oasis for example at the sites of Meri and Chufu, could suggest that smaller scale rituals were carried out by individual communities since they were dependent on rainfall for water and desiccation in those areas began *ca.* 5300 calBC. With the deterioration of the climate and the innate instinct for survival, I believe that the rock-art reflects this situation. The motifs, engraved on the veil of the spirit world appear to focus on rain and fertility. The potency created by the rock-art was absorbed and acted on by one who was sensitive to that potency, a shaman.

### **5.3.2 Contacts**

Small objects from the Bashendi period provide essential clues as to the existence of long distance trading networks or the exchange of goods over significant geographical areas. These objects include Amazonite beads and lip plugs made from barites, both gem stones being found in the Eastern Desert; pendants and bracelets

made from marine shells and the use of copper (see McDonald 2002, Table 1; 2009b, 268).

Most of the evidence of contacts would appear to be lithic rather than ceramic, (Hope 2002, 56). McDonald (2002, 114) discusses the lithic evidence including side blow flakes and bifacial knives that were characteristic of Bashendi B sites that have been found at Badarian sites in the Nile Valley (McDonald 2006, 5; Riemer 2011, personal communication). Sherds of black-topped ware, direct rimmed vessels, rippled ware, smooth brown surfaced ware and red-slipped ware, which are prevalent in the Badarian period, were discovered in the Oasis (Hope 2002, 57; Nelson, 2001, 539; Warfe 2003, 81). According to Hope (2002, 58) Dakhleh Oasis should be considered as a possible source of features that appeared in respect of Nile Valley ceramics since they appeared earlier than in the Nile Valley. Other evidence highlighting contact is the discovery at Dakhleh of fragments of shell bracelets (Badarian period), disk-shaped maceheads, palettes and copper objects (Brunton 1928, 45ff; McDonald 2002, Table 1) as well as a Nile silt ceramic spoon, which was similar to those found by Brunton (1937, pl. 18, 36-37) at Mostagedda. This might suggest that the Badarians were a transhumant or semi-transhumant rather than being a sedentary population; thus there might have been a reciprocal contact.

Ancient routes with pottery dating to the Badarian period were discovered dating to the Predynastic period across the Western desert from the Nile Valley to the Kharga Oasis (Darnell 2002, 156-177). McDonald (2006, 4) believed that on the basis of the similarity of assemblages that Kharga and Dakhleh Oases, which are connected by a limestone plateau, could in fact have constituted a cultural unity. The evidence would seem to suggest that during the Predynastic period people from the Western Desert, whom it is now believed to have formed Brunton's Tasian culture (Section 6.2.1), entered the Nile Valley at the Qena Bend, which allowed them access to the major Predynastic settlement sites. The traffic does not appear to have been one way. Rippled burnished sherds, sherds of red and brown black-topped vessels made from fine Nile silt dating to the Badarian period have been found as well as pots made from local clays in the style of Nile Valley ware (Darnell 2002, 161ff). McDonald's (2009b, 269) view is that the Bashendi culture with its contact with the Nile Valley was probably a factor in the development of the early Predynastic cultures.

### 5.3.3 Section Summary

Like the rock-art in the Wadi Sura, I believe that of the Oasis and environs gives vital clues as to the fundamental beliefs of the people. These beliefs are basically the same as those depicted in Wadi Sura I and II despite the differences in style and typology. The focus is on fertility. Whilst the motifs might be considered totemic, as far as is known, the art is limited to two sites within the Dakhleh Oasis itself which suggests it is shamanic in nature (see Layton 2000). Both locations, a place of aggregation and the “Painted” Wadi, are areas that can be considered to have potency and power, which accord with landscape theory. The depictions at Meri and Chufu were also located on rock surfaces of hills. The fact that the two sites were dependent on an ever decreasing rainfall and that so many images were created suggests that they were linked to invocations for rain.

The female anthropomorphs depicted in the rock-art with their exaggerated hips and buttocks, which ethnographic analogy has suggested, represents fertility and the female principle. However, the male principle is required to bring about rebirth and regeneration and that can be understood as rain. The placement of some female anthropomorphs facing the sky, especially those in cupules, in rock planes evokes such an interpretation. It was during the Bashendi B culture (5650-3950 calBC) to which these motifs are dated that the rains declined and whilst Dakhleh Oasis is on the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer, water recharge is essential to maintain the water levels which fluctuate according to climatic conditions. The rock-art, I suggest, can be analysed as a ritual according to Rappaport’s (1999) framework in Section 3.4.1. Such rituals accord with the definition of a belief system that I proposed in Section 3.6.1: a response to a challenge to life resulting in an appeal to a supernatural entity for assistance and which involved the use of symbols. The appeal to the supernatural also accords with the role of a shaman, who as seen in Sections 4.2 and 4.2.4, by means of special rituals, contacted the spirits on behalf of the community and appealed to them, in this instance for life-giving rain, with the community itself in all probability taking an active supporting role.

The portrayal of numerous giraffes often in close proximity to the female anthropomorphs does suggest a linkage between the two. In parts of Africa, the giraffe is considered to be a rain animal and I advocate that giraffes and female

anthropomorphs are linked to rain rituals, the rain being the male principle. It is also mooted that the giraffe could portray shamanic properties. Thus, a linkage of the rock-art to shamanic rain rituals should not be dismissed. Ethnographically, those responsible for rain making are considered to be shamans and I suggest that was the case in the Oases. Thus whilst I consider the rock-art in Dakhleh and environs to be of shamanic origin and possibly includes motifs, that is entoptics, resulting from ASC, it is not as overt as that at Wadi Sura. The discovery of ancient routes across the Western Desert, with pottery dating to the Badarian period has shown that there was contact between the desert peoples using the Oases and the Badarian peoples. The Oases were nodal points which made possible the interaction of peoples and the interchange of goods and ideas. Such a situation could result in the dissemination of beliefs over a period of time. Thus, I suggest that the origin of early predynastic beliefs emanated in part from the Oasis area.

The next section presents a totally different type of site, one with no rock-art. However, as was emphasised in Chapter 4, shamanism can take different forms, and it is mooted here that Nabta Playa, a megalithic site, can also be interpreted as having shamanic characteristics.

#### **5.4 NABTA PLAYA AND THE NEOLITHIC CEMETERIES AT GEBEL RAMLAH**

Unlike the sites discussed above, there is no rock-art at Nabta Playa (see Fig. 5.1 for location). Its interest for the purpose of this work lies in the stone structures discovered there which have been dated to the Ru'at El Baqar (the cattle herders) or Late Neolithic<sup>96</sup> (*ca.* 5500-4650 BC), and the Bunat el-Ansam (the megalith builders) or Final Neolithic<sup>97</sup> (*ca.* 4600-3400 BC).<sup>98</sup> Whilst there was evidence of settlement sites, these were temporary and seasonal. The deteriorating climate in the El Baqar and El Ansam periods would mean that there needed to be constant movement to find suitable grazing for the herds (Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 671).

The site is located about 100 km west of Abu Simbel and forms one of the largest depressions, *ca.* 10 km by 7 km, in southern Egypt. Whilst there are other similar

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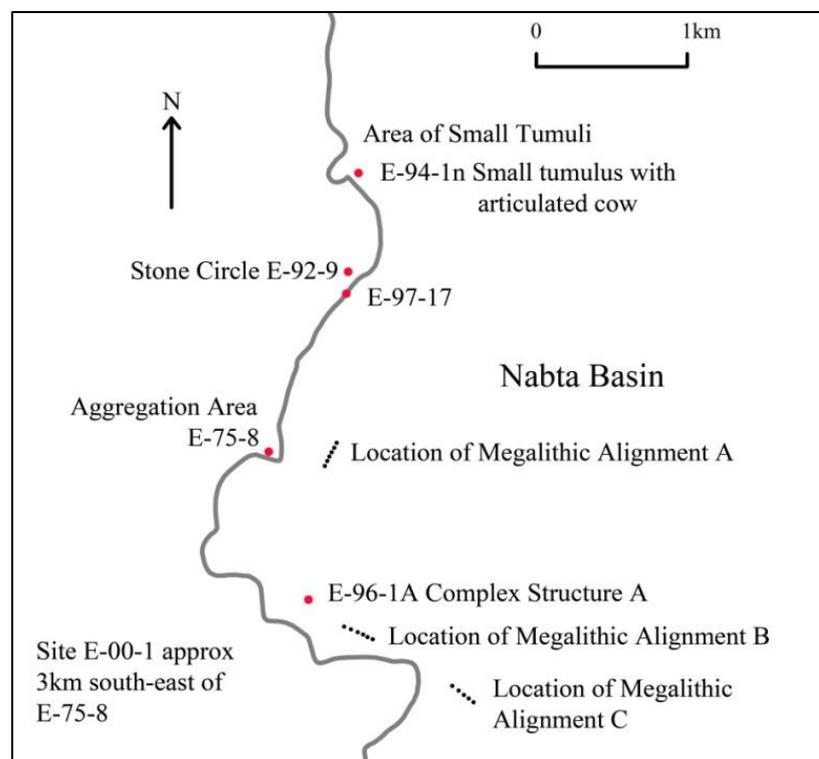
<sup>96</sup> Equates approximately to Gilf B (Gilf Kebir) and Bashendi B (Dakhleh).

<sup>97</sup> Equates approximately to Gilf C (Gilf Kebir) and overlaps Bashendi B and Sheikh Muftah (Dakhleh).

<sup>98</sup> Henceforth referred to as El Baqar and El Ansam.

structures in Sahelian and sub-Saharan Africa, they are usually dated later to the Iron Age. Excavations<sup>99</sup> were carried out under the auspices of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition (CPE)<sup>100</sup> from 1973 led by Wendorf and Schild (Malville *et al.* 1998; Schild and Wendorf 2002 and 2004; Wendorf *et al.* 1992-93; Wendorf and Schild 1998; Wendorf *et al.* 1997; Wendorf *et al.* 2001). The Expedition<sup>101</sup> also discovered three cemeteries dating to the El Ansam period at Gebel Ramlah, 25 km northwest of Nabta Playa. These have produced interesting data about burial practices, which reveal an insight into the beliefs during the El Ansam period.

#### 5.4.1 Nabta Playa



Map 5.4: Structures on the western side of Nabta Playa mentioned in the text. The thick line marks the western edge of the wadi. (Taylor after Wendorf *et al.* 2001, Fig. 1.2)

The stone structures were initially thought to be part of the natural landscape (Wendorf and Schild 2001a, 9). However, an examination revealed that there were several very distinct complexes: two stone circles, two (originally thought to be three) megalithic alignments, cattle tumuli and complex stone structures, all of which

<sup>99</sup> 1974-1975, 1977, 1990-2000, 2002. Schild and Wendorf (2002, 8).

<sup>100</sup> The Expedition was established in the early 1960s in response to the UNESCO appeal to help salvage monuments in Nubia as a result of the rising waters behind the New High Dam, Aswan. It comprised Southern Methodist University, USA, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences and the Geological Survey of Egypt. The expedition was joined by international scientists from various disciplines when appropriate.

<sup>101</sup> The cemeteries were excavated in 2000, 2001 and 2003 (Kobusiewicz *et al.* 2009 and 2010).

are located on the western side of the central part of the playa basin. Dating of these features is problematical as will become apparent when discussing the individual elements; it is possible they formed an integrated unit over a period of time. Nevertheless, these features provide clues as to the beliefs of those responsible for their erection.

#### **5.4.1.1 Tumuli**

These small stone covered tumuli are located on the west bank of the wadi at the northern end of the wadi basin (Map 5.4). As seen from Table 5. 1, in those tumuli excavated there were remains of nine and possibly 11 cattle. The largest tumulus (E-94-1N) and the only one constructed within the playa, contained the articulated remains of a young cow just reaching adulthood (Fig. 5.33) oriented north-south interred in a circular pit which had been roofed with tamarisk (Schild and Wendorf 2004, 11), which was radiocarbon dated to *ca.* 5500 BC (Malville *et al.* 2008, 133). Applegate *et al.* (2001, 468) stated that only an extremely decayed stick had been found and it was not possible to determine if the pit had been roofed over with sticks or whether this was a solitary example left on top of the fill. Amongst the stones, some of them extremely large, above the pit were the disarticulated bones of a sheep/goat/Dorcas gazelle. One tumulus contained the remains of a human male (see also Section 5.4.3). The tumuli have been dated to the beginning of the El Baqar period by means of stratigraphic and radiocarbon dating (Wendorf and Schild, 1998, 108), with the possible exception of Tumulus E-97-6, which appears to date to the end of the period (Applegate *et al.* 2001, 478).<sup>102</sup> The deposition of whole and remains of animals is witnessed in the Nile Valley during the Badarian period (*ca.* 4350-3750 calBC) (Chapter 6).

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<sup>102</sup> The dating is based on charcoal from a hearth placed at the same level as some of the tumulus stones.



Fig. 5.33: Articulated remains of a young cow in E-94-1n (After Schild and Wendorf 2004, 12. With kind permission of Schild)

Tumulus	Articulated Cattle	Disarticulated Cattle (MNI) <sup>1</sup>	Other (MNI)
E-94-1n	1		Sheep/goat/gazelle
E-94-1s		2+1?	1 Sheep
E-96-2			
E-96-4		4 (1 juvenile, 1 sub-adult and 2 young adults)	
E-97-4		2 (1 juvenile and 1 sub-adult)	
E-97-5			Human probably male. Placed on right side, spine facing east, head to the north. Cranium, mandible and majority of scapulae not preserved.
E-97-6		1?	
E-97-12			
E-97-16		1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9+2?</b>	

Table 5.1: Main Contents of Tumuli

Data from Applegate *et al.* 2001, Table 15.1

<sup>1</sup>MNI – minimum number of individuals

#### 5.4.1.2 The Stone Circle

Two stone circles of similar construction were discovered at Nabta Playa (Wendorf *et al.* 1997, 97). One of the circles<sup>103</sup> – E-92-9 – was discovered in 1992 on the top of

<sup>103</sup> As a result of vandalism, this stone circle has been removed and reconstructed in the grounds of the Nubian Museum at Aswan. The second stone circle approximately 17 m in diameter was discovered on a sandstone hill located some 500 m to the west of the western group of megaliths but no further details are given (Schild and Wendorf 2004, 13f). According to Schild (2011, personal communication) it comprised a deflated large tumulus with an outer stone block ring as well as a round dry stone masonry chamber inside. A small grave pit was found near the centre.

a sandy mound at the mouth of the major wadi (see Map 5.4 and Fig. 5.34) which channelled the waters after the first summer rains into the Playa basin from the north (Applegate and Zedeño 2001, 463; Schild and Wendorf 2004, 11f). Many of the stones had become displaced (Applegate and Zedeño 2001, 463). Radiocarbon dating of charcoal from an adjacent hearth provides a relative dating of *ca.* 4900 BC (El Baqar period) for the use of the circle (Malville *et al.* 2008, 133). It is not possible to be certain as the hearth could have conceivably been built earlier than the circle, although the dating is consistent with the El Baqar ceramic evidence recovered from the mound on which the circle was constructed (Applegate and Zedeño 2001, 464f). Consideration was given as to whether the stone circle was a house or an above-ground granary but it was concluded it was a stone circle related to the summer solstice. According to Applegate and Zedeño (2001, 467) much less labour investment was required to erect the Nabta Playa circle since the sandstone slabs were relatively small compared to the stones used in the other features.

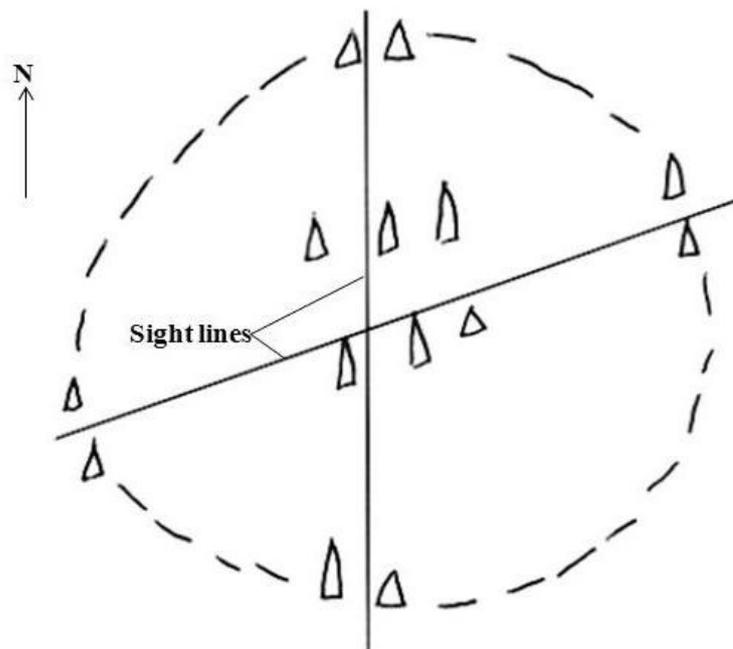


Fig. 5.34: E-92-9. Reconstruction of the stone circle.  
(Author. After Applegate and Zedeño 2001, Fig 14.2)

The circle, less than 4 m in diameter, comprised approximately 55 thin slabs of Nubia<sup>104</sup> sandstone buried vertically with four pairs of larger stones on opposing

<sup>104</sup> Terminology used in Wendorf *et al.* 2001. *Holocene Settlement of the Sahara*. Vol. I.

sides of the circle. Two of the pairs or “gates” are aligned roughly North-South and the other two pairs approximately 70° East of North. In the centre of this circle are six vertical slabs in two lines arranged so the space between them is aligned to both lines of sight (Applegate and Zedeño 2001, 463-477; Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 669). Malville *et al.* (1998, 490) deduced that the sight line approximately 70° East of North pointed to the position on the horizon of the rising of the sun at the summer solstice, which heralded the summer rains. The gaps between the two stones was too wide to allow for precision dating of the solstice but would have provided a valuable indicator for the event. As a result of observation, Malville, (2011, 4) reaffirmed the assertion that the stone circle was related to the summer solstice on the basis that the shadows caused by the rising sun aligned with the central stones. Since Nabta Playa lies near to the Tropic of Cancer, the zenith sun, which occurs just before and after the solstice may also have been regarded to be of particular importance as is the case for many cultures (see Aveni 1981, 167ff). The North-South line, Malville (2011, 4) thought, could be symbolic and had not been intended to be a sightline but he does not elucidate.

#### **5.4.1.3 Megalithic Alignments**

Quartzitic sandstone megaliths, most of which had been shaped to produce rounded, ogival or shouldered tops, were oriented towards the northern circumpolar stars (Schild and Wendorf 2004, 12) and radiated outwards from Complex Structure A. They were analysed by Malville<sup>105</sup> (Malville *et al.* 2008, 134ff; Malville 2011, 8ff; Schild and Wendorf 2004, 12), who determined that they formed three alignments (A, B and C) with most of the stones facing north (see Map 5.4). Alignment A was thought to comprise three sub-alignments A1, A2, A3 and Alignment B of two sub-alignments. Alignment C was, as a result of a re-examination, deemed possibly not to have been an alignment of slabs. It is believed, though caution must prevail, that the alignments were oriented as in Table 5.2. Malville *et al.* (2008, 137, 2011, p.12) admit difficulties in determining the horizon of the El Baqar/El Ansam period because of the movement of the dunes since that time and the fragmentation of the slabs and thus built in an uncertainty factor. The results must remain hypothetical,

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<sup>105</sup> The results of Malville’s original work were challenged by astrophysicist Thomas Brophy. In response to this challenge, Malville using satellite imagery and additional GPS measurements by Brophy and Rosen (2005) re-evaluated his original results. The data presented above represents his latest thinking.

and even with caution as stressed by Schild (2011, personal communication,). The alignments were erected on playa silts laid down during the El Nabta and El Jerar periods (*ca.* 7050/7000 – 6100 calBC), thus providing a *terminus post quem* for their construction. The dates in Table 5.2 suggest that the alignments were erected during the El Ansam, Final Neolithic (see Malville, 2011, 13).

<b>Alignment</b>	<b>Star</b>	<b>Approximate Dates BC</b>
A3	Arcturus <sup>1</sup>	4530-4320
A2	Arcturus	4220-4020
A1	Arcturus	3810-3630
B2	Sirius <sup>2</sup> εOrionis or Alnilam in the Belt of Orion <sup>3</sup>	3700-3430 4300-4100
B1	Sirius <sup>2</sup> α Centauri <sup>4</sup>	4640-4400 4500-4260

*Table 5.2 Astronomical Alignment of Megaliths*

Data from Malville 2011(pre-publication copy);Wendorf and Malville 2001, 500ff.

<sup>1</sup> The three alignments to Arcturus, the fourth brightest star in the sky that can be seen from both northern and southern hemispheres, may have been due to the changing position of the star as a result of precession. <sup>2</sup> Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky and rose just before the sun on about 27-30 May in the Late Neolithic and would have been prominent in the sky during June and July. Thus it could be thought to precede the summer rains as later in Egyptian thought, it became the herald of the Inundation. <sup>3</sup> Associated with the winter solstice. <sup>4</sup>Third brightest star in the night sky.

#### **5.4.1.4 Complex Stone Structures or Shrines**

On the western fringe of Nabta Playa are two groups of complex stone structures, with a general north-south alignment. They follow a similar form; generally one or two horizontal slabs about 1.5-2.0 m in length surrounded by either a rectangle or oval of what originally had been megalithic standing stones. According to Wendorf and Królik (2001, 503), the outer structures were between 5-7 m long and 4-6 m wide. Some of the stones weighed several tons (Schild and Wendorf 2004, 13). Thus the construction of these complex structures would have been labour intensive requiring strong and effective management (Wendorf and Królik 2001, 503).

From those megaliths, still standing and broken bases still embedded in the silt deposited prior to the El Baqar period (Wendorf and Królik 2001, 503), it was deduced that the megaliths were orientated towards the north and the circumpolar stars. The tops of many of the stones appear to have been shaped like those of the alignments (Schild and Wendorf 2004, 13). They were possibly commemorative or

represented persons. The western group is the larger comprising about thirty structures, whilst the eastern group comprised five structures, with one comprising eight interlocking sub-units.

Excavation of several structures revealed that under the surface architecture a large pit led to mushroom-like sandstone blocks, which were thought to have been formed during the initial deflation of the Nabta basin by wind before the deposition of playa sediments (Malville 2011, 7f). In the largest of the structures – Complex Structure A – was discovered a large, partially shaped rock which was estimated to have weighed approximately two-to-three tons, standing vertically and aligned slightly west of north. It has been suggested (Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 670) that its shape resembles a cow (Fig. 5.35) but that must remain pure speculation. If the interpretation is correct, the carved rock would represent the first megalithic statue in ancient Egypt. This particular structure is the focus of the megalithic alignments described above (Section 5.4.1.3). No material culture was discovered to provide clues as to the structures' use. It was thought (Malville *et al.* 1998, 488; Wendorf and Królik 2001, 503) that the structures may have been high status burials although no bodies were discovered since it was possible that the remains of the deceased and any material culture were "...crushed to powder in churning soils..." (Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 670). If they were not actual resting places, they could have been cenotaphs for those who died away from the Playa, the size of the grave possibly indicating rank, or shrines or had an astronomical implication (Wendorf and Królik 2001, 519). The dating of these structures is problematical. The structures were built over a period of time. Radiocarbon dating of pieces of charcoal from the eight sub-unit structure gave a date within the El Ansam period (*ca.* 4600-3400 calBC) but the excavators (Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 670) believe that this structure because of its different subsurface architecture could have had a different purpose to the others, some of which they believed dated to the El Baqar period *contra* Malville (2011, 7) who believes they were all erected during the El Ansam period.



*Fig. 5.35: The large sculptured stone thought to be shaped like a “cow”, with CPE leader Fred Wendorf standing behind giving an indication of scale. (After Wendorf et al. 2001, Fig. 17.11. With kind permission of Schild)*

#### **5.4.2 Burials: Nabta Playa and Gebel Ramlah**

Very few burials appear to have been discovered at Nabta Playa. One tumulus – E97-5 – contained the bones of a young human male who was healthy at the time of death, whose skull was missing. The possible meaning of this atypical burial is discussed in Section 5.4.3. Other burials excavated at Nabta Playa, revealed badly preserved skeletal remains. Where dental analysis was possible, Irish (2001, 521) concluded one was an older adult female (site E-97-17 Southeast of the stone circle) and another was a younger adult male (site E-00-1). No mention of any funerary goods is made in relation to any of the graves. Wendorf and Schild (2001b, 670f) refer to a double grave in E-75-8, the aggregation area, in which the bodies were semi-flexed, heads to the west like those of the Badarian period. Grave goods had been deposited and included a red-stained arrowhead, a cowrie shell, ochre and a miniature caliciform beaker.

This situation contrasts sharply with the burials discovered in 2001 and 2003 by the *Combined Prehistoric Expedition* at three cemeteries (E-01-2; E-03-1; E-03-2) at Gebel Ramlah. The cemeteries are located on the shores of a fossil playa some 25 km northwest of Nabta Playa and it is believed that they were probably located near settlement areas as several such areas had been found along the playa edge. It is thought the burials were of people with a strong association with Nabta Playa (Malville *et al.* 2008, 140). The cemeteries were dated by radiocarbon dating of bone collagen to the El Ansam period (Malville *et al.* 2008, 140), which according to the

Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit's new chronology for early Egypt (Dee *et al.* 2013) started earlier than, but overlapped with, the Badarian period. Kobusiewicz and Kabaciński (2010, 252f) believed the goods, in particular the caliciform vessels, found in the cemeteries had strong similarities with objects of the Tasian, rather than the Badarian, culture, with which there were "less significant analogies". However, they acceded that the former culture was considered by some scholars to be Badarian.<sup>106</sup>

The following is in the main descriptive; the theoretical issues relating to burial will be covered in the next chapter since the primary focus of that chapter is funerary remains. Sixty-seven individuals (Kobusiewicz and Schild 2005, 22) were buried in primary and secondary<sup>107</sup> inhumations. Sixteen graves contained individual persons, 15 contained two or more. One of the graves (E-01-2:12) contained grave goods only and is thought to be a cenotaph grave for a person or persons who died whilst away from the site, possibly when herding. In all the primary individual burials, the body had been placed in a flexed position on the right side with the head to the west facing south. The hands were placed before the faces. This burial direction, which is seen elsewhere in Nubia, for example cemetery N117, near Gebel Sahaba, suggests it was integral to a belief system, which may have been linked to the concept that as in life so the dead could see the rising and setting of the sun. In cases where the sex could be determined, 34 were classified as female (or ?female), 16 were male (or ?male) and 17 were of unknown sex (Irish 2010, 195). That the majority were female could indicate that the men died whilst in remote areas. Seventeen of the dead were <17 years and included five 0-2 years.<sup>108</sup> Primary burials and most secondary burials revealed complete skeletal material. No skeletal modifications were discerned except for the repositioning of bones after a secondary (re)burial (Irish 2010, 199). It seems that the people were concerned that the bodies should remain whole. Two female

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<sup>106</sup> The Tasian question is discussed in Section 6.2.1.

<sup>107</sup> All secondary burials appeared to constitute *in situ* reinterment of individuals disturbed by intrusive graves (Irish 2010, 191).

<sup>108</sup> A cemetery mainly for children, infants and foetuses and dated to *ca.* 4650-4500 calBC has recently been discovered at Gebel Ramlah (Kabaciński 2014, personal communication). Some neonates were buried with an adult probably indicating the mother's death during or just after childbirth. Each burial contained lumps of red ochre – see main text of this chapter and footnote 112 on the significance of red ochre.

skulls had mis-positioned teeth in the jaw;<sup>109</sup> in a third case, eighteen teeth had been placed in the right orbit and in a fourth case three teeth had been positioned in the nasal cavity.<sup>110</sup> One body was found to be wearing four bracelets which had been wedged in place by the person's radius and ulna *post mortem* (Irish *et al.* 2003, 281-285, Kobusiewicz and Schild 2005, 23). One multiple burial (E-01-2:2) contained five semi-disarticulated adult skeletons suggesting that at the time of burial, the soft tissues had disintegrated and thus death occurred when the persons were at a far distance from the burial ground and had been carried around until burial was possible. Such a practice is known from hunter-gatherers in Brazil and Uruguay who collected the bones of the deceased and carried them in "shroud" bundles possibly on their backs until the final burial (Criado-Boado *et al.* 2006, 41). Seven burials (5 female, 1?male and 1 male)<sup>111</sup> had been sprinkled with red ochre. The colour red was symbolically identified with transitional states (Pinch 2006, 81) and death is the ultimate transitional state. The colour of the mineral, red, could be considered to be reminiscent of blood, and therefore understood as being the replenishment in death of the force that allows the pursuance of a life after death (Aufrère 1991, 556).<sup>112</sup> Tilley (1996, 322) points out that the bones on which the haematite eventually lay could represent "semen-milk" both life giving substances.<sup>113</sup> Thus the admixture of the two would be a forceful means of ensuring life after death.

The three cemeteries are interpreted by the excavators as being extended family burial grounds. The number of secondary burials would suggest that it was thought

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<sup>109</sup> Both belonged to females aged 12-14 years; one (E-01-2:4:V) moved from original burial location during subsequent interment of an adult female. Her skull and mandible were placed in the hands of the new occupant. The second burial (E-01-2:14) was a disturbed primary burial probably as a result of the burial of an adult female above (Irish 2010, 221).

<sup>110</sup> These two adult individuals (E-03-2:2 II and III) came from the same burial pit; their remains had been collected and repositioned during a later adult female burial) Skeletal parts had also been replaced (Irish 2010, 221).

<sup>111</sup> Cemetery E-01-2:14, female; Cemetery E-03-1:2, female; E-03-1:4, female; Cemetery E-03-2:2:III (male); E-0-3-2:6:I, female; E-0-3-2: 9:I, ?male; E-03-2:13:I, female.

<sup>112</sup> The use of red ochre in burials was not limited to the Western Desert and Predynastic Egypt. It appears to have played a symbolic role in burials in the Middle Palaeolithic for example, in Qafzeh Cave, Israel dated to 100,000-90,000 BP (Hovers *et al.* 2003, 507-509) and in some European Paleolithic burials *ca.* 26,000BP including Wales (Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, 32-41). It also been discovered in Mesolithic and Neolithic graves in eastern Baltic countries (Zagorska 2008, 115); in Mesolithic graves in the western Baltic (Meiklejohn *et al.* 2000, 230), the Balkans (Borić and Stefanović 2004, 529, 532, 543 and Table 1; Stefanović and Borić 2008, 158 and 159); and at Neolithic Çatalhöyük (Hodder 2006, 190). Borić (2002, 31) suggests that when found round the pelvic area of females, the red ochre related to issues of reproduction and when discovered elsewhere on male bodies, it had an apotropaic effect.

<sup>113</sup> Certainly there is evidence from the Late Period that the ancient Egyptians believed semen was formed in the bones of men (Sauneron 1960, 19-27).

important to be buried with family members even though death had occurred sometimes possibly faraway. Although dental analysis has shown the deceased belonged to two different populations – Mediterranean and sub-Saharan – the cemeteries appeared to show no signs of social stratification (Kobusiewicz and Schild 2005, 22).

The deceased were accompanied by numerous grave goods including caliciform beakers (Fig. 5.36), decorated with geometric designs or curved bands filled with rocker stamp design. Other ceramic vessels included ripple ware and a black topped variant. The graves also contained lithics, flat granite, limestone or sandstone palettes, some with traces of pigment on them, grinding pebbles, pigments, personal adornments such as beads and pendants made from agate, carnelian and ostrich shells; ivory and shell bracelets; bone tools; containers made from cattle horn, ivory and sandstone for such pigments as dark red or yellow ochre and malachite and largish pieces of mica which were often buried near to the head – one shaped like a tilapia (Fig. 5.37). As well as this being decorative, the choice of fish shape may have been deliberate. According to the theory of multifunctionality/levels of meaning, objects can have more than one function and can have multi-layered meanings (Section 3.4.5). The depiction of the Nile tilapia, besides being a highly decorative object, can be interpreted on a deeper level, which may have been an additional reason for its inclusion among the grave goods. The Nile tilapia, as a mouth brooder<sup>114</sup> could be understood to be a symbol of fertility and regeneration. The piece may have been placed in the grave in order to assist the person in death as it possibly was thought to have done during life. Sub-adults were also provided with grave goods but not pieces of mica and rarely with pottery.

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<sup>114</sup> The females hold their eggs in their mouths until hatched at which point the young are released. In moments of danger the mother would regather her young and when the danger had passed would expectorate them unharmed (Dambach 1966, 274). In one spawn a small female could produce about 100 eggs; larger fish 1000-1500 eggs (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; [http://www.fao.org/fishery/culturedspecies/Oreochromis\\_niloticus/en](http://www.fao.org/fishery/culturedspecies/Oreochromis_niloticus/en)). Such numbers would give rise to the idea of the fish being a symbol of fecundity and rebirth.



*Fig. 5.36: Caliciform vase.  
Provenience: E-03-1:2/3, Gebel Ramlah (After Kobusiewicz et al. 2009, Fig. 29. With kind permission of Kobusiewicz)*



*Fig. 5.37: Mica shaped in the form of a Nile tilapia.  
Provenience: E-03-2:7, Gebel Ramlah. (After Kobusiewicz et al. 2009, Title Page. With kind permission of Kobusiewicz)*

### **5.4.3 Discussion**

I have indicated previously that wadis would be regarded as being places of potency and power since they were channels for run-off of the life-giving waters as a result of the rains. When the rains were late or failed, the wadi would be the focal point for rituals to the supernatural entities responsible for rain. I believe that the siting of the various monuments at the side of the wadi or close to the Playa basin supports that supposition especially in view of the fact that the El Baqar or Late Neolithic period, which is when a number of these monuments are thought to have been constructed, was a relatively dry period and there is no evidence that the Nabta basin was seasonally flooded (Mohamed 2001, 426). The fact that the monuments were placed within the western part of the playa indicates the importance that was accorded to the wadi and to that sector of it.

As the climate was gradually deteriorating – the Late Neolithic was a relatively dry period - and pasturage on occasions would not be as plentiful due to oscillations in the climate, stress would be increased on both the human and faunal populations. Malville's (2011, 4) observations reveal that the stone circle had a solar function relating to the summer solstice and the summer rains. Runnels (1998 and 2011, personal communication) believes that of all the elements, only the stone circle has an astronomical meaning.

Stone circles are to be found across northern Africa. Bagnold (1931, 27) discovered a similar circle to that of Nabta Playa in the Libyan Desert north of Gilf Kebir (1931, sketch map, 14). Like that at Nabta Playa, it was made from thin sandstone slabs of which half were still vertical, whilst the remainder lay on the ground. The circle revealed no signs of orientation. Other stone circles in the Sahel-Saharan region, such as those in the Gambia (Parker 1923; Palmer 1939) are much later in date (Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 672) but it appears that none is attributed a definite calendrical function; those in Gambia were located in close vicinity to the villages and appeared to have a funerary function as did those in Senegal (Laporte *et al.* 2012, 409-427; Parker 1923, 198ff; UNESCO World Heritage List 2015) and in northwest Kenya, which were linked to herding societies (Hildebrand and Grillo 2012, 349). The stone circles of the Lotuko, the Lokoiya and the Lango Nilotic peoples are squatting places for initiated men (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 307, 343 and 359); presumably they have a political character. The stone circle with a calendrical purpose appears to be Namoratunga II in northwest Kenya dating to 300 BC; the calendrical links, in this case, are astral.<sup>115</sup>

Although stone circles appear to have numerous functions, I believe that the location of that at Nabta Playa in a prominent site at the mouth of the wadi together with the fact that the positioning of the four pairs of larger stones to form “gates” and the internal structure creating sight lines, gives credence to the stone circle having a calendrical function relating the rising sun at the summer solstice and the onset of the rainy season. This could imply an indication of an imperative need for water, especially since it was constructed during a relatively dry period. Thus the stone circle could have had an additional function as a locus for rain making ceremonies possibly similar to those of the Bari (Seligman and Seligman 1932, Pl. XXVI).

There was no evidence of permanent habitation sites at Nabta Playa during the periods in question. Rather, the focus of the site was the stone structures. Scarre (2011, 17f), in considering ethnographic and prehistoric examples of monumentality, posits that such constructions were ceremonial centres and places of ritual, many of which were aligned on astronomical phenomena; a conclusion that sits well for

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<sup>115</sup> The stone circle with its 19 megalithic stones are aligned with certain stars and constellations is still used by the Borana, a Cushitic people, to calculate their calendar (Lynch and Robbins 1978, 766-768).

Nabta Playa as will be discussed later. Renfrew (2007, 121) believes that the labour input to create monumental sites was so great that “religion” must have been a motivating factor. The architectural design of the site implies expert knowledge and in order to construct the Nabta Playa structures, the labour force must have been organised and overseen by persons with the necessary project management skills who had the authority to plan and oversee the collection of the stone and the building of the structures as well as ensuring that daily activities continued to be performed. These facts suggest that there was a ranked society or an incipient stratification which would appear to contradict the situation at Gebel Ramlah where no stratification could be detected in the burials. It is suggested in this work that such “leaders” held the position of “*primus inter pares*”. That a transhumant rather than a settled population could erect such structures is not without precedence. Göbekli Tepe in southern Turkey is a massive stone complex identified as a series of temples dating from *ca.* 9600 BC, and which was constructed by hunter-gatherers (Mann 2011, 39ff).

Whilst Wengrow (2006, 57) may have a point when he maintains the purpose of the structures is debatable and the dating is weak, I do not think he is justified in dismissing the excavators’ overall conclusions about the Nabta Playa site. It would appear that the dating of the cattle tumuli, with the possible exception of one, to the beginning of the El Baqar period *ca.* 5400 BC (Section 5.4.1.1) may be corroborated indirectly by the date of cattle burials in the Sahara; from Niger to the Libyan Sahara. A number of these burials, such as Adra Bous (Niger) and the Messak Settafet (Southwestern Libya) are dated to *ca.* 5300-5000 BC (di Lernia 2006, 53), also within the El Baqar (Late Neolithic) period.<sup>116</sup> On the basis that there was a specific arid spell between 5300 and 5000 BC, it is difficult to dispute di Lernia’s (2006, 60; see also di Lernia *et al.* 2013, 14) conclusion that the climate was related to this development and the burials were the outward manifestation of rain-making ceremonies.

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<sup>116</sup> Cattle burials within tumuli have also been found elsewhere in Egypt but lie outside the period: êr-Arîb in the southeastern desert, four of the 341 tumuli were excavated and were found to contain the disarticulated remains of three cows and a calf. These were dated *ca.* 2300-1500 BC on the basis of a sherd resembling C-group pottery or may have been later (Murray, G.W. 1926, 248); the 4-500 hundred stone tumuli discovered at el-Bahreïn are probably contemporary with the C-group (Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 668).

However, the fact that the remains of cattle in particular, which were a precious commodity, were discovered within some of them would suggest that the structures held a deep meaning for the people. For cattle pastoralists, the animals represented wealth and status and were the basis of socio-economic exchange. Cattle exerted a strong influence on the Nuer and Dinka and other cattle herding peoples; cattle formed bride wealth, compensation for blood deeds and were considered to be the most important of sacrificial animals (see Section 4.3.4). On ceremonial occasions the Dinka and Nuer usually sacrifice oxen and for the Nuer the sacrifice of a cow in milk is the greatest sacrifice that can be made (Evans-Prichard 1949a, 58). At Nabta Playa, Site E-75-8<sup>117</sup> (Map 5.4) was discovered to contain large amounts of cattle bones and it was believed the site was an aggregation site used for ceremonial purposes (McDonald 1998, 138; Wendorf and Schild 2001b, 671) involving the sacrifice and eating of cattle. To sacrifice cattle has a deleterious effect on a person's wealth, since the cattle are owned by individuals but sacrificing cattle is regarded as being a spiritual act to supplicate or to placate the gods/spirits and therefore is of benefit since the supernatural beings will look favourably upon them.

Sub-Saharan cattle pastoralists usually only killed their cattle for sacrificial purposes, one sacrifice was that for rain. The remains of cattle found in the tumuli could well be evidence of such activities. As the climate was gradually deteriorating – the Late Neolithic was a relatively dry period - and pasturage on occasions would not be as plentiful due to oscillations in the climate, stress would be increased on both the human and faunal populations. As stated previously, rain was the essence of life. It is therefore not inconceivable that sacrifices were made to the spirits to ensure that the rains fell. According to Crazzolaro (1934, 320) cattle were “...*das Bindemittel zwischen der sinnlichen und übersinnlichen Welt...*”<sup>118</sup> The burial of the articulated young cow suggests that this was a special sacrifice. Such an animal is a guarantor of the future herd; it represents fertility. Thus, the sacrifice of such a valuable asset could be regarded as an ultimate sacrifice in times of dire stress. As will be seen below, death and burial was not the end of life but was a *transition* into the afterlife that is a process of rebirth and regeneration (see van Gennep 1977[1960], 146ff). It is suggested that the cow was sacrificed and buried whole to appease the spiritual

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<sup>117</sup> Dated to the El Baqar period.

<sup>118</sup> “...the link between the sensual and supernatural worlds...” Author's translation.

world so that rain would be forthcoming and the process of birth and regeneration could commence. Possibly this tumulus and the others should be regarded as shrines in a similar manner to Nuer shrines constructed over sacrificed cattle (Johnson 1990, 50) and were linked to rain and fertility. The location of the burials at the side of the wadi, which brought the waters to the playa basin, is probably no coincidence. Whilst this has to be a supposition, it is not inconceivable that over time, the sacrificed cow was seen to have spiritual powers. From this, it is no quantum leap to accept that the cow would eventually be considered as a spiritual being in its own right in the minds of the people. The first stage of the formalisation of this thought might be seen in the carved rock (if indeed that is what it is) discovered in one of the complex stone structures.

The complex structures could also have held a spiritual significance for the people. Beneath the structures excavated were mushroom-shaped tablerocks. As the complexes were constructed on high ground, it is doubted that they had been fortuitously discovered during the excavation for wells. What method was used for their discovery is unknown. However, similar tablerocks are to be found 700 m away to the south. It may have been deduced that such rocks carried on under the playa sediments. The meaning of this particular complex, which developed over time at Nabta Playa is not known. The mushroom tabletops had been shaped, some more so than others. However, it may be surmised that the complex was a spiritual focus since the “bovid” shaped rock was found buried on top of one of the mushroom tabletops in Complex Structure A. Initially it was thought that the structures were graves for high status people but as no human bones were found, it was then decided they were cenotaphs for those who had died whilst away from the Playa. The fact that many of the megaliths had rounded tops like stele possibly suggested that they were accorded anthropomorphic values or were commemorative stones, would support the latter suggestion. An ethnographic parallel might be seen in the Malagasy standing stones, which were often erected to commemorate deceased males, whose bodies had not been returned to their traditional burial places (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998, 311). The fact that the megalithic alignments radiated from Complex Structure A would perhaps indicate that the complex structures had an astronomical purpose but to date no astral phenomenon can be related to them. Whittle (2003, 125) points out that stones can have extremely powerful meanings as shrines to the dead. Robb

(2013, 450) argues that anthropomorphic stones represented ancestral figures. Could it be that the complex structures were shrines to the spirits of powerful ancestors, who were possibly invoked to assist in ensuring rainfall? The fact that many of the stones had been shaped into an extremely stylised anthropomorphic form could give credence to that suggestion. The fact that the megaliths of the alignments were also anthropomorphised might also suggest that they related to ancestors. Malville (2011, 8) suggests that these megaliths "... may represent departed members of specific clans who perhaps were specialists who used these particular stars for navigation across the desert."

From the structures at Nabta Playa, it may be concluded that the stars played an important role in the lives of the pastoralists. The fact that megaliths of the Complex Structures and most of those in the alignments faced the northern heavens where the circumpolar stars, 'the imperishable ones' are to be found are suggestive of this. During the Pyramid era, it was thought the deceased king would ascend to the circumpolar stars where he would reside by means of a passageway rising northwards in the pyramid<sup>119</sup> where he was interred. However, it is not possible to make a similar assumption for the pastoralists as Schild and Wendorf (2004, 15) do<sup>120</sup> with any certainty because of the chronological gap of at least one millennium. I believe that it is more probable the interest in the northern sky had a more practical astronomical basis. One reason was that ancient populations trying to find new pasturage and water did so at night in order to avoid the glare of the sun. The stars would therefore have been used as instruments of navigation. The brighter stars in the sky would have held especial importance to them during their journeys across the desert but whether they had additional importance is not possible to determine. The circumpolar stars indicated the location of the north celestial pole at a time when there was no pole star (Malville 2009, 14). Thus they were essential to determine true north. Additionally, bright stars would prove to be valuable navigational guides since they were able to be seen. The fact that they constantly moved across the heavens meant that knowledge of astronomy was necessary on the part of the herders to determine the direction in which they needed to go. However, it must be supposed

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<sup>119</sup> In the case of the Great Pyramid, the so-called ventilation shaft.

<sup>120</sup> According to Schild and Wendorf (2004, 15), the possibility that the mushroom rocks under the stelae were considered to be launch pads sending the deceased, symbolized by the upright megaliths, to Dāt could not be ruled out.

that the transhumant populations had a strong affinity with, and understanding of, nature both astronomical and terrestrial.

It should be stressed that the alignments and their association with particular stars are fraught with problems. Malville *et al.* (2008, 137) also show an uncertainty as the references to the alignments are couched in hesitant terms: "...these alignments *might* have been associated with the brightest stars in the night sky of Nabta." (my italics). In his latest paper, Malville (2011, 12) still shows slight doubt: "The alignment B2, may have been lined up with the stars in the belt of Orion...". An astronomical purpose for the alignments cannot be categorically ruled out but it is possible they were also linked to ceremonial rites. As stated before, water is the essence of life. Therefore, the alignments could have been integral to rainmaking ceremonies.

Understood as an integrated unit, Nabta Playa could therefore have been a place of aggregation, where the cattle pastoralists came together to renew ties, to undertake social, ritual and ceremonial activities most probably at the time of the summer rains. It would appear that as far as is known, no other site in North Africa has a similar collection of structures (Wendorf and Schild 2001a, 9). The Nabta Playa structures had no material culture debris directly associated with them as in other parts of the site (Wendorf and Schild 1998, 110). This would indicate that the structures were thought to have a significant meaning for the people and were used for particular ritual purposes. In the spirit of Scarre (2011, 10) that such places are linked to the "continuity of life forces", I believe that Nabta Playa was associated with rain making rituals along similar lines to those of the sub-Saharan pastoralists. Given the climatic conditions of the El Baqar and El Ansam periods (Late and Final Neolithic periods respectively), it is not unrealistic to believe that the ancient cattle herders did likewise.

The conceptual image of Nabta Playa could also be interpreted as a three-tiered cosmos: the heavens, the earth and the underworld represented by the pits under the complex structures and accords with Lewis-Williams and Pearce's (2009, 194f) view in respect of the chambers of European megalithic tombs. That being so, it is therefore possible to accept that among the herders, like the Nilotic pastoralists there would be one who would have special powers as a rainmaker. Did that rainmaker at

Nabta Playa have shamanic powers? Since there is no rock-art at Nabta Playa which might provide the necessary evidence, perhaps the carved rock perceived to be in the shape of a cow could be understood as being a shamanic rain animal. The rainmaker shaman performed the necessary rituals to appease the spiritual powers in order that rain might fall. However, it is stated above that this rock could have been thought to have spiritual powers. This view integrates well with shamanic ritual since a shaman is a ritualist (Chapter 4).

The burials at Gebel Ramlah with their plentiful grave goods, many of which have parallels in typology with those found in the Badarian graves, such as pottery, palettes and pigments, beads, tools, shells, would suggest that the herders had a belief in the afterlife. Although Ucko (1969, 265) has demonstrated the presence of grave goods does not necessarily mean such a belief, I maintain, based on van Gennep's rites of passage, that in general they do. The last stage of any rite of passage is the integration of a transformed being into a new society. Death was a rite of passage and thus the deceased underwent a transformation and was incorporated into the world of the dead, the world of the ancestors. The grave goods, whether they be the deceased's possessions or were selected by the living, I believe were deemed to be essential, or possibly symbolic, for the transformation to the afterlife. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6. What form that afterlife took is debatable. Sub-Saharan peoples such as the Nuer believe in an afterlife in which the spirit of the deceased lived on. The concept that the deceased continues to exist in an afterlife is widespread. Whittle (2003, 63f) suggests that in central Europe during the Tiszapolgár culture phase (*ca.* 4500-4000 BC) the dress of the deceased and their grave goods suggested a participation in social life by performative means activated when the deceased traversed to another world. Thus, the burials of the pastoralist cattle herders, with their numerous grave goods, the replacement of teeth and of the bracelets that had become detached *post mortem* might suggest that they too believed in an afterlife. The meaning of the burials and grave goods will be discussed along with those of the Badarian period in Chapter 6 since the same theoretical arguments apply.

Two of the burials at Nabta Playa discussed by Irish (2001, 521) could possibly date to the El Baqar period but are both in such a deleterious state that it is impossible to

draw any conclusions. The human tumulus burial at Nabta Playa is problematical. Often the word “deviant” is used for such burials but since it has negative and sexual connotations, I suggest the burial is atypical in that it is located within an area which contains faunal remains, possibly sacrificial remains. There are a number of reasons for such a burial: the person was one of status or had magical associations or was a social outcast or for some reason was considered to be outside the community; the death was considered to be a bad death such as suicide. Kyll (1964, 175) suggested such burials occurred when the living felt in danger. Whilst any conclusion must be hypothetical, I suggest that this burial is an instance of either a human sacrifice, since the other tumuli contained the remains of sacrificed animals or as seen in the Sahara, animal burials gave way to human burials and this was a cultural shift in mortuary practices. The tumulus is undated but is believed to date, like the other tumuli, to the El Baqar period, a period of aridity. There are more tumuli, thought to be animal tumuli, some 2-3 km to the west. It is possible, they too contain human burials. However, on the basis of the available evidence: the location of the burial, that this was a single human inhumation and the fact that the skull appears not to have been buried with the remainder of the body since there were no remnants, nor were there any teeth, does suggest, that the burial represents a human sacrifice paralleling that of the faunal sacrifices. The skull may have been buried elsewhere in order to negate the power of the body or from a relational theoretical viewpoint, the skull was kept within the community to ensure the person’s presence within society since the dead comprise many parts of society and therefore the body or part thereof belongs to the community (Fowler 2004, 81).

#### **5.4.4 Contacts**

The peoples of Nabta Playa were not isolated desert groups. The various finds indicate that they had long distance contacts or were involved in trade. Ceramic ware such as black topped ware provides the main evidence for contact across the Western Desert and Nile Valley from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. This ware appeared to be common across the desert area from Nabta Playa to the Dakhleh Oasis and environs. That discovered at Nabta dated to *ca.* 5000 BC (Nelson 2002, 18; Nelson and Khalifa 2010, 137). Although it was suggested some may have originated in the Nile Valley (Wendorf and Schild 2001a, 8), it differed in quality. That of the Badarian was finer leading Riemer and Kindermann (2008, 621) to suggest it would be better

termed ‘desert black-topped ware’. It is postulated that this desert ware could be the predecessor of Badarian black-topped ware, the influence having come from the desert (Fig. 5. 38). Red-slip ware, found in the Badarian period, was also present at Nabta Playa during the El Baqar, Late Neolithic period (Nelson 2002, Fig. 2.1) and at Dakhleh in Bashendi B locations (Warfe 2003, 81).

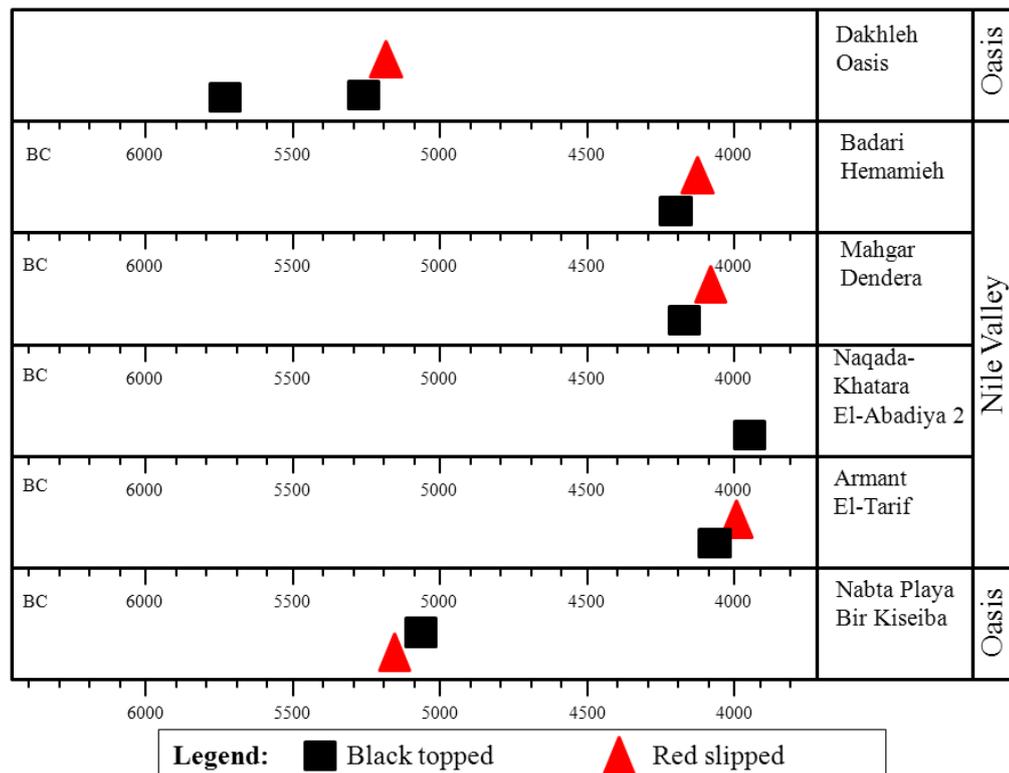


Fig. 5.38: Chart showing the distribution of Black-topped and Red Slipped ware. (Source: Harmer based on Riemer and Kindermann 2008, Fig. 8)

Caliciform beakers decorated with incised patterns, often geometric which were filled with a rocker stamp design both on the interior and exterior were discovered in graves in the cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah, Nabta Playa. Such pottery was found by Brunton (1937, pls. 12 and 14) mainly in settlement areas e.g. at Mostagedda. Caliciform beakers were also found over a wide area ranging from the Eastern Desert (a tomb in the Wadi Atulla - Friedman and Hobbs 2002, 178ff) across to the Western Desert (in burial caves at Wadi el Hôl in the Western Desert, Darnell 2002, pl. 93) and down into the Sudan (in funerary locations at Kadero, Krzyżaniak 1991b, 527; Kadada and the Dongola Reach, Friedman 1999, 4). Such a wide distribution of such pottery type would suggest contacts between populations.

The grave goods of the deceased at Gebel Ramlah indicate that the people of the Nabta Playa area were involved in a wide trading network. Mica was not found locally and it is assumed that the pieces discovered probably originated in the Eastern Desert (Aston *et al.* 2000, 45) if it is Egyptian. These were obviously precious commodities and were not found in children's graves (Kobusiewicz *et al.* 2009, 150). It is surmised that the goods made from ivory came from Equatorial Africa (Kobusiewicz *et al.* 2004, 577). Beads made from agate (Eastern Desert), cornelian (Nile Valley and Red Sea), lip or noseplugs made from cornelian and turquoise are other indicators that the cattle pastoralists were part of a trading network. Hendrickx and Bavay (2002, 60) are of the opinion that the 'turquoise' from the Badarian period is actually glazed steatite making the identification of the 'turquoise' for Gebel Ramlah objects suspect. If, however, they are true turquoise, the stone would have come from Sinai; otherwise steatite is found in the Eastern Desert (Aston *et al.* 2000, 59). Larger freshwater bivalves (*Etheria elliptica* and *Spathopsis rubens*) indicate contact with the Nile Valley.

#### **5.4.5 Section Summary**

Several themes: megalithism, landscape and shamanism together with ethnographic analogy have been utilised in order to interpret the purpose of the site. The evidence indicates that Nabta Playa played an important role in the lives of the nomadic peoples. It was a node for the gathering of transhumant peoples for social, political, trading and ritual activities and which provided a backdrop for discussions on beliefs. Whether those who gathered at Nabta Playa were members of the same lineages or whether they were separate groups is unknown. Megalithic sites are related to spiritual activity (Renfrew 2007, 121; Scarre 2011, 10). Landscape theory maintains topographical features would be thought to have potency and power. This would include wadis since they could turn from being dry to a torrent of water in very little time. The fact that megalithic activity took place at the western side of the wadi is important but whether it has anything to do with astronomical symbolism cannot be ascertained. In order to interpret the features, in particular the stone circle, the tumuli and Complex Structure A, I believe it is necessary to place them within the climatic environment, that is, one that is relatively dry. It is also important to take into account the evidence of the sacrificed cattle found in the aggregation area E-75-8 and the tumuli. Ethnography shows that cattle were the source of wealth and thus

their sacrifice, especially if young, would affect the future of the herds. Thus, I suggest that the cattle would only have been sacrificed for an important occasion and if set against the climatic environment, this would be for rain as is the practice among the Nilotic peoples. Without rain, there would be no life. The necessary rituals, although the format is unknown, I suggest would have incorporated Rappaport's framework and would have been performed by one who was able to appease the supernatural world, namely, a shaman. Ethnographic analogy shows that African rainmakers were regarded as being shamans. Thus unlike Wadi Sura and the Oases, evidence of shamanism here does not rest on rock-art. The stone structure within Complex A possibly suggestive of a cow could represent a later development or even possibly the shaman's animal.

The cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah, which date to the El Ansam period, are deemed to show similarities with the Tasian culture, which was contemporaneous with the Badarian period (Section 6.2.1). The importance of the deceased being buried whole is indicated by the care taken to ensure that any damage caused by burial or secondary burial was repaired. The burials with grave goods indicate in my view that there was a belief in a life after death (Section 5.4.3). The grave goods also indicate involvement in long distance trading practices, whereas the pottery types indicate contact, either direct with the Nile Valley or indirect possibly via the Oases.

## **5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have used several theoretical approaches since the evidence considered is not cohesive. Landscape theory and those of shamanism and ritual have been consistently used throughout. Rock-art theory was only applicable to Wadi Sura and Dakhleh Oasis and environs. Recourse has been made to ethnographic data at all sites. However, in order to pull together the outcomes of these theories and to produce a strong argument, cabling theory has had to be used.

An examination of sites in the Western Desert reveals evidence of the belief systems that existed at the time. The three major sites, Wadi Sura, Dakhleh Oasis and Nabta Playa, are thought to have been aggregation sites used by transhumant populations for the performance of ceremonies and rituals. During the period from *ca.* 5300 calBC the climate was deteriorating with rainfall becoming scarce. The result was that water and food sources dried up and pasturage became unavailable. Thus a

common thread running throughout this chapter is the dependence of life on water. Although the Wadi Sura rock-art, deemed to be shamanic in character and representing a complex symbolic representation of beliefs related to the invocation of rain, was thought to represent the beginning of ancient Egyptian beliefs, that suggestion is disputed by this work, since the comparative texts submitted as evidence date in the main from the New Kingdom period. Rather it is thought that the early beliefs as presented by Wadi Sura I and II were shamanic in character. Another reason for denying this rock-art as being the source of early Predynastic beliefs is the fact that the peoples populating the area appear to have had no direct or indirect link with the Nile Valley (see Map 5.2).

The engravings in the Oases regions took on a different characteristic but are also deemed to be shamanic. Rather than portraying beasts, female figures with extremely large hips and buttocks were depicted which suggest an emphasis on fertility. The aim of the artists was to draw attention to these features as some heads are missing and the others are portrayed in a small-scale. Figures that were obviously not male have been thought of as being female even if no breasts were depicted. Although Winkler's view that these represented a goddess has been perpetuated the view taken here is that they represent the female principle. Some of these figures are depicted in scooped out rocks and thus it is argued that by evoking the male principle, rain, fertilisation takes place and new life begins. The ceremonies would be led by a ritualist that is a shaman.

It might be thought that Nabta Playa does not represent shamanic thought. However, many sub-Saharan societies have rainmakers. It is therefore possible that such a person existed among the peoples using Nabta Playa. That person would be responsible for leading the ceremonies, for contacting the supernatural world and thus can be regarded as a shaman. The three tiered cosmos at Nabta Playa would also give credence to a shamanic aspect to their beliefs. The shaped rock buried beneath Complex Structure A might represent a rain animal. The shaman carries out rituals as does a priest. It maybe that in the Western Desert can be seen the very beginnings of ancient Egyptian religion but it did not take the form identified by Le Quellec and Bárta as exemplifying later Dynastic theology.

At Nabta Playa another belief becomes apparent, that of a life after death. The burials at Gebel Ramlah, with their numerous grave goods and the apparent care to preserve the bodies of primary inhumations, even to repositioning those parts of the body that had become detached, would strongly suggest such a belief was held. The deposition of grave goods, despite Ucko's warning, I believe were linked to the belief in an afterlife. This will be discussed in Chapter 6. The fact that red ochre was sometimes used in the burials, as occurred elsewhere in the Neolithic world, would suggest that it had a role to play in this belief. Whilst the north appears to be important at Nabta Playa, a belief in an afterlife linked to the cardinal point North, the place in the sky where the circumpolar stars are located, cannot be proved. Rather, the South would seem to be the important cardinal point for the burial of the transhumants, possibly this related to the diurnal movement of the sun.

These nomadic populations did not live in isolation. Taking into account the deterioration of the climate and increasing aridity resulting in a push-pull effect that is the areas traversed by the nomadic populations would decrease as they were drawn to permanent water sources. Thus it would be inevitable that there was increased interaction between groups. This mobility of peoples would result over time in exchanges of ideas and an assimilation of beliefs at least by some.

In the sections on Dakhleh Oasis and environs and Nabta Playa references have been made to possible contacts with Badari by the transhumant peoples. It is my belief that these peoples had an influence on the beliefs of the Badarians. The next chapter will attempt to ascertain whether this is so. Since the evidence for the Badarian period is based on cemetery finds, the discussion on the relational aspects of burials will also take into account those at Gebel Ramlah.

## Chapter 6

### FROM NOMADS TO SEMI-SEDENTISM: ORIGINS OF RELIGION IN PRE-DYNASTIC EGYPT:

#### THE BADARIAN PERIOD (*ca.* 4350-3750 calBC)

##### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

As shown in Chapter 2, belief systems enable people to cope with the challenges that face them in life, especially in respect of natural forces over which they have no control. Thus, such beliefs help to ‘explain the inexplicable’ and those beliefs often involve supernatural beings and the belief that nature has a spiritual force. To detect the beliefs of the pre-historic Badarian<sup>121</sup> people, for whom there is no textual evidence, it is necessary to examine the objects they left behind in the hope that they will provide the key to their spiritual cognition. Although settlement sites have been identified, the majority of the evidence of the beliefs held during the Badarian period comes from burials and the grave goods interred with the deceased.

In Section 3.6.1 my definition of a belief system, based on social anthropological thinking, stressed the use of symbolism. Whilst symbols can be interpreted in various ways (see Turner 1970, 20ff), I postulate that the Badarian burials and grave goods are symbolic and reflect the belief systems of the Badarian people. My reasoning is based on the general similarity of the burials and the inclusion of grave goods. If burials and grave goods had no purpose, why was such care taken when burying a person? There was a reason for such actions being carried out in such a particular manner.<sup>122</sup> It could be argued that a person was buried due to fear of the dead and to sever connections with the deceased; to stop the deceased’s spirit from coming back to haunt the living or to assist the deceased to transform into a spirit. The reason for grave goods could be the removal of the dead person’s possessions from the living to remove any pollution caused by their reuse. However, they could also be objects considered to be of value assisting the deceased during his/her transformation into a new entity. Since the burials were not haphazard and the bodies generally faced towards one cardinal point, there is evidence, I believe, of specific

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<sup>121</sup> The term is derived from Badari, the main centre of the district where the sites are situated (Brunton 1928, 1).

<sup>122</sup> See Parker Pearson 2003[1999] and Ucko 1969 for full explanations.

reasons for such practices and these reasons have their basis in a belief system. The focus of this chapter is therefore the interpretation of the burials and grave goods of the Badarian period in that light; however, I will make reference to the situation at Gebel Ramlah<sup>123</sup> where appropriate. Attention will then be paid to animal burials during the Badarian Period. Finally, I identify features in Badarian burials that can be interpreted as having shamanic characteristics. As in Chapter 5, it is not possible to apply one single theoretical approach since different aspects of death and burial are considered. The application of only one theoretical approach would miss the nuances highlighted by others. Therefore, the outcomes of the applications of the different approaches each result in one strand in a cable of reasoning which when grouped together provides a composite conclusion. Cabling is also used within a theoretical approach as referral is made to other disciplines, in particular ethnography to strengthen the argument. The relevant theoretical approaches are: personhood/relationality, ethnographic, multi-functionality/meaning, contextual and shamanic.

## 6.2 BACKGROUND

Archaeological evidence reveals that the first communities in the Nile Valley are located in present Middle Egypt and date to very early in the Predynastic period (Hassan 1988, 153; Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000, 39; Midant-Reynes 2000, 160). These communities are the most northerly found to date. They have been assigned to the Badarian period, the first sub-period of the Predynastic era. The evidence suggests that between 8500 and 5300 BC there was no human habitation in the Nile Valley, with the exception of the Epipalaeolithic Elkabians who were thought to follow a nomadic-hunter and fishing subsistence (Vermeersch 1992, 143).<sup>124</sup> The increasing desiccation of the Western Desert between 5300-3500 BC resulted in the movement of nomadic pastoralists to locations of permanent water supplies including the Nile Valley (Barnard 2009, 15; Friedman 1999, 9; Hassan 1992, 309; Hendrickx 2012, personal communication; see also Chapter 5). The area became "...a melting pot of indigenous Nilotes and desert herders, part-time

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<sup>123</sup>The cemeteries are dated to the El Ansam period, *ca.* 4600-3400 calBC thus overlapping the Badarian period – Section 5.4.2).

<sup>124</sup> The lack of evidence of habitation may be due to the Nile being exceptionally low during this period and any sites on the Nile floodplain would be subsumed by the higher Niles of the humid phase Hassan 1988, 143; Midant-Reynes 2000, 91; Vermeersch 1992, 143.

cultivators, and hunters.” (Hassan 1988, 135). If Hassan is correct, such an admixture of peoples could result in the coalescence or syncretisation of belief systems. Whilst the origin of the Badarian people is unknown, geoarchaeological evidence (Lindstädtter and Kröpelin 2004, 764) strongly suggests that their roots lay in such migrations resulting from desertification. The Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit’s new chronology<sup>125</sup> also posits the beginnings of the Badarian period during the climatic changes resulting in the desiccation of the Western Desert.



*Fig. 6.1: Satellite image showing the main Badarian sites referred to in the text. Luxor is a locational point. (After Google Earth)*

Whilst the geographical spread of the Badarian period is uncertain, the main sites – Qau el-Kebir (subsequently referred to as Qau), Hemamieh, el-Badari (subsequently referred to as Badari), Mostagedda and Matmar (cemetery and settlement sites) – are located in the low desert of the East bank of the Nile in modern Middle Egypt (Fig.

<sup>125</sup>Dee *et al.* 2013.

6.1).<sup>126</sup> Some forty settlement sites were identified in the area of Badari-Matmar and Mostagedda. The evidence is scanty but is characterised by hearths, pits, posts, post holes, rubbish dumps and shallow layers of ash and charcoal. Brunton (1928, 40) hypothesised that the Badarians lived in shelter-type constructions. Although Hassan (1988, 154) interprets the settlements as being villages, hamlets and homesteads, that is “permanent” habitation sub-sites of the three main areas, it is possible they were temporary, seasonal camps as Mahgar Dendera 2 appears to have been (Hendrickx *et al.* 2001, 103) or outlying sites. If so, the main settlement areas would have been closer to the Nile, only to have either been destroyed by the inundations or covered by resulting deposits of alluvium.

Present evidence suggests the Badarians had a mixed economy; pastoralism; hunting and fishing. Although Brunton identified storage pits and granaries, relatively small amounts of grain were discovered; the most significant find being a leather bag containing grain in grave 2224A at Mostagedda (Brunton 1937, 40). Fuller (2005, 327) and Wetterstrom (1993, 224) suggest that such cultivation is post-Badarian, a view that is supported by Wengrow (2006, 33). If that is so, the Badarian people were not agriculturalists as proposed by Midant-Reynes (2000, 160). The production of pottery could indicate sedentism but that cannot be taken as being firm evidence since an analysis of ethnographic data shows that ceramics are also made by non-sedentary people.<sup>127</sup>

Present evidence suggests that the Badarians pursued, not a nomadic life but one that was reasonably mobile based on seasonal changes. If these habitation areas were indeed outliers like that at Mahgar Dendera 2, the main settlement areas lay elsewhere. Since herding is evidenced, it is possible that the Badarians had a lifestyle similar to the Nilotes described in Chapter 4 in that certain members of the community would travel with their herds to new pasturage living in temporary camps whilst leaving other members of the community at the main site. The social

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<sup>126</sup> Badarian culture has also been discovered at Maghar Dendera 2 excavated at the end of the last century (Hendrickx *et al.* 2001), Armant and environs (Ginter and Kozłowski 1994, 134f; Mond and Myers 1937, 6-8; 163ff; Myers [nd];), and Hierakonpolis (Hoffman 1982, 140; 1989, 320), el-Kab (Hendrickx 1984, 229) and the Wadi Hammamat (Debono 1951, 74).

<sup>127</sup> Arnold (1988, 119f) refers to the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock 1967, 119f), which demonstrated that 103 non-sedentary societies made pottery. Eerkens (2008, 307-326) shows the same situation pertained in parts of the Mojave Desert and the North American Great Basin in western America.

basis of the Nilotic peoples is the male age-set system whereby those in the lower echelons, generally unmarried, are tasked with supervising the cattle. The reservation of cemetery 5300 at Badari for males might argue for such a system, especially as it was located next to a cemetery containing both sexes. The fact that there were a number of storage pits among the settlement sites and elsewhere might suggest that the Badarians followed a delayed-return strategy; that grain or other sustenance or goods were stored until they returned to that particular location.

### **6.2.1 The Tasian Question**

Graves at a cemetery between Mostagedda and Deir Tasa that were in certain respects dissimilar to Badarian graves led Brunton (1929, 459) to believe they belonged to an earlier culture, which he called “Tasian”. One of the bases for his conclusion was that they contained some pottery of a different type from that found in Badarian graves. However, it is clear that Brunton (1937, 26) was uncertain of the dating of some of the graves on the grounds that the graves of the two periods were intermingled. As the cover pages to his (Brunton 1937) plates XIII, XV, XVIII-XXI, XXIII, XXV suggest it is also apparent that he had difficulty in distinguishing some pottery and other objects of the two periods.

The Tasian question has been much debated in the past and Baumgartel (1955, 20) disputed its existence. Kaiser (1985, 71ff) supported a separate Tasian culture, influenced by Lower Egypt, which had acted as a conduit of Lower Egyptian traits to Upper Egypt in Naqada I and was the predecessor of that latter period. Much of the present debate has centred on the caliciform beakers found in village areas. The position of modern scholars (Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000, 40; Holmes 1999, 186; Holmes and Friedman 1994, 107) was that these beakers were contemporary with the Badarian period and there was no separate Tasian culture. However, the view has changed to one of the Tasian period representing a desert culture concurrent with the Badarian culture (Darnell 2002, 165; Friedman 1999, 9; Friedman and Hobbs 2002, 189; Hendrickx 2012, personal communication).<sup>128</sup> Thus Kaiser’s argument about influences of Lower Egypt does not appear tenable since the Tasian caliciform vessels were discovered in sites in the Sudan (in funerary

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<sup>128</sup> It is interesting to note that Murray, M. (1956, 1 footnote 1) came to a similar conclusion that the Tasian culture was contemporary with the Badarian period but was formed of small groups of infiltrating people.

locations at Kadero, Krzyżaniak 1991, 527; Kadada and the Dongola Reach, Friedman 1999, 4). Friedman (1999, 9) argued that the desert peoples could have interacted with the Badarians on a trading basis. In Chapter 5 reference was made to the desert trade routes. That such vessels have been discovered, albeit in funerary locations, in the Western and Eastern Desert, would support this view.

I accept the view of Friedman *et al.* that the Tasian culture probably originated in the desert and was contemporaneous with the Badarian period. Since Brunton had difficulty in distinguishing whether some ceramics had their origin in his Tasian or Badarian periods together with the fact that he was uncertain about the dating of a number of the graves, I am incorporating consideration of his Tasian graves in the discussion on those of the Badarian period.

### **6.3 BURIAL AND AFTERLIFE**

The definition of a belief system (Section 3.6.1) involves practices and trappings which allow engagement with supernatural entities with symbolism playing a role. Whilst this refers to the living and their need for responses to the vicissitudes of the world, I suggest that this definition may also be applied to the dead. Burial of the dead is a response by the living to a situation over which they have no control. If the premise of spiritual beings and an afterlife is accepted, it is inevitable that the living regard the dead as joining such a community and that it is incumbent upon them to assist in this process. Burials are redolent with symbolism, from direction, body position and inclusion of grave goods.

It is not known whether all the dead were accorded burials or whether burials were restricted to certain of the population during the Badarian period. According to Brunton's excavation reports and grave lists (Badari: 1928, pp. 3-18; plates 5-9; Matmar: 1948, pp. 7-9; plate 3; Mostagedda: 1937, pp. 5-7; 33-43; plates 7-10) relating to the Badarian period, there were 594 single burials (undisturbed and disturbed) whose graves had been allocated a specific number.<sup>129</sup> Sixteen of the graves at Mostagedda contained double or triple interments giving an overall total of 633 burials in the Badarian period. Of these burials 29.7% were male, 16.7% were female, 25.3% were sub-adult and 28.3% were of unknown sex or the sex was queried. (See Table 6.1 for breakdown; Tables 1a-c in the Appendix are breakdowns

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<sup>129</sup> The excavation reports contain entries for burials that are not included in the Registers.

of the graves and contents at the three sites Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda<sup>130</sup> and forms the basis for the tables in this chapter). Additionally there were five animal burials at Badari.

Site	Male	Female	Unknown (inc. ?F, ?M)	Sub-adult	Total
<b>Badari</b>	82	42	92	39	<b>255</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	17	12	12	21	<b>62</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	89	52	75	100	<b>316</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>633</b>
<i>%</i>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>25.3</b>	

*Table 6.1: Breakdown of all Burials by Site and Sex/Age*

The Badarian burials were generally in pit graves, oval or round in shape with the walls generally sloping outwards from the base; a few graves were rectangular with rounded corners (Fig. 6.2). At Badari, there is evidence that some may have had matting and sticks against the sides to prevent soil spillage into the grave (Brunton 1928, 18). Additionally some of the graves may have been roofed; graves 2702 and 2704 at Mostagedda had upright sticks, which may be roof supports (Brunton 1937, 44); such techniques would signify a development in grave architecture.

The Badarians were mainly buried on their left side (unlike the bodies of primary burials at Gebel Ramlah which were placed on their right). The bodies lay in a foetal position (exceptions include burials in graves 5744 and 5752 at Badari); tight contraction of the body was rare (Brunton 1928 18; Gabra 1930) (Fig. 6.2). In the male grave 6018 at Badari, the body had been buried face downward. Approximately 80% of burials were associated with matting, skins or cloth (Table 6.2). Red ochre does not appear to have been scattered on the bodies as was the case in several instances at Gebel Ramlah.

<sup>130</sup> Badari: Brunton 1928 pp. 3-18; pls. 5-8; Mostagedda, Brunton 1937 5-7, 33-43; pls. 7-10; Matmar, Brunton 1948, pp 7-9; pl. 3).

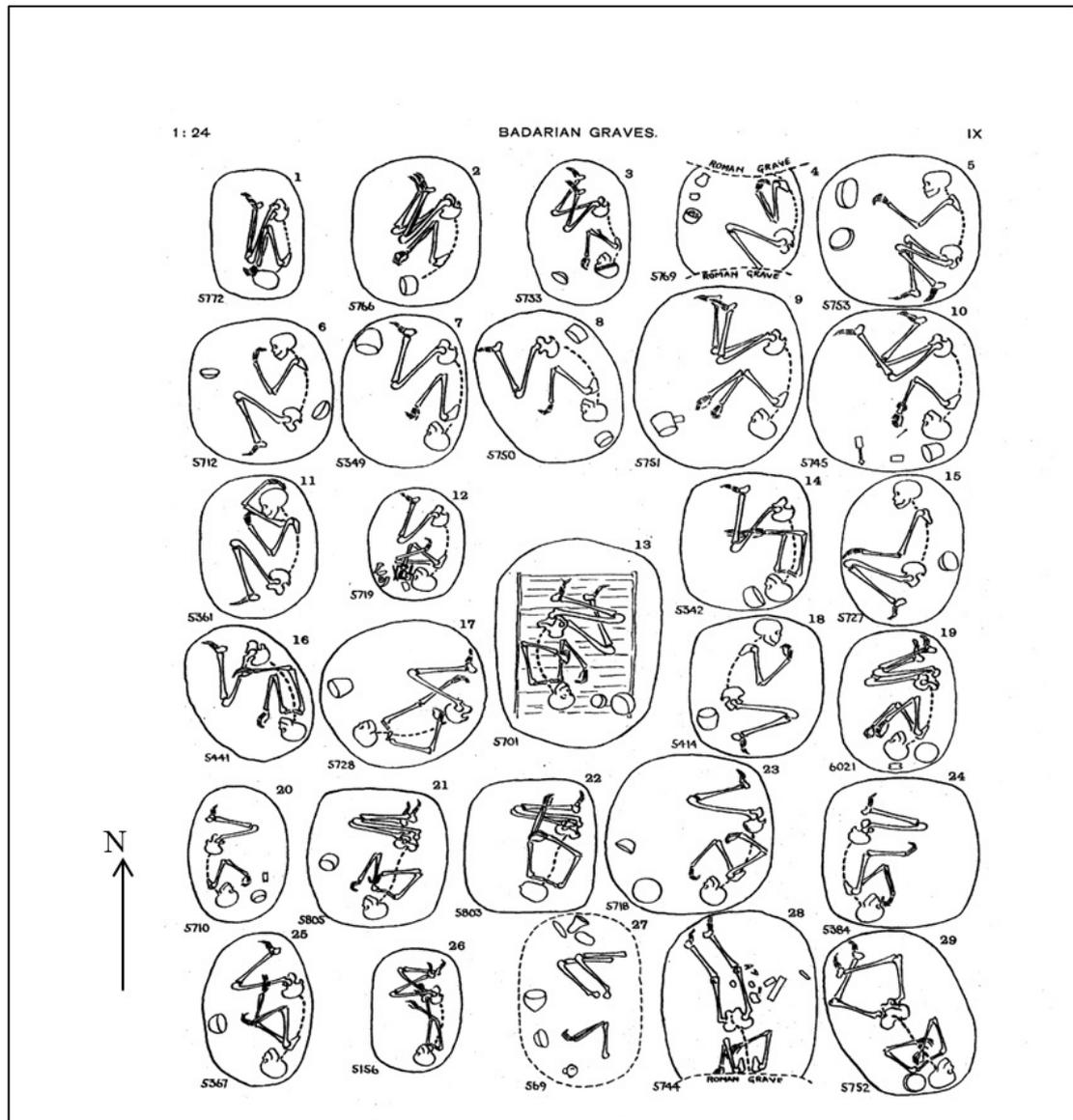


Fig. 6.2: Examples of grave shape. (After Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, pl. 9. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)

Site	Male	Female	Unknown (inc. U, ?F and ?M)	Sub-adult	Total	Total burials per site	% of burials with matting, skins or cloth per site
<b>Badari</b>	71	32	48	30	181	255	71.0%
<b>Matmar</b>	16	8	11	13	48	62	77.4%
<b>Mostagedda</b>	77	48	58	93	276	316	87.3%
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>80.0%</b>

Table 6.2: Site Breakdown of all Burials associated with either Matting, Skins or Cloth

According to Brunton, (1928 19; 1937, 27; 1948, 10) more males were buried in skins (mainly goat or gazelle), with the fur generally being next to the body. In three graves at Mostagedda, (grave 818: male; 2220: female and 2818: ?female) and two in the Badari region (grave 5735: male and grave 5762: male), the skin had short fur like that of a feline (Brunton 1928, 19; 1937, 47).<sup>131</sup> Based on an ethnographic similarity relating to the San, whereby it was the elite who wore skins of cat fur, these graves might have belonged to members of the elite. The deceased in grave 5735 would appear to have been a person of some status, the skin was worn in a similar manner as the dynastic period *sem* priest and wound round his waist was a long string or belt of steatite beads (Brunton 1928, 15).<sup>132</sup> Reference should also be made here to the Nuer leopard-skin priest, who was a person of standing in the community, a ritualist whose role incorporated shamanic characteristics and who was identifiable by the leopard-skin worn (Section 4.3.9.1). Though the hides were worn as garments, some appeared to be used in the sense of a kaross or cloak.<sup>133</sup> Brunton (1937, 47) queried the use of cloth in some of the graves, wondering whether they were the remains of shrouds or garments but the condition of the cloth made it impossible to determine. Sometimes, remnants of cloth were discovered beneath the skins; Brunton (1937, 47) deduced the skins were used as coverings and not as garments.<sup>134</sup>

According to the grave registers, in 399 cases the head of the deceased lay in the direction of one of the cardinal points.<sup>135</sup> Based on these figures (Table 6.3), overall, 80.5% (n=321) of bodies were buried on their side with their faces to the west; 7.0% (n=28) faced east; 4.5% (n=18) of bodies faced north, and 8.0% (n=32) faced south.<sup>136</sup> The hands were placed close to the face or near to the head; occasionally one hand was lower down (Brunton 1928, 18). The faces generally looked west (Brunton 1928, 19); Gabra (1930, 148) corroborates this with his findings at Deir

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<sup>131</sup> In neither report does Brunton identify the species.

<sup>132</sup> Belts were part of a shaman's regalia (Chapter 4); together with the distinctive pelt could indicate that the deceased fulfilled a shamanic role.

<sup>133</sup> Brown (ed.) 1993. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. I, defines a kaross as a cloak or sleeveless jacket like a blanket made from hairy animal skins worn by the indigenous peoples of southern Africa.

<sup>134</sup> The bodies at Gebel Ramlah appear not to have been wrapped.

<sup>135</sup> A further 18 cases are recorded, which may be a question of inadvertent misalignment: 1 with the head to SW, 14 with the head to SE and 3 with the head to NW. Taking these into account, the direction of the body was unknown in approximately 34% of burials.

<sup>136</sup> At Gebel Ramlah, in all primary burials the head was to the west and facing south.

Tasa where 45/47 bodies had their faces in that direction. Of those with their heads to the North, the majority of the faces looked west. One notable exception was the burial in grave 6018 at Badari whereby the deceased was buried face down but was still covered with matting. Brunton makes no comment about this atypical burial. An atypical burial was discussed in relation to Nabta Playa (Section 5.4.3) and I suggest the same reasons may pertain in this instance. The faces of the deceased of primary individual burials at Gebel Ramlah looked south (see Section 5.4.2). The position of the bodies generally was reminiscent of sleep, especially those whose heads appeared to be supported by pillows (for example: Mostagedda, graves: 426, 449, 2704B; Matmar, 3107). The fact, too, that many of the heads were wrapped, as is the case of modern desert dwellers when sleeping, also suggests that death was considered to be equivalent to sleep (Brunton 1928, 40).

<b>Head Direction</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>
<b>On left side (facing)</b>	18 (East)	296 (West)	29 (South)	11 (North)
<b>On right side (facing)</b>	25 (West)	10 (East)	7 (North)	3 (South)

*Table 6.3: Direction of Faces of Deceased*

Comprehensive data contained only in the grave registers in Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, pls. 5-8, Brunton 1937 and 1948, pls. 7-10 and pl. 3 respectively

Brunton (1928, 19; 1937, 123) reported that there was no evidence of the practice of deliberate mutilation or dismemberment of bodies in the Badari region or at Mostagedda. Skulls were sometimes found dislocated from the body, possibly as a result of the deterioration of the ligaments or as a result of plunder. The latter could account for skulls that were missing (Brunton 1937, 45). However, grave 5766 at Badari contained an undamaged skeleton whose skull had been specifically replaced by a smooth brown pot (see Section 6.3.1 for discussion and Fig. 6.3).

Unlike Gebel Ramlah, there were relatively few multiple burials. At Badari, there was one instance, grave 5123, which contained the remains of three people but due to the absence of matting and sherds, Brunton (1928, 19) identified the grave as a plunderer's dump. There were several multiple burials at Mostagedda, for example

grave 2840 a baby with a female; grave 2224: two adults and a sub-adult; grave 2704: two males and grave 3522: two males and one female.

### 6.3.1 Discussion

Death is not just about the dead but is about the living. It is the living, who identify with the deceased – they have lost part of themselves. They are left behind to mourn and to carry out the necessary rituals to ensure the deceased becomes a transformed entity. The living adapt the landscape to create an area where these rituals are carried out to enable the dead to undergo transformation. This dedicated land suggests that the living claimed ownership of that land, which became the focus for relationships both between the living and the dead and the ancestors; the ancestral land, the ancestors and the living were thus conjoined, the grave was the point of communication between the two worlds. Consequently, it can be argued that the ancestors played an important role in the lives of the living. The same is true, for example, of Nilotic peoples (see Chapter 4).

Personhood and relationality are important theoretical approaches for the understanding of the underlying concepts of death and burial. The theories, which are integrally linked, have been used in respect of the European Neolithic (for example, Chapman 2012, *passim*; Fowler 2004; Whittle 2003, 63f) and the Bronze Age (Brück 2004; 2006a, 73–101; 2006b, 297–315; Fowler 2004; 2013b). As previously established (Section 3.2.3), a person is not an individual but is a composite being formed from the relations with, and substances of, others. Relations are also objectified as goods, which are also multi-authored, so their exchange also affects the composition of the person. In giving, a person gives part of themselves which is absorbed by the recipient. Death changes these relations as the deceased is disaggregated from the living. New relations are reconfigured through mortuary rites, which provide contextual evidence or relational personhood, carried out by the living, resulting in the dead being transformed into different entities. Van Gennep 1977[1960] maintained that each rite of passage, of which death is one, comprised three parts. The first, the stage of disaggregation involved the preparation of the body for interment and for a new state of being, which could involve wrapping which separated the dead not only from the living but from their former social identities. Wrapping, whilst it could be considered an anti-pollutant to protect the

living from the dead or as a means of separating the two, it could also be seen as protection for the deceased when undergoing the transformation process. This stage also incorporated placing the body in the grave. The closing of the grave engendered stage 2, the period of liminality, when decay set in thus changing the deceased's ontological being. This period of liminality also affected the living since it equated to a period of mourning. The final stage was the integration into the world of the dead with the deceased being transformed and accorded a new status and entity with a concomitant change of relationship with the living. Thus the actions of the living during mortuary rituals were vital in the transformational processes undergone by the dead and the maintenance of relationships, albeit changed, with them. The mortuary rituals also transformed the identities of the living, in that they lost part of themselves in the death of the person. However, they also provided positivity for the living in that they provided the occasion for the circulation and sharing of memories. The deceased's belongings, that is, all the relations that composed the person, may be brought together in material form and then redistributed among the living. Thus the deceased is broken up and elements dispersed into the world and throughout the community (Fowler 2004, 84). Parts of the deceased may be circulated within the community to keep the essence and memory of the dead alive (Thomas 2002, 42) or interred in other locations in order to engender new relations. Ultimately these relationships weaken as new ones are forged among the living. I do not believe that relationships with the deceased are broken if only on the basis that the ancestors are believed to play a role in the lives of the living.

That there was a relationship between the living and the dead buried at Gebel Ramlah is paramount as evidenced by the seeming need for the completeness of the bodies, which were carefully restored after disturbance by the placement of others in the grave (Irish 2004, 645-647). In some instances only fragments remained, the most affected being the bones of infants and children since they would be more fragile than those of adults. There were no signs of animal modifications, weathering, or human modification for example cut-marks from disarticulation, defleshing (Irish 2010, 199). None of the five bodies buried together (E-01-2:2)<sup>137</sup> had any such marks. All bar these 5, all of whom were adult (3 males, 1?female and

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<sup>137</sup> Site with grave number after the colon.

1? male) who it is thought died away from the occupation areas, had been buried soon after death since their bodies were flexed. However, *rigor mortis* is only a temporary state after which bodies regain sufficient pliancy to be flexed.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, it is possible burial in fact took place sometime after death. Relationships at Gebel Ramlah appear to have been based on familial grounds. It was essential that the bones of the deceased who had died whilst away from the settlements were brought back to be interred within. Thus the care with which the dead were buried and the fact that a significant number of graves appeared to be familial as the secondary burials would imply, indicates, that the living regarded the dead as being an extension of the community. This would have involved a change in identity, since the deceased entered a new existence, one apart from the community, thus forming a new relationship between the living and the dead. Extant evidence would be the ritual flexing of the body and its deposition in a basket denoting a change in personhood and existence whilst maintaining relations with the living community.

The burials of the Badarian period differ from those at Gebel Ramlah in that the deceased faced in different directions, but mainly towards the west and that the bodies, which were often placed in hampers, were covered with cloth and/or matting. As at Gebel Ramlah, the bodies were flexed. Recent investigations of the funerary wrappings of four of the deceased at Mostagedda (graves 494, 3538: one ? female, one female; 1214: female and 1215: male) showed evidence of the use of agents, and in similar proportions, that were used for mummification purposes in the Dynastic period.<sup>139</sup> Whilst these numbers are statistically too small on which to base the definite conclusion that they were examples of very early mummification, such action might suggest that it was thought necessary to deter the process of decay until the burial preparations were complete. It was a means of commemorating and possibly retaining those relationships developed during life which then changed once the grave was covered. At Badari large cooking pots, which contained meat or grains, were discovered in the cemeteries. Brunton (1928, 42) purported they were

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<sup>138</sup> Advice provided by Co-operative funeralcare.

<sup>139</sup> These comprise a plant oil or animal fat ‘base’ constituting the bulk of the ‘balms’, with far lesser amounts of a conifer resin and an aromatic plant extract/‘balsam’, and minor amounts of a wax and a plant gum/sugar. The usage of such embalming agents predates the earliest scientific evidence by more than a millennium. These agents constitute complex, processed recipes of the same natural products, in similar proportions, as those utilized at the zenith of Pharaonic mummification some 3,000 years later (Jones *et al.* 2014).

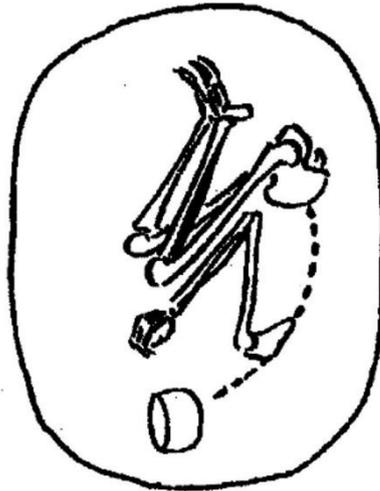
the remains of mortuary feasts. Such feasts were scenes of exchange of substances which could also involve the dead as food was placed in the grave, although on present evidence this was a seemingly rare occurrence in the cemeteries of the Badarian period.<sup>140</sup> This conclusion may be distorted since approximately 43% of the burials had been disturbed.

The individual dead could remain in the community by the retention and circulation of some of the bones. In the main, the deceased at Gebel Ramlah and in the Badarian cemeteries appear to have been buried while fleshed. If the practice of bone circulation was observed then the graves would have to be reopened when the body had become skeletonised and the bones removed. The excavators of Gebel Ramlah indicate that the skeletons did not appear to have been subjected to such modification (Irish 2010, 199). As noted in Section 6.3, Brunton (1928, 19; 1937, 123) reported that the disturbances of bodies were either the result of the deterioration or plunder. However, incomplete skeletons may be the result of a deliberate act of opening the grave to extract bones which were then circulated and relocated resulting in the creation of new relations with the dead (above). Possibly the intention was to elevate the person to being a powerful ancestor and the bones were a synecdochical representation of the dead person (see Fowler 2004, 86). The same reasoning may be applied to the replacement of the skulls in graves 5766 at Badari and 1206B at Mostagedda with a smooth brown pot (Fig. 6.3) and a black topped vessel respectively. It may be that skulls were deliberately removed into the community in order that aspects of the deceased were retained and were later reburied, which might explain the fact there was an additional skull in the ransacked grave 1208 at Mostagedda (see Table 1c in the Appendix). Wengrow (2006, 121) posits the possibility that such burials were examples of multi-locational burials. Thus essences and memories were maintained in different locations. The reason for substituting a vessel, which can be said to resemble a skull in shape, as a replacement for the skull might be to ensure the continuation of relationships through material objects between the living and the dead who became ancestors. This argument is strengthened, I

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<sup>140</sup> Undisturbed and disturbed burials: Animal bones: Badari: 5148 (unknown), 5371 (sub-adult); Mostagedda 592 (male); 3202 (female); 3531 and 549 (both sub-adult) although the bones may have been the remains of a ?pet gazelle. Matmar: 2007 (?female); in cemetery 3100, in an unregistered grave. Organic matter identified as bread: Badari: 5709 (unknown); 5716 (male); 5738 (?female) and 5770 (female). Mostagedda: 3506 (?male); 10017 (female); Matmar: 2517, (female).

believe, by the fact that the skull was the focus of the intake of nutrition and as vessels can be associated with food, so the deceased was not denied nourishment (see Brück 2006a, 84) and would continue to exist relationally. Such a substitution was also a means whereby members of the community gave part of themselves back to the deceased.



*Fig. 6.3: Grave 5766, Badari depicting the pot in place of the skull. (After Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, Pl. 9: Fig. 2. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)*

Death is the antithesis of birth and the point when transformation to another entity or life begins. The most obvious indicator is the foetal burial position, a position that was common in the Neolithic period. Dividual and permeable beings comprise essences from, and relations with, others. Thus a foetus comprises the essences of its parents and their relations with others and is therefore a composite being which contains components of its forebears and the community. The Nilotic peoples perform various rites after the birth such as cleaning the child and burying the afterbirth and umbilical cord when cut (Deng 1972, 36: Dinka; Seligman and Seligman 1932, for example Dinka: 160, 165; Nuer: 221f: Azande, 517). In some societies such as early Polynesia, births were witnessed by others (Oliver 2002, 160). Thus birth brought about relational reciprocity. Burial involves reverse procedures. Rites are undertaken in particular during the Badarian period, which include the body being wrapped or covered and placed in a foetal position in the grave. On death, relations between the dead and the community change as the deceased embark on a transformational process. This is underpinned by mortuary practices carried out by the survivors, which result in the deconstruction of the deceased and their reclassification as a new ontological being having become integrated into the world

of the dead and ancestors (Fowler 2004, 80). In other words, they are reborn into a new life, an afterlife.

### 6.3.2 Direction of Burial

Directionality of burial may be based on a belief system or the person's place within society.<sup>141</sup> Since the majority of the deceased (80.5%) faced westwards, there must have been a compelling reason for this. The rationale I suggest was a belief system. I propose that the Badarians believed that as the sun died and was reborn, so they too would be reborn after death. A similar argument pertains for those (7.0%) buried with their faces towards the east. As the sun perpetually rose each day, so the dead would also rise to a new life. A probable later formalisation of this belief is to be found at Abydos, whereby the proto-kings built their graves near to the pathway to the Wadi in the cliffs to the west (Richards 1999, 92).<sup>142</sup> The break in the cliffs was thought to be the gateway to the afterlife. 12.5% of the deceased were buried with their faces towards the north or south. Those facing the south could have held similar or the same beliefs as the people buried at Gebel Ramlah; that is a belief based on the visibility of the sun during the day. I have already noted that there was a belief of an afterlife in the northern skies where the circumpolar stars located during the Pyramid era (see Section 5.4.3). However, the chronological divide between the two periods is too great to reach such a conclusion for the Badarian period. A north facing direction may relate to the flow of the Nile or reserved for those on the edge of Badarian society.

### 6.3.3 Death and Fertility

The more difficult belief to ascertain is whether the Badarians believed that death was related to fertility, *i.e.* the ability to reproduce, whether by humans or in respect of plants or animals. According to Bachofen (1859, 16ff) death is essential for rejuvenation; it is essential for the survival of the world; it is the complement of life and is the foundation of life: “...*Der Tod erscheint mit dem Leben verbunden und selbst als Grund desselben...*”<sup>143</sup> (Bachofen 1859, 242). He based his thesis on the Greek and Roman symbolism of the egg, a symbol of fertility and on the bi-coloured

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<sup>141</sup> For the breakdown of the directionality of faces see Table 6.3 and discussion (Section 6.3.2).

<sup>142</sup> The royal graves of the 1st and 2nd dynasty at Umm el-Qaab had exits oriented towards this Wadi (Effland and Effland 2010, 130f).

<sup>143</sup> “...Death appears to be connected with life and even as the foundation of the same” (Trans. Author).

half black (or red) and half white eggs depicted in some Roman tombs, which showed symbolically the continual passage of darkness into lightness, of death to life, of the need of each of the equation on the other in order to exist (see Bachofen 1859, 13). The Dinka believed that such fertility was linked to the powers of Spear chief. Chapter 5 made reference to fertility as it related to the fecundity of the land, which had repercussions for a transhumant population and their animals. However, how does human death affect fertility? Since death is the reversal (or the equivalent) of birth, it can be argued that death provides for a new birth or rebirth, which in itself is an abstract form of fertility. Such abstraction, however, is probably not relevant to the argument. The problem is trying to understand the world situation from the point of view of those living 6,000 years ago. However, it seems that for many indigenous societies, living is a continuous process of birth or as Ingold (2011, 142) refers to it as a process of progeneration; thus life crosses the generational barriers. Thus for the living, the ancestors form an essential part of their being. Whilst the ancestors are no longer in bodily existence, they are still spiritually very present; consequently life and death can be understood as a continuum. Thus, the ancestors would be very involved in the lives of the living. Consequently, they would need to be placated in order for them to act benevolently on behalf of the community and enable the people to prosper. Therefore, it may be argued that death did indeed bring about fertility.

#### **6.4 GRAVE GOODS**

To Processualists, grave goods were evidence of social ranking (Anderson 1989; Binford 1971, 23; Shennan 2009, 27-32; Tainter 1975, 1-15), rather than objects of relationships. Although they may not have belonged to the deceased, grave goods are evidence of continued relationships between the dead, the recipient and society, the donor. Those grave goods which are multi-authored are representative of continuing relationships between the creators of those pieces and the deceased. Some may have had specific meaning and some may give an idea of what other beliefs were held. Thus, it can be argued that all grave goods, no matter how sophisticated or simple to the modern eye, have meaning for both the deceased and the living and are therefore part of the belief system. However, it should be acknowledged that they may have a different purpose in death than in life (Ekengren 2013, 182) thus complying with Baines' (2007, 310) theory of multifunctionality. Whilst the placement of objects in graves is generally assumed to have occurred simultaneously, it may have taken

place over a period of time with some objects being removed and replaced by others. Objects in the upper layers of grave fills could possibly represent such actions or ancestor rituals (Gramsch 2013, 466).

*All* grave goods should be accorded importance and those seemingly appearing to be unimportant to the modern eye should not be lightly dismissed as being meaningless since there was a reason for them being placed in a grave. In the following consideration of grave goods, I will discuss broad genres. Where reasoning applies across a spectrum of genres, reference will be made to the original discussion. For example, the discussion on pottery sherds can be applied to most objects that have been fragmented and placed in the grave. The focus will be on the grave goods found in Brunton's undisturbed graves as they relate to those interred within them (333 in total),<sup>144</sup> since the associated grave goods will have been placed there at the time of the burial. I will also refer where relevant to burials that have been partly disturbed not necessarily due to robbery but because of ancestor rituals. The tables relating to the various categories of grave goods comprise breakdowns by sex and numbers of sub-adults (full details are contained in tables 1a-1c in the Appendix).

#### 6.4.1 Pottery

Site	Male	?Male	Female	?Female	Unknown	Sub-Adult	Total
<b>Badari</b>	33	2	13	7	4	23	<b>82</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	9	0	7	3	0	7	<b>26</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	25	4	14	8	6	47	<b>104</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>212</b>

*Table 6.4: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials containing Pottery*

Table 6.4 shows that pottery was discovered in 212 (64.0%) out of 333 undisturbed Badarian period burials, of which 34 were female (16.0%); 67 (31.6%) were male, 77 (36.3%) belonged to sub-adults; the sex or age of the remainder was in question or unknown. In 12 instances<sup>145</sup> the pottery was in the form of sherds and in 17, the vessels contained organic matter, which in four cases<sup>146</sup> was thought possibly to be bread. In one case, grave 10017 (female) at Mostagedda, the vessel covered the

<sup>144</sup> Undisturbed burials: Badari: 129; Matmar: 37 and Mostagedda: 167

<sup>145</sup> Badari: 5371 and 5719 (both sub-adult); Mostagedda: 2012 (?male); 1212B, 1219, 2001, 2002 (all female), 819, 2006, 2007, 2203 (all sub-adult), 2204 (unknown)

<sup>146</sup> A bread-like substance was found in grave 2517 at Matmar (female), which was not associated with a pot.

bread as though for protection. Six vessels contained seeds/grain.<sup>147</sup> This suggests that the Badarians believed that the grains and seeds could be transformed into a new state like the human body after death. The placement of sherds in graves may represent the change of social transitions, the ending of old relations and the establishment of new ones (Brück 2006b, 303). The object may have been ritually broken to emphasise the changed relationship. Such an action, with the mourner retaining the remainder of the pots in memory of the deceased thus maintained the relationship between the living and the dead. However, the sherds may have been part of an exchange system and highly valued objects in themselves which were highly charged with relationality of those who had handled them. Thus they may have been placed in the grave to link the living with the ancestors via the deceased. The sherds might have been considered to be synecdochical, as representing the whole vessel and thus charged with the same meanings and relationships. Vessels were used as containers in food-making processes and from which food was eaten. As noted above, a number of the pots contained organic matter some of which was thought to be bread; this situation differs from that at Gebel Ramlah where none was found. With a linkage to nourishment, the sherds could be considered indicative of a belief that the sherds would enable the provision of nourishment on a performative basis. The inclusion of food substances can also be interpreted as indicating the flow of substances from those who prepared the food to the dead. Thus in instances where such inclusions occur, relations between the living and the dead were augmented. I suggest also that the presence of empty pottery vessels also indicates a belief that substances that had been contained within them were also magically present for perpetuity.

#### **6.4.2 Flint and Bone Tools**

Both flint and bone tools formed part of the deposition in some graves. Flint tools mainly took the form of scrapers or knives, whilst bone was used to make *inter alia* awls, needles, piercers and points. Objects of both materials were found mainly in male graves (Table 6.5). Brück (2004, 317) points out that tools and other equipment may have belonged to the deceased or to others who had carried out tasks for them

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<sup>147</sup> Where identified, the seeds/grain appeared to be *triticum* sp. At Mostagedda, grains were found loose in grave 1247 (?female) and in a bag in grave 2224A (male). The seeds in a seventh grave ( male grave 302 male at Mostagedda) were thought to have been introduced by animal activity.

and thus emphasised the relationships between them. Some of the tools may have been used during the rituals relating to the preparation of the body and its burial and were therefore incorporated into the grave as a means of symbolising relationships between the dead and the living.

Site	Male		?Male		Female		?Female		Unknown		Sub-Adult		Total	
	F	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F	B	F	B
<b>Badari</b>	4	7	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	0	2	0	9	11
<b>Matmar</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2
<b>Mostagedda</b>	4	4	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	8	1	16	6
<b>Total</b>	9	12	0	0	1	3	5	2	2	0	10	2	27	19

*Table 6.5: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials containing Flint and Bone Tools*

Note: F=Flint; B=Bone

The arguments applying to sherds also apply to flint flakes which occurred in 12 graves.<sup>148</sup> It would seem that flint flakes were most likely to be deposited in sub-adult graves. The deposition in these graves may be because they were deemed not to have played a full role in society and therefore, generally, were not thought to warrant a more finished piece. Another explanation may be that the flakes are independent objects, yet at the same time they are part of a core. Thus metaphorically the flakes may represent social relationality (Aldhouse-Green 2015, personal communication). Additionally flint flakes resulting from lithic reduction could have synecdochical qualities representing the object that has been created. Metaphorically the flakes are integrally related to this creation and can symbolically be linked to the idea of creation and birth. Flint may also have a symbolic meaning in that its durability connects the present with the past and therefore links it with the ancestors (Graves-Brown 2010, 124). This generational aspect could be applied to any flint object found with the deceased.

Flint knives were found in four graves (Badari 5134 (sub-adult), 5705 and 5739 (both male) and Mostagedda 468 (sub-adult)). Whilst these may have been used in life, their deposition may be symbolic especially as they were also found in sub-adult graves. They may be a powerful emblem of the connotation of the severing of the life and relationships with the corporate community to allow the transformation of the deceased to take place and new relations to be established.

<sup>148</sup> Badari: 5390 and 5738 (both ?female), 5751 (male). Matmar: 2510 (?female). Mostagedda: 209 (male), 301, 303, 427 494, 2206 (all sub-adult), 443 (?female), 1656 (unknown).

### 6.4.3 Beads and Shells

Beads and shells, which are found in 24% (n=80) of the undisturbed burials (see Table 6.6d for a sex/age breakdown by site and Appendix 1 for details) of the Badarian period,<sup>149</sup> are also objects which have a strong affinity to relationships and to the past. They have individual biographies. Beads have had to be created from stones collected perhaps on the basis of the meanings attached to their colour or their qualities. The stones include carnelian, red/green jasper, serpentine, calcite and limestone. Copper beads were also found. The most numerous were those of glazed steatite even when excluding the instances whereby large numbers were used to create what appear to be belts; for example it is estimated that between 5-6000 beads were used for that discovered in grave 592 at Mostagedda. These belts will be discussed in Section 6.6.1. Shells, often used in conjunction with beads, to make jewellery, have individual biographies from collection to curation and include exchange relationships since they are all Red Sea species.<sup>150</sup>

Site	Male	?Male	Female	?Female	Unknown	Sub-Adult	Total
Badari	1	1	0	0	0	4	6
Matmar	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Mostagedda	3	0	0	0	0	6	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 6.6a: Sex/Age Breakdown. Burials containing Beads only

Site	Male	?Male	Female	?Female	Unknown	Sub-Adult	Total
Badari	4	0	0	0	1	2	7
Matmar	1	0	1	0	0	3	5
Mostagedda	1	0	4	1	0	11	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>

Table 6.6b: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials containing Shells only

Site	Male	?Male	Female	?Female	Unknown	Sub-Adult	Total
Badari	5	0	1	1	1	7	15
Matmar	1	0	1	2	1	2	7
Mostagedda	0	0	3	0	0	8	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>33</b>

Table 6.6c: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials containing both Shells and Beads

<sup>149</sup> Beads and shells used as beads were found in 15 (46.9%) graves at Gebel Ramlah.

<sup>150</sup> *Ancillaria* sp., *Conus* sp., *Nerita* sp. are the most common. The *Mutela* shells which were used in conjunction with pigments were derived from freshwater molluscs from the Nile.

Strings of beads worn by the deceased may be thought to be their personal possession as Fowler (2013b, 127) implies. However, it is possible that they were purposely made for the burial of the person or may have belonged to one of the mourners. Barrett (1994, 121-122) argued that strings of beads could have been taken apart and restrung, combining elements of the original necklaces. Such actions would construct biographical relationships between people and place the deceased within a nexus of generational relationships. The same argument applies to the use of shells in the same situations. On the available evidence, shells and beads occur more commonly in the graves of sub-adults (Table 6.6a-d). I believe that this web of relationships represented by strings of beads and/or shells when found in sub-adults' graves in particular (for example: Mostagedda: 202, 308 and Badari: 5364 and 5708), could be construed as providing additional protection.<sup>151</sup> Thus the beads and shells represented relationships between the deceased as a new entity and the living. The mourners extracted part of themselves to give to the deceased. Loose beads and shells may have synecdochical meanings.

Site	Male	Female	Unknown (inc. ?F and ?M)	Sub-adult	Total
<b>Badari</b>	10	1	4	13	<b>28</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	2	2	3	8	<b>15</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	4	7	1	25	<b>37</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>80</b>

*Table 6.6d: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials containing Beads and/or Shells*

#### **6.4.4 Ivory Objects**

Of the 31 pieces of ivory discovered in 18 burials (Table 6.7), 12 (38.7%) were bangles, of which 9 belonged to sub-adults, with one possessing five. The remaining 3 belonged to males. Their purpose may be age-dependent. Those worn by sub-adults may be thought to have apotropaic values whereas the others were believed to imbue their owners with the powers and qualities of the animal from which the ivory was derived, in all probability the hippopotamus. I also suggest that at least two of the bangles worn by the males were possibly status items and indicated power. One was decorated with blue-glazed steatite in a chevron pattern (grave 3537 Mostagedda) and the second bangle was found on the wrist of the deceased who also

<sup>151</sup> According to Deng (1972, 41) within weeks of birth Dinka babies are adorned with beads and shells for decoration and spiritual protection.

had masses of green glazed steatite beads around the waist (grave 5705, Badari), which I discuss in section 6.6.1. The remaining objects were items of daily use: a decorated comb discussed in Section 6.4.9.1, spoons including one with an ibex terminal discussed in Section 6.4.9.2, hooks, vases, tusks and a small ivory rod. However, even everyday items, either belonging to the deceased or donated by the donor, might be thought to be essential for the deceased during the transformation period or in the afterlife. Another reason may be that the donor wished to give the deceased something of themselves to ensure the continuation of relations albeit on a different plane. Some of the goods would have been created by others and therefore this continuation of relations would have existed between the deceased and the creators of the pieces.

Site	Male	?Male	Female	?Female	Unknown	Sub-Adult	Total
<b>Badari</b>	2	0	1	2	0	2	<b>7</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	2	0	3	0	0	5	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>

*Table 6.7: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials with Ivory Objects*

#### 6.4.5 Palettes, Pigments and Stones

Palettes were found in depositions in eleven burials (Table 6.8). Unlike those discovered at Gebel Ramlah, which were made from granite, sandstone and limestone, eight found in Badarian undisturbed graves were greywacke, with two calcite and one limestone examples. In those cases where the bodies could be sexed or aged, palettes occurred mainly in female and sub-adults' graves generally close to the hands.

Site	Male			Female			Unknown			Sub-Adult			Total		
	P	Pi	S	P	Pi	S	P	Pi	S	P	Pi	S	P	Pi	S
<b>Badari</b>	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>

*Table 6.8: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials with Palettes, Pigments and Stones*

P=Palette; Pi=Pigment; S=Stone

In eight of the burials, male in particular, pigments, such as malachite and red ochre were found. A few grinding stones were also discovered. The palette discovered in the female grave 2840A at Mostagedda was stained red on one side and green on the other. The usual explanation for the use of the minerals was for eye protection based on the fact the eyelids of a head found in grave H-97 at el-Mahâsna dating to Naqada II were outlined in green paint (Ayrton and Loat 1911, 28f). They may also have been used for tribal or ceremonial markings.

In early societies, colours have symbolic importance (Taçon 1999, 120). Turner's (1970, 69ff) theory on colour symbolism associates red with blood and thus with life and black is linked to a change in the mode of existence. Thus, these colours are related to life and the movement from one existence to another. It may be assumed that the colours of the minerals, red, black and green used in conjunction with the palettes no doubt had a symbolic meaning and were not used as a result of vanity as Friedman (2001, 12) maintained.

Whilst it is not known how the early Predynastic Egyptians interpreted colours, it is a reasonable assumption that they looked to nature to provide explanations. Red has been dealt with in Chapter 5 (including footnote 112, where it was thought to be symbolic of life). Black could refer to the colour of the fertile silt laid down by the inundation with which the Badarians were familiar. It could therefore represent death from which emerged new life, which would concur with Turner's theory. Green is also linked to rebirth. From nature, green shoots would be understood as a new beginning, a new life. I suggest that these three minerals had symbolic importance in a funerary setting because their colours have connotations with life and regeneration. Greywacke, from which the majority of palettes were made, may have been deliberately chosen for its greenish-grey colour. Thus, as malachite was understood to embody the principle of life; the working of a green mineral on a greenish-grey palette might, as Stevenson (2007a, 152) suggests, have brought about a synergistic effect resulting in the improved efficacy of the powers of the malachite. Palettes and minerals were important therefore because of their agency in the transformation of the body both in life and in death.

### 6.4.6 Basketry and Wood

Thirteen graves contained examples of basketry, usually forming covers to vessels (Table 6.9). There is no indication that the pottery contained any content (see Section 6.4.1 for comment on empty vessels). In three instances of sub-adult burials, the basketwork was placed over the face, possibly for protection. A few wooden objects had survived: two throwsticks in Badarian grave 5716 (male), which are discussed in Section 6.6.2; two long pointed pieces of wood that may be clappers (grave 5719, Badari) and a handle end of a small throwstick (2706 Mostagedda), both of which belonged to sub-adults; a decayed piece of wood of unknown use in grave 1656 (Mostagedda, unknown) and the deceased (?male) in grave 2011 Mostagedda wore a twig or basketwork necklace. The wooden objects appear to be personal possessions of the deceased, although they may have been made specifically for the grave. They, like other grave goods, can be interpreted as evidence of the maintenance of relations between the deceased and the living community. Since the wood had obviously been worked (possibly with the exception of the decayed piece), it was multi-authored and therefore had imbued in them relations with those responsible for their creation. Thus the pieces engendered relations between their creators and the deceased. The twig/basketwork necklace is unusual and may be it was thought to contain magic or, more probably since it is the only object mentioned by Brunton (1937, 39) in respect of that grave, could be understood to be an identifier of status in the community.

Site	Basketry				Wood				Total
	M	F	U	S-A	M	F	U	S-A	
<b>Badari</b>	3	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	<b>7</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	1	1	0	4	0	0	2	1	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>

*Table 6.9: Sex/Age Breakdown: Burials with Basketry and Wooden Objects*

### 6.4.7 Anthropomorphic Figurines

Human figurines were not discovered at Gebel Ramlah but six were discovered in Badarian sites. These have been dated to the Badarian period although for some this dating is questionable. However, one of red clay (Fig. 6.4) was found in an

undisturbed context in grave 494 of a young (probably) female at Mostagedda and another was discovered in a partly disturbed sub-adult's grave (5769) at Badari (Fig. 6.5) The grave had been cut by Roman graves at both ends of the burial, which was otherwise undisturbed (see Fig. 6.2, no. 4).

#### **6.4.7.1 *The Mostagedda Figurine***

The reason for considering this female figurine is that Brunton believed it was deliberately broken before or when being placed in the grave and does not regard the breakage to be accidental, although that possibility cannot be discounted. According to Chapman (2012, 25), the characteristic of a deliberately broken object is that all the pieces are found in the same deposit as is the case here. No other objects in the grave appeared to be damaged.



*Fig. 6.4: Clay figurine. Provenience: grave 494 Mostagedda. Cairo Museum.  
(After Brunton 1937, Pl. 26)*

The figurine was in four pieces, three between the face and the knees and the fourth behind the head (Brunton 1937, 56). The body inclined and the legs were fused together possibly for ease of handling.

#### **6.4.7.2 *The Badari Figurine***

Since the figurine<sup>152</sup> was discovered in a pot with some threads of cloth in a sub-adult's grave (5769),<sup>153</sup> Brunton (1928, 17) concluded that it was a model burial and

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<sup>152</sup> This figurine is probably female. There are depressions on the body where the breasts would have been located.

<sup>153</sup> The grave was partly destroyed as a result of both of its ends being cut by Roman burials. The grave goods were not disturbed.

that the figurine was a doll (see Fig. 6.2, depiction no. 4 for the location of the figurine). The figurine is crude and schematic. Like the Mostagedda example, the bulk of the figurine lies in its lower torso. The pubic area is distinguished by diagonal lines. Like the Mostagedda figurine, there appears to be no leg differentiation and the lower body looks as though it could have been a means of holding it. Markings reveal that a necklace was depicted and those on the back were revealed to be straps or vertical incisions with chevrons between them, which may have been tattoos or scarification marks.



*Fig. 6.5: Clay figurine covered in wax for conservation. Provenience: grave 5769, Badari. H: 7.0 cm; W. 3.8 cm; L. 10.0 cm. Petrie Museum: UC 9080. (Source: Author. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)*

### **6.4.7.3 Discussion**

The two figurines have similarities, small head, stump like arms and an amalgamated lower torso that gives the impression of facilitating holding of the figurine. Often figurines used as dolls in African societies such as the Ashanti are produced without arms to prevent breakage (Ucko 1962, 45) and that could be the case here. However, according to Bailey (2005, 29ff), often unimportant features are undeveloped. In *akuaba*, Ashanti fertility dolls, certain aspects of the human body had to reflect ideal dimensions (Silver 1979, 198). Thus arms, which were not identified as one of those aspects, are depicted as stumps. Using an ethnographic comparator, the dolls may

have a fertility purpose. Baines' (2007, 310) theory of multifunctionality and that of Derchain (1976, 7) of multi-levels of meaning, could assume such a link – both were made from clay, "...a primeval substance which recalls both the original creation and the ongoing process of life and fertility. Deposited by the Nile in its annual inundation, mud was a natural symbol of life..." (Wilkinson, R.H. 1999, 94). Bearing in mind the context in which these figurines were discovered and taking into account Baines' and Derchain's theories, I accept that one reason they were buried with the deceased was they symbolised new life. The fact that the figurine from Mostagedda was broken may not have been important, the importance being that all the pieces were interred.

Although Brunton (1928, 17) interpreted the Badarian figurine as a doll, it is clear from the discussions of Ucko (1968, 421ff) and Hamilton *et al.* (1996, 281-307) that figurines had polyvalent uses including fertility and magical purposes; they could be contractual devices, teaching aids, visual aids for body development, conceptualisation of one's self, images of ancestors, dolls or servant figures. It cannot be assumed that figurines always had the same purpose; it may be that, as with humans, they played different roles according to circumstances. However, in death their purpose changed. I suggest besides symbolising fertility and new life (see above paragraph) that another reason for burying the figurines was that if they were possessions of the deceased, they were too poignant to be left behind in the community. Death had brought about a break in the relationship between the deceased and figurine but interment with the deceased created the engenderment of a new relationship on a different plane as a result. The breaking of the Mostageddan figurine may have been because of a close linkage with the deceased, whose ontological being changed on death; therefore the figurine also had to assume a new entity and as the deceased was incorporated into the community of the dead, the figurine may be understood to be magically made whole. Another plausible reason is that the figurine belonged to someone close to the deceased and the figurine was fragmented and placed around the deceased's body for protection, thus creating a new relationship between the deceased and the donor of the artefact.

#### 6.4.8 Feathers

Feathers were discovered in eight undisturbed graves<sup>154</sup> at Badari and Mostagedda, five of which belonged to sub-adults. Whilst like other grave goods they represented relations between the living and the dead, I believe that they also had an additional meaning which resulted in their being placed in the grave. The feathers in Badari grave 5754 were arranged fan-like near to the deceased (Brunton 1928, 16). They were identified as ostrich feathers “...or some bird of the ostrich family” (Brunton, 1928, 38). Ostriches also are said to worship the rising sun by performing a dance (Brunner-Traut 1938, 77). Whilst a supposition has to be made, it could be that the Badarians witnessed such activity and identified it with the dawning of a new day. Consequently they may have interpreted this so-called dance as the reawakening of life. Thus the discovery of ostrich feathers in the graves, I deem, could be explained as being integral to the reawakening of the deceased and the process of transformation.

The feathers in the sub-adult’s grave 2211 at Mostagedda have been identified as belonging to the night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (Brunton 1937, 57), whose habitat included the Nile Valley. As its name implies, the night heron is nocturnal (Cramp 1977, 262ff), thus by extension it could be seen that it lives during the darkness. The night, a time when darkness reigned as the sun had disappeared below the horizon and the world became still, could be thought to equate to death.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the night heron could be thought to be living through death. Therefore, the feathers, synecdochical images, in the grave could indicate a belief in the power of the bird to assist the dead to live again.

The remaining unidentified examples of feathers could relate to the notion of flight. Just as birds could be seen to leave the ground and soar towards the heavens, often regarded as the abode of the spirit so the feathers, again synecdochically, could be interpreted in that light. The feathers were placed in the grave to assist in the transformation journey of the deceased to the community of the dead.

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<sup>154</sup> Badari: 5754 (sub-adult); Mostagedda: 443 and 3555 (both ?female), 1005 (male), 444, 448A, 2211 and 2913 (all sub-adult).

<sup>155</sup> The first textual evidence of death equating to sleep is contained in the *Pyramid Texts* §894 in which the dead king is referred to as sleeping. §2092 refers to the resurrection of Osiris on awakening.

#### 6.4.9 Decorated Objects

Although relatively few portable decorated objects were discovered dating from the Badarian period, many of these objects are, as stated by Wengrow (2001, 96), related to the decoration or ornamentation of the body, which he believes is significant in the light of the archaeology of the temporary settlement sites that have been discovered. Significantly a number of them were either in the form of an animal or the animal formed an element of the object. This development was not limited to the Badarian people, but increased during the following periods and the imagery used was probably symbolic especially as it focused on wild rather than domestic animals.

Only a few decorated objects have been found dating to the Badarian period (Table 6.10). Although this thesis focuses on goods from undisturbed burials, reference to these other pieces gives a possible indication of personal beliefs.

Site	State of Grave	Grave No	Sex/Age	Type
	<b>Undisturbed</b>			
<b>Badari</b>		5745	Female	Fragmented ivory spoon with ibex terminal
<b>Mostagedda</b>		428	Female	Bone/Ivory Comb surmounted by a bird
	<b>Partly Disturbed</b>			
<b>Badari</b>		5409	? Male	Ibex head amulet
<b>Mostagedda</b>		3522	2 Male, 1 Female	Pieces of ivory making hippopotamus shaped vessel
	<b>Quite Disturbed</b>			
<b>Badari</b>		5740	Sub-Adult	Hippopotamus amulet
		5446	Unknown	Ivory spoon with hippopotami terminal
		5457	Unknown	Ivory spoon with unidentifiable decoration
		5130	No mention of a body	Ibex shaped spoon terminal
<b>Mostagedda</b>				
		1208	Male	Hippopotamus amulet
		1218	?Male	Ibex shaped terminal of a spoon

*Table 6.10: Burials with Decorated Objects*

It is difficult to deny the argument that the purpose of the decoration was to make an item more aesthetically pleasing. Baines (2007, 301, 310) maintains that the word “art” can be applied to ancient objects, which generally are multifunctional. Thus, very few pieces of art were produced as “art for art’s sake”. Derchain (1976) argued that Egyptian art could be interpreted at different levels from the obvious to the symbolic. This is the case with Late Predynastic and Dynastic art, which is imbued with complex messages (see Hendrickx 2011, Note 1). I suggest that the decorations,

which depict wild fauna on the Badarian pieces (Table 6.10), indicate that the Badarians too believed them to have special powers and qualities that assisted them not only in life but also in death. For example, the power and strength of the hippopotamus could be used apotropaically to ward off danger during the transformational period or they could be absorbed by magical means thus infusing the deceased with the same qualities and powers or through symbolism to assist them to achieve a successful transformation to a new entity. Such beliefs in animal powers and qualities, I think, was an inchoate belief system, which became more highly developed in Naqada III and the Dynastic periods, culminating in certain animals being considered to have special powers and some being regarded as deities.

#### **6.4.9.1 Avian Decoration**

A comb surmounted by a bird (Fig. 6.6) came from an undisturbed female grave (428) at Mostagedda. It had been deposited under the matting at the feet of the deceased (Brunton, 1938, 34). This type of depiction is similar to those of Naqada I except the top of the comb is curved, whereas those of Naqada I tend to be square.



*Fig. 6.6: Ivory comb surmounted by a bird. Provenience: Mostagedda grave 428. (After Brunton 1937, Pl. 24: Fig. 21) (Note: Poor resolution due to the small size and quality of the original image)*

Whether this comb should be considered to be amuletic is of course debatable. However, applying the multiple functionality/meaning theories of Baines and Derchain (see Section 3.4.5) I suggest that the bird representation had a deeper meaning than just being a decorative item. Baumgartel (1960, 48) thought the decoration possibly represented a goose. There is a similarity between the depiction above and the Egyptian goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*), whose habitat is the Nile

Valley (Cramp 1977, 448). This identification is not certain. In Naqada I-IIB aquatic birds did form decorative elements of portable objects. Since the typology of goods of Naqada I-IIB is similar to that of the Badarian period, the acceptance of this Baumgartel's supposition is reasonable. Whilst outside the breeding season at the end of the dry season, hundreds, occasionally thousands flock together. The flocks diminish in number as a result of the dispersal of breeding pairs. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine that the reformation of the flocks, including juvenile birds, would be interpreted symbolically as representing regeneration and new life.

A possible alternative identification is that bird was an ostrich (*Struthio camelus*), which is both powerful and aggressive (Cramp 1977, 39f) and whose iconography is capable of interpretation from both a male and female point of view. Thus in life the male ostrich with its strength would symbolise power, and a causation of regeneration and birth; the female would indicate birth, nurture and life i.e. fertility.

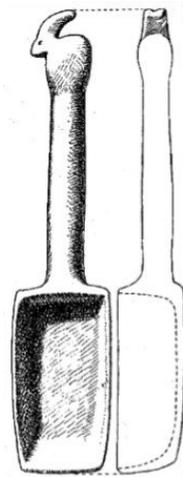
Thus in a funerary context, the avian element of the comb, could be interpreted as having a particular role to play in the transformation of the deceased. Applying personhood/relationality theory, the placement of the object in the grave engendered a relationship between it and the deceased. The attributes of the decorative element could therefore be understood to be absorbed by the deceased, who consequently would be imbued with additional energies and powers thus ensuring their transformation into a new life.

#### **6.4.9.2 Ibex Decoration**

Apart from the bird, the only other animal that can be considered due to the criterion of considering goods from undisturbed burials is the ibex (*Capra ibex nubianus*), whose head formed the terminal of an ivory spoon (Fig. 6.7) found in the female grave 5745 at Badari. In the Ancient Near East, the ibex appears to have been an animal of special veneration and was frequently depicted on tables of sacrificial offerings to the gods (Phillips 1955, 63) and on temple walls. Robin (1997, 73f) suggested that it was not an animal of a god but rather that it symbolised various aspects of nature, such as the vigour of wild life, although according to Berggren (2004, 155), Brioschi, who studied the numerous ibex petroglyphs on Har-Harkom in the Negev Desert, concluded that the male ibex represented the Ancient Near Eastern moon god Sin in zoomorphic form. The horns of the ibex could appear to

depict a crescent moon. It is feasible that the Badarians also regarded the horns of the ibex as a lunar symbol. Studying images, the connection is not difficult to make. If it were thought the horns represented the moon in the first quarter, that is the waxing moon, it could be concluded that the ibex was linked to the concepts of fertility and rebirth.

Hornung and Staehelin, (1976, 139f) linked the ibex horns to this concept in the Dynastic period because of their similarity to the hieroglyph  $\text{𓆎}$  *rnw*, a notched palm branch, which is depicted pictorially with many notches, meaning rebirth, regeneration. Huyge (2002, 201) used this argument when discussing the meaning of the rock-art representations at Vulture Rock, el-Kab, which he dated to Horizon II, that is Naqada II. I submit that the spoon with ibex headed terminal (Fig. 6.7) does represent regeneration or rebirth and that was the reason it was buried with the deceased in Badari grave 5745 (and in the other two disturbed graves: Badari 5130 and Mostagedda 1218).



*Fig. 6.7: Fragmentary ivory spoon with ibex terminal. Provenience: Badari grave 5745 British Museum EA 59707. (After Brunton 1928, pl. 22. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)*



*Fig. 6.8: Ibex head amulet. Provenience: Badari grave 5409. L. 2.4 cm, W. 2.2 cm. Petrie Museum UC 9123. (Source: Author. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)*

The amulet in the form of an ibex (Fig. 6.8) was found in a partly disturbed grave (Badari 5409). The object is included in the analysis because the animal has already been the subject of discussion. The deceased was thought to be male. The ibex, which inhabited the Eastern Desert, was renowned for its speed, agility to ascend rocky cliffs rapidly and on becoming motionless being difficult to see (Osborn and

Helmy 1980, 515ff). Its reappearance could be interpreted in terms of regeneration. It could therefore be thought of as being a magical creature. Presumably, in life the wearer, a male adult, wished to absorb the qualities and power of the animal especially in a hunting situation. However, in death, the amulet may also have had the same connotation of regeneration and rebirth.

#### **6.4.9.3 Frog Decoration**

I concede that the dataset for decorated goods is small when using the criterion used for this thesis. It is, however, difficult to ignore the fact that decorated goods were found in disturbed graves and if taken into consideration does suggest there was an underlying meaning to their usage. Although reference has already been made to the attributes of the ibex, the hippopotamus and birds in respect of death and transformation, another example is the frog, which can also be interpreted in a similar vein. A spoon with frogs depicted on its terminal found in the quite disturbed grave 1416 at Qau<sup>156</sup> could be understood to symbolise fertility creation, and regeneration because of the frogs' reproductive capacity (Wilkinson, R.H. 1994, 107). According to Pliny (1983, IX, LXIV, 159), the frog was understood to dissolve into slime and then spontaneously regenerate when the land became fertile, which has been interpreted from an Egyptian viewpoint as when the inundation waters receded (Pinch 2002, 140). Thus its regenerative powers were emphasised. Therefore, the frog, like the Nile tilapia (Fig. 5.37) discussed in Section 5.4.2, could, during this period, have been considered to be symbolic of regeneration after death. In other words, it was linked to the transformation of the dead from the old to a new life as a different entity.

#### **6.4.10 Discussion**

Grave goods are concrete expressions and embodiments of human thoughts and ideas (Childe 1956, 1). The selection of grave goods in all probability was not that of the dead person but of familial relations or even the wider community. The criteria used to make this selection are unknown (Shanks and Tilley 1982, 152). However, conscious decisions had been made both in their manufacture and in their choice as grave goods. They were a form of non-verbal communication through the

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<sup>156</sup> Whilst Qau is located south of Badari, it did fall within the remit of Brunton's excavations (Brunton 1927, 1). .

representation of ideas (Leach 1977, 167) conceivably with the other world (Parker Pearson 2003[1999], 11); they had significant meaning (see Baines 2007, 298, 301, 310). That meaning may be symbolic and not linked to their function in life. The meaning of symbols, as Turner (1970, 20ff) pointed out, was reliant on a number of factors since they were multivocal, depending on the context. Thus their meaning may escape modern interpretation. Their position in the grave may impinge on that meaning.

In my exposition of Badarian grave goods using the application of personhood/relationality theory, I have focused on those found in undisturbed burials. The underlying reason is that the context in which they were discovered was secure. Whilst the theory provides for graves being opened to determine the rate of transformation and to allow for goods to be extracted and others placed in the grave, it can never be certain that the graves had not been subject to plunder. This has obviously reduced the number of grave goods that could be considered but at least there is contextual security in knowing that they were original and deposited at the time of burial. Whilst the main emphasis of this section is on the burials of the Badarian period, this general discussion encompasses those at Gebel Ramlah.

Young sub-adults are often considered by traditional societies to have no standing and are not considered to be a person until they can contribute to society (Evans-Pritchard 1956, 146; Hertz 1960, 76, 84), indeed the Vezo of Madagascar consider a child less than one year old to be an “animal” because of its dependency on the mother (Astuti 1998, 36) and thus cannot be incorporated in the society of the dead (Van Gennep 1977[1960], 152). However, sub-adults were accorded burials at both Gebel Ramlah and the Badarian sites. The inference must be that they were regarded as being members of the community from a very early age; Brunton states that one burial was that of a baby (Mostagedda grave 303). Most of the graves contained objects, in particular, beads and shells and palettes. Pottery also featured in many of the Badarian sub-adult graves but in only one at Gebel Ramlah (Kobusiewicz *et al.* 2010, Table 1.6). Thus they too were subject, like adults, to the same ramifications that death brought to adults.

Although the Nuer and Dinka may be supposed to have similar burial practices to the Badarians, such as the ritual treatment of the body, mortuary feasts and a mourning

period involving sacrifices, in one aspect it can be said that they differ. No grave goods are deposited in the graves. The burial of the dead with goods implies a reason behind such actions which was not just that of the removal of the dead from the sight of the living. Ucko (1969, 265) warned that grave goods were not always indicative of an afterlife after previously stating that burial very often implied a spiritual belief. However, the treatment and directionality of the body together with the placement of objects with the body does suggest these actions were integral to a belief system. Regarding the latter, if the objects were not part of a belief system, they would not have been deposited in the grave in a relative systematic manner. Petrie (1939, 35) believed "...each object had its own position", however, it is unlikely there was such proscription but more a generality of principles (Pollard 2001, 316), for example, the deceased would have more need of personal items, such as palettes and pigments, and therefore they were placed within easy reach. There may however have been a certain order in which items were actually placed in the grave and Stevenson (2007b, 81) suggests that the goods may have been handled by each of the persons around the grave as a means of engaging with the deceased by proxy. Such rituals would create social memory and develop relational bonds between the living and the dead.

Ethnographic data have shown that some modern early societies believe that the dead are transformed into different ontological beings and enter another cosmic sphere, which is understood as being the afterlife (Nuer: Evans-Pritchard 1956, 159; Malawians: Morris, B. 2000; Shilluk: Schnepel 1991, 52; African Societies: Tengan 2010, 282-284). Death is always linked with resurrection and "...exclusion is always followed by a new integration" (Hertz 1960, 79). This integration is evidenced by skeletonisation of the body. The Badarian peoples would be aware of the transformation of the body to a skeleton and could view this as part of the transformation process of the person becoming a new entity in the community of the dead and ancestors. Applying the theory of personhood/relationality, I have referred earlier to the fact that grave goods engendered new relationships between the living and the dead. I propose that these grave goods formed an integral part of the community's assistance to the deceased to enable them to achieve a transformed state and integration into the community of the dead. This concurs with Mbiti's (1991, 120) analysis of indigenous African religious beliefs in general, according to

which grave goods were generally considered essential for progression to the next world.

The types of grave goods appear to fall into two categories. Those it was thought the deceased would need either on the journey of transformation or in the afterlife, and those that could be interpreted as providing additional energies during the transformational process to achieve rebirth and regeneration. Decorated goods fall into this latter category. The criterion of considering objects in Badarian period undisturbed burials does radically reduce the dataset. However, I believe there is sufficient evidence to suggest that they were placed with the deceased not just because they would be useful but because the decorative element could be interpreted, using Baines and Derchain's theories, as having additional qualities beneficial for becoming a transformed entity.

The categories of grave goods at both Gebel Ramlah and the Badarian sites were similar and included pottery, palettes and pigments; flint and ivory tools; beads made from shells and stones such as carnelian, jasper, steatite and serpentine; shells, the last two indicating either direct or indirect contact with the Eastern desert and the Red Sea. According to Wengrow (2003, 132), the result of archaeological excavations in Sudan has shown that this similarity, together with the treatment of the body and method of burial, extended from Middle Egypt to modern Khartoum and suggested a "coherent and widely disseminated body of beliefs".

## **6.5 ANIMAL BURIALS**

The Badarian period witnessed the burial of animal parts (perhaps evincing synecdoche) and smaller animals in both adult and sub-adult burials (Table 6.11) and individual burials of larger animals (Table 6.12) within the human cemeteries. The remains in graves 302 and 494 at Mostagedda identified as possibly being gazelle may also have been pets accompanying their owner into the afterlife or a very early indication of domestication of the species (see Flores 2003, 53-57). The remainder may be considered to be offerings resulting from the sacrifice of the animal at the person's death, of which the remains in Badari grave 5371 in particular may be evidence. Brunton (1928, 42) stated that cooking pots containing grain and meat were found mainly in the mixed cemeteries at Badari. These would appear to be part of funerary rituals possibly at the time of burial to placate the dead. Such a setting

would suggest a ritual performance. Sacrifice, which is a ritual performance, is a means of making contact with the spirit world (Evans-Pritchard 1951b, 112). Thus the sacrifice can be understood as a propitiatory act on the part of the community for the spirit world to accept the deceased among the ancestors as well as a method of providing the deceased with food on a performative basis. According to Vitebsky (1995, 25, 40, 80, 120) shamans play a dominant role in such rituals.

Site	Grave No.	Sex	Age	Animal Remains
<b>Badari</b>	5371	U	Sub-adult <i>ca.</i> 4 years	Calf's ? rib, knuckle bone, scrap of a jaw. Pieces of dung fuel; stone rubber, 8 small stones with traces of burning
<b>Mostagedda</b>	302	M	U	Body of ?gazelle
	426	U	Sub-adult	Ox-ribs.
	451	?F	U	In a pot animal bone and organic matter
	494	?F	Sub-adult/Young	Remains of ?gazelle (?pet).
	592	M	U	Several vertebrae and small bones under pot
	2838	?M	U	Leg and blade bones of a ?calf
	2841	M	U	5 ribs and a blade bone of a calf
	3002	?M	U	Ribs of an animal
	3531	U	Sub-adult <i>ca.</i> 5 yrs	Ribs of very young animal

*Table 6.11: Undisturbed Burials with both Human Burial and Animal Remains*  
Data from: Brunton and Caton-Thompson. 1928, pl. 5-8 and Brunton 1937, pls. 7-10.

Evidence from Nabta Playa revealed that cattle were interred, either as the whole animal or as disarticulated bones. The practice of separate animal burial appears to have been continued at Badari (Brunton 1928), Deir Tasa (Gabra 1930) and at Mostagedda (Brunton 1937) some 1000 years later. There were in total seven such burials – see Table 6.12 – which must represent a small proportion of the domesticated animal population.

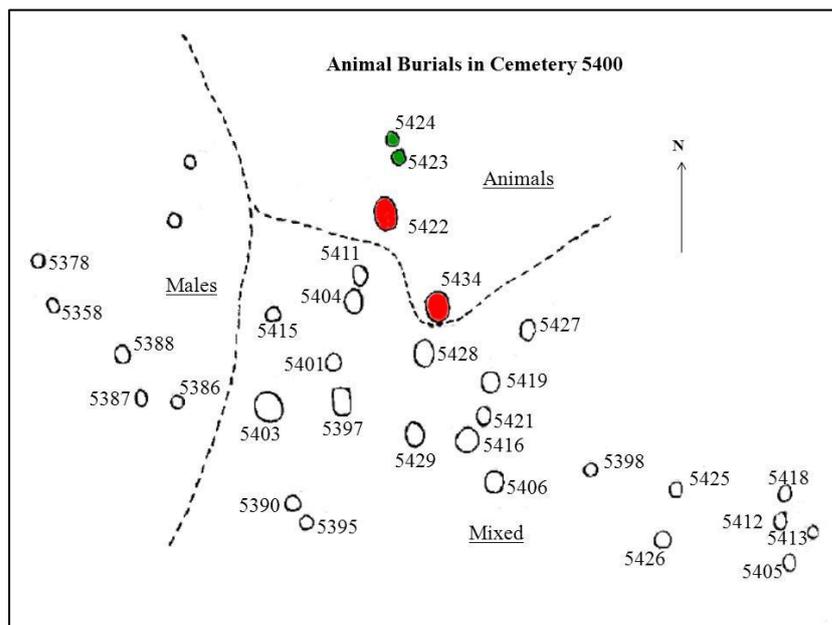
Location	Bovine	Canid	Caprid	Total
<b>Badari</b>	2	1	2	<b>5</b>
<b>Matmar</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Mostagedda</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Deir Tasa</b>	?2 <sup>1</sup>	0	?2 <sup>1</sup>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>?4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>?4</b>	<b>7</b>

*Table 6.12: Independent Animal Burials*

Data: Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928; Gabra 1930; Brunton 1937 and 1948.

<sup>1</sup> Only two animals were buried at Deir Tasa, the species could not be identified for certain. They were either cattle or goats.

At Badari, bovine and caprid graves lie at the edge of the human cemetery 5300/5400 (Map 6.1). This cemetery contained most of the Badarian interments which had scarcely been plundered in antiquity. The graves were poor in character but the better graves, forming the western part of the cemetery and which had been robbed, lay on higher ground (Brunton 1928, 18). The area where the animals lay is to the north of the intersection of both cemetery sections. The two bovines (graves 5422 and 5434) were covered in matting like human burials as was the canid (grave 5113). The horn core of the bovine buried in grave 5434 was turned down as though it had been the subject of deliberate deformation as practised by the Nilotic peoples in relation to spiritual beliefs (see Section 4.3.3). One of the caprids (grave 5423, disturbed), also seemed to have been covered in cloth; the excavation report does not mention any matting in respect of the caprid in grave 5424, which had been partly destroyed.



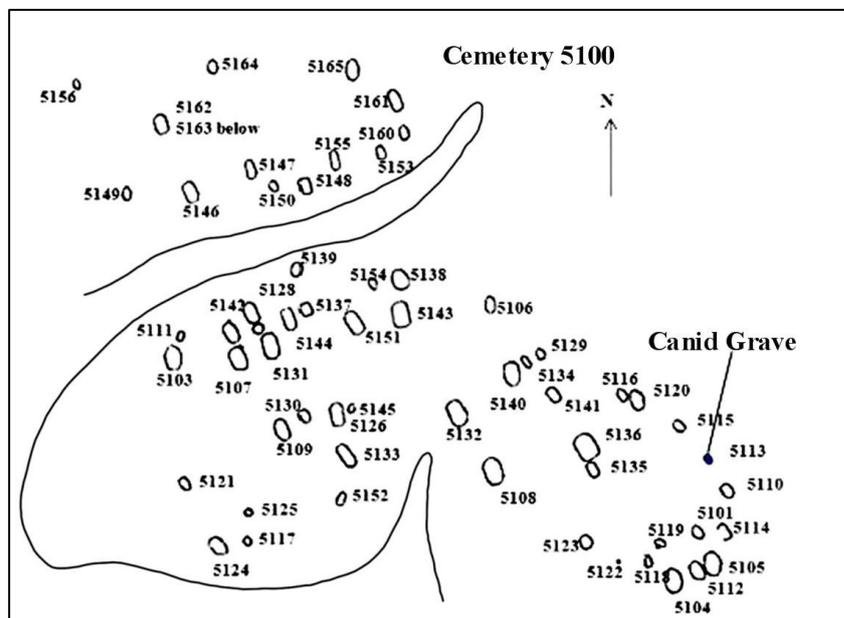
Legend: Red = bovid graves; green = caprid graves.

Map. 6.1: Animal burials in Cemetery 5400 Badari. (After Brunton and Caton-Thompson, 1928, pl. 4)

The burials of the separated bones of “...*bovins ou de chèvres*.” at Deir Tasa were in rectangular graves (Gabra 1930, 148) but no more information was given. Such grave forms, certainly for human burials, Brunton (1937, 43) suggested were for the more wealthy.

The canid in grave 5113 (Map 6.2) at Badari is buried in a different cemetery to the other animals and because of this perhaps should be considered in a different light.

Cemetery 5100 in which the grave was located was badly plundered (Brunton, 1928, 6); often the graves contained no body or just a few human remains together with a rich array of burial goods, or the remains thereof. Thus, this cemetery appeared to contain the burials of more important people. Grave 5113 was sited among human burials on the eastern outer extremity of the cemetery. At Mostagedda, the canid had been covered in matting.<sup>157</sup> Flores (2003, 6), who has undertaken an in-depth study of animal burials in the pre/early dynastic from Nubia to the Delta, questions whether this was an independent burial and suggests that it was possibly part of a human interment. The fact that it was covered in matting would suggest that it had been accorded some status since there is no reference to matting covering the animals buried with humans at Mostagedda (Brunton 1937, 34 and 36).



Map 6.2: Canid Burial in Cemetery 5100 Badari (After Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, pl. 4)

### 6.5.1 Discussion

The fact that so few animals seems to have been buried in individual graves does give rise to the question of why? Flores (2003, 29) was of the opinion that if the animal burials were significant then they would have been accorded the same type of burial as the more important of the deceased humans. However, although they were covered in matting or cloth, this was no different from the deceased of lower status since wrapping was the “lowest common denominator”. If they were treasured

<sup>157</sup> The grave not allocated a number and was unregistered (Brunton 1937, 41)

possessions, it would be expected that they were buried alongside their owners. If they were buried to eradicate odours from their decomposing bodies, why would the Badarians have gone to the trouble of enveloping them with materials and what happened to the other animals which are not represented? There must be some significance to their burial. According to Eliade (1964, 159), the belief in hunter-gatherer societies was that the souls of animals resided in their bones and thus their burial followed the same format of that of humans. A *contra* argument to that of Flores is that diachronically, the number of animal burials were few even if overall the herds were small. Thus, it would seem that special attention was accorded these particular animals by the Badarians.

Brunton (1928, 42) thought that these animals were revered. Hornung (1996[1971], 101) supports this hypothesis stating that the burials represented a cult of sacred animals or that they possessed divine powers. Vandier (1952, 197) understood the burials of bovines and caprids to represent a prototype of Hathor and Khnum, whilst Baumgartel (1955, 23) saw the bovine burials as evidence of the worship of a mother goddess. Since the Badarians in part originated from the Western Desert, it is likely that they continued the reverence accorded to bovines. Flores (2003, 63) queries this interpretation of independent animal burials, which died out with the Badarian period. She insists that if cults did develop in the Predynastic period, the evidence should be found in the burial of animals in or directly associated with human graves. *Contra* to her argument must be that of formalisation. A corollary of the development of society is the development of thought and reasoning. In the later Predynastic periods, plastic rendering of objects became more common eradicating the need for the burial of the actual animal. Flores (2003, 64) also argues that if the animals were considered sacred, they would have been buried in separate cemeteries; the Badarian burials were all within human cemeteries. It could be argued that as the bovine and caprid burials in particular at Badari were concentrated in one distinct area adjacent to human cemeteries and the canid grave was located on the outer section of Cemetery 5100, all the animal burials appear to satisfy Flores' criterion. It could be that the different animals were buried for different reasons.

Cattle played an important role in the lives of those inhabiting the area now covered by the Sahara Desert as evidenced by rock-art<sup>158</sup> and cattle burials dating to *ca.*5200-3800 BC have been discovered in the Sahara Desert. Whilst there is an overlap with the Badarian Period, it is possible that this practice percolated from the Sahara Desert through to Badari. Paris (2000, 111f) when commenting on such burials is of the view they reflected a religious belief but the remains should display a “...good conservation of the anatomical connections of the skeleton...” but sometimes the remains could be dismembered as a result of ritual. This ritual related either to the cattle itself or to a separate individual or entity (Paris 2000, 114). However, later di Lernia 2006, 60; di Lernia *et al.* 2013, 14) suggested they were related to rain making rituals (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.3).

There are two possible solutions to the problem. Cows are the most valuable beasts amongst cattle owning societies because they provide life-giving milk and the number of cows outweighs the number of bulls. For example the Nuer have one bull per 30-40 adult cows and only the best male calves are not castrated (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 33). Thus, it is possible that the cattle interred were cows buried, like that at Nabta Playa, as a principle of fertility. The practice may have emanated from the Western Desert. They may have been buried to ensure the inundation of the Nile or even to ensure the longevity of the herd and if the latter, the caprid burials could be explained in the same manner. Those mediating the ceremony would probably be the shaman/ritualist.

The second possibility is based on the fact that Nilotic societies regarded cattle as being a gift from a higher power (Evans-Pritchard 1953, 192; Lienhardt 1961, 23). Theorising on the basis of Hultkrantz (1966 147f; 1978, 23) who believed that similar cultures develop similar religious systems, it is therefore possible that the Badarians also regarded their herds as gifts in the same manner. Thus sacrifice was a means of returning the spirit of the animal to that power. Ingold (1980, 283) would appear to understand this power as equating to the notion of spiritual animal guardians, that is the shamanic concept of the Master of Animals. He sees such sacrifices as a means of securing the future prosperity of the herd; the shaman being the intermediary asking the guardian to accept the animal. The careful burial of the

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<sup>158</sup> Gilf Kebir pastoralist rock-art is dated by Riemer (2013a, 39) to 4400-3500 calBC.

remains would appease the animal guardian as it showed respect for the animal. The fact that no grave goods were buried with the animals does not detract from that reasoning since grave goods were meant for the deceased in the afterlife, whereas the purpose of the sacrifice and burial of these animals was to appease the animal guardian.

The canid burials pose problems since the actual species, jackal or dog, are unknown; thus it is difficult to interpret the reason for their presence in the two cemeteries. The jackals on standards depicted on ceremonial palettes and maceheads dating to Naqada III were accorded numinous qualities.<sup>159</sup> However, it is unlikely that they were accorded such qualities during the Badarian period despite Baumgartel's (1960, 143) temptation to interpret the buried canids as the funerary deity Anubis.

DuQuesne (2005, 5) has shown that canids in many cultures had funerary connections. The jackal is a scavenger and inhabitant of the low desert and cemeteries and was known to despoil shallow graves. The animal must have had a special meaning for it to have been buried in such a location. Perhaps it was thought by burying a jackal in such a manner that it would placate the others of the species and so not violate the graves.

If the skeleton at Badari was canine, its burial is more understandable. It is known from Naqada I C-ware that dogs assisted in the hunt and the evidence reveals that hunting formed part of the Badarian economy. Dogs also offered protection to their owners and certainly in the Dynastic period were often considered to be pets. Thus the canid burial could be that of a favoured dog or was meant to be the companion of the dead in the afterlife, although if the latter, I would have expected it to be interred with its owner. The position of the grave on the edge of the cemetery might indicate that it was meant to keep guard of the dead. According to Eliade (1964, 90) dogs

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<sup>159</sup> As a result of the comparison of the images with those from the Dynastic period, the following identifications have been made: the standing jackal has been identified with Wepwawet (Baumgartel 1960, 94; DuQuesne 2005, 25; Wilkinson, R.H. 2003, 191; Wilkinson, T.A.H. 2001, 197f, who determined that Wepwawet was the standing canid with the *šdšd* before it;) although there were a few exceptions to that rule according to Duquesne (2005, 396); the couchant jackal was identified with Khentimentiu, Foremost of the Westerners – an epithet later accorded to Anubis –depicted on a sherd dating from the 1st Dynasty (see Petrie 1903, pl. 12). Wepwawet's form was later identified to be that of a wolf (Pinch 2002, 213).

were considered to be helper spirits of shamans. Also in the shamanic world, dogs were considered to be psychopomps guiding the dead to the afterlife

## 6.6 EVIDENCE OF SHAMANISM

The investigation of the three major sites in the Western Desert identified shamanism as being an important stratum of the belief systems. According to shamanic theory shamanism *per se* existed in hunter-gatherer and early pastoral/nomadic societies (Winkelman 1990, 319f; 2006, 143). Since the society of the Badarian period was in probability not sedentary, it would be expected that shamanism formed a stratum of the prevalent belief system. The examination of the grave goods revealed that some could be interpreted as having shamanic characteristics.

### 6.6.1 Belts

At Badari and Mostagedda, Brunton's excavations revealed five adult undisturbed graves (Badari: 5705, 5721, 5735<sup>160</sup>; Mostagedda: 592, 3512) in which large numbers of blue or green steatite beads were found. These were associated with the waist area of the deceased and had formed some kind of belt. The deceased in these single burials were identified as being male with the exception of one, the deceased in grave 5721 at Badari but in the later discussion, Brunton (1928, 27) acknowledged the body to be male. A similar situation pertained in a partly disturbed grave (Mostagedda 3522) whereby large numbers of blue or green glazed steatite bead were associated with one of the three deceased.<sup>161</sup> Two of the deceased in this grave were identified as being male, the third as being female. Brunton (1937, 42) states that the record is not clear as to the sex of the body around whose waist the beads were but posits they were related to one of the deceased males. On the basis that these large amounts of beads appear to be associated with males, I would advocate, like Brunton (1937, 42) that in that particular grave they belonged to one of the male

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<sup>160</sup> Badari graves 5705 and 5735 were in relative proximity in part of the cemetery seemingly reserved for males only; grave 5721 was some distance away in the mixed part of the cemetery. Mostagedda graves 3512 and 3522 were at opposite ends of cemetery 3500, south of Mostagedda: grave 592 lies to the north.

<sup>161</sup> According to UCL's Xia Nai Index of Egyptian beads, Record Number 000051895, one of the beads was said to be turquoise and not glazed steatite. Hendrickx and Bavay (2002, 60f) dispute such an identification. Some items identified as being made from turquoise had proved to be steatite. They point out that Badarian objects in secure contexts that were classified as being made from turquoise were in all probability made from glazed steatite, steatite being found in the Eastern Desert. The oldest unquestionable occurrence of turquoise dates to Naqada IIC.

deceased. The deceased in Badari grave 5735, as noted above, appeared to be of some standing as he wore a complete black skin wrapped sideways round the back and the hips in a manner similar to the later *sem* priest (see Section 6.3). I argue that the others also had status within the community. Although glazed steatite beads were worn by others, the numbers involved here are far in excess of those worn by others as can be seen from the three examples below (Fig 6.9 - Fig. 6.11). I am advised (Aldhouse-Green and Nicholson 2015, personal communication) that specialist knowledge and craftsmanship would be required to ensure that firing temperatures were maintained for the glazing process and that the beads matched in size and shape. The fact that they were buried implies to me that they were personal to the owner. These strings of beads/belts were prestigious objects, emblems denoting status and authority within the community. They were imbued with powers and were therefore not objects that could be retained in the community and transferred to others as they were integral with the deceased. They were the expression of the person; a statement of their power.

The beads are not a pure colour but range from varying shades of green through to blue. As discussed above, colours were symbolic to many early societies, as they are today, and the colours of the beads are reminiscent of water, new growth and the sky. It has been suggested that the glaze could represent energy (Aldhouse-Green 2015, personal communication). The owners of these belts were possibly leaders of their communities. However, the colours of the belts suggest that there was a complexity to this status. It is possible that they represented the spheres of domination or influence as identified above. One person with such influence was the shaman. Section 4.2.4 indicates that shamans played pivotal political, social and spiritual roles in society and could be considered to be the most important person. As noted in Section 4.3.9, in both Nuer and Dinka societies there were personnel who had shamanic attributes. Based on Hultkrantz's (1966, 147-148; 1978, 23) theory that societies with similar ecological backgrounds develop similar beliefs, it is not untoward to believe that the Badarian communities had likewise. On this basis I suggest that these belts belonged to shamans. To support this conclusion, the fact that the belts, in particular that from Grave 5735 at Badari which comprised a long string of beads 9.22 metres in length, meant that they had a sinuous nature like a snake, which is often linked to the shamanic world (Eliade 1964, *passim*; Walter and

Fridman 2004, *passim*) or to the world of the ancestors (Jolly 1998, 259), to which the shaman had access.

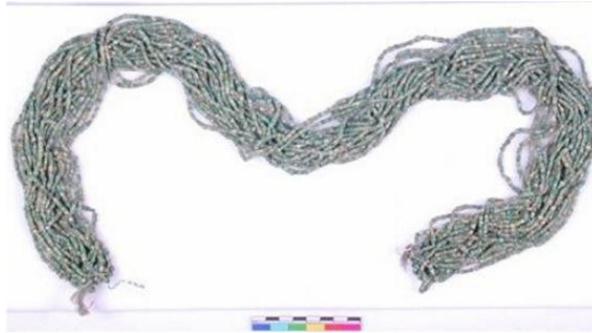


Fig. 6.9: String of glazed steatite beads wound round the waist. Provenience: Badari grave 5705. Petrie Museum UC9233. (After <http://petriecat.museums.ucl.ac.uk/detail.aspx> [Accessed 19 July 2015])



Fig. 6.10: Green glazed steatite belt. Each of the eight bone spacer-beads is pierced by three holes. Provenience: Mostagedda grave 592. British Museum: EA62150. (After <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection> [Accessed 23 October 2013]) © The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 6.11: Part of a green-glazed steatite belt. Provenience: Badari grave 5735. Petrie Museum UC 9250. (Source: Author. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology). The other part is on display in the Ashmolean Museum.

### 6.6.2 Throwsticks

Brunton (1928, 15) also refers to two wooden throw sticks or castanets (Fig. 6.12 shows one) discovered near the hands of the male deceased in an undisturbed grave (5716) at Badari. They were incised with a pattern of dots down the side and chevrons along the bottom. Both were damaged and Brunton (1928, 32) suggests that this might represent an example of deliberate killing of the objects prior to burial to destroy their power. It is possible that they were shamanic rods. Eliade (1964, 228) refers to such objects, which were used for prophesying action to be taken. Brunton based his conclusion that they were castanets on the basis that they were relatively small – about 12.5 cms in length – and on the fact that Randall-MacIver (1902, 42), the excavator of el-Amrah, referred to the similar shaped sticks held by two men on a D-ware vessel discovered as such – Fig. 6.13. Although D-ware dates to Naqada II, there is no reason to dismiss the idea that the Badarians would have had such instruments. Thus the two objects could have been used during shamanic rituals and they were deliberately broken so their power could not be used by others.



*Fig. 6.12: Wooden throwstick. Provenience: Badari grave 5716. Petrie Museum: UC 9292 (Source: Author. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology)*



*Fig. 6.13: D-ware vessel depicting two men holding what appear to be castanets/clappers. Late Naqada II. Provenience: El Amrah grave b225, British Museum EA35502. (After <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection> [Accessed 13 September 2013]) © The Trustees of the British Museum*

### 6.6.3 The Hippopotamus Vase

The hippopotamus, a creature associated with both land and water, had ferocious powers which posed danger for those in its vicinity. However, no examples of hippopotami decorated pieces were found in undisturbed graves but pieces of ivory which formed a hippopotamus shaped vessel with an opening (Fig. 6.14) was

discovered in a partly disturbed multi-occupied grave (3522) at Mostagedda. The reason for considering this object is that I believe that one of the occupants of the grave was a shaman (see Section 6.6.1). Due to the size and shape of the vessel and the fact that hippopotamus ivory would be considered to be a valuable material due to the substantial dangers incurred in obtaining it, I agree with Hendrickx and Depraetere (2004, 815) that it is unlikely that such a vessel would have been used for general daily use but rather it was a receptacle used for ritual purposes. It is not possible to determine whether it was used for certain or all rituals. Nonetheless, such a vessel could have been used by a shaman when carrying out rituals to ensure a successful hunt, especially for hippopotami, which posed great danger to the hunters. Rituals are often carried out by African tribes before hunting expeditions to ensure their success (Seligman and Seligman 1932, 299, 470; Douglas 1999, 26). Another explanation for a linkage to shamanism was the duality of its environment, water and land. The animal, like the shaman, could be thought to have special powers enabling it to penetrate different worlds. On this basis, it is conceivable that the hippopotamus might have been understood to be a shamanic animal. The vessel may have been fragmented to destroy its powers or as the shaman had changed entity in death, so the vessel also had to “die” likewise.



*Fig. 6.14: Ivory vessel in the shape of a hippopotamus. Provenience: grave 3522 Mostagedda. H. 5.9 cm. L: 7.3 cm. British Museum EA 63057 (After <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection> [Accessed 23 October 2013]) © The Trustees of the British Museum*

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

This examination of the Badarian period has utilised a number of theoretical approaches to try to ascertain a more complete understanding of the prevalent belief system. There is a dearth of hard evidence but as it is multi-faceted it is therefore not conducive to be interrogated by a single theoretical approach. If a monocausal approach were employed, it would result in a number of aspects being overlooked. The result of each application forms a link and by amalgamating or cabling the results a chain is formed resulting in a stronger argument.

The interpretation of burials and mortuary rituals is rendered difficult because of the lack of textual evidence. Therefore, it is necessary to consider ethnographic comparators, their purpose being suggestive rather than analogical. Recourse is also made to the anthropological theory of personhood/relationality, which is used in respect of modern day early societies since this theory gives an understanding of the workings of the cognitive processes of such peoples. The theory has been applied relatively extensively in archaeological contexts (see Section 6.3.1). Mention is made in this chapter to mortuary rituals. Ritual theory was identified as one of the theoretical applications to be used. As this has been covered in detail in Chapter 5, to cover the ground again would be duplication. However, I believe that the rituals for burial, preparing and burial of the body would follow a ritual pattern as would the mortuary feasts. Often in other societies such as the Nuer and the Dinka, one person of standing is involved in these rituals and I believe the same situation would have pertained with the early Predynastic Egyptians. As discussed in Chapter 4, early societies were shamanic in nature and using shamanic theory, I have shown that shamanism formed an integral stratum of early Predynastic Egyptian beliefs.

Whilst theoretical approaches underpin most of the chapter, it must be accepted that the natural environment would also play an influencing role not just in the lives of these people but in death also. It seems clear that the natural world influenced their beliefs from the direction of burial to depictions on portable objects. It is this connection with the natural world that provides essential clues to their beliefs, which, based on Bird-David (1999) and Ingold's (2006, 10) interpretations of animism of an integrated world based on relational ontology (Section 2.2.1), strongly suggests that they were animistic. This interpretation of animism allows for the existence of supernatural powers and beings. It is quite possible that the Badarians accorded

spiritual powers to the sun and to the Nile, especially the inundation since both were required to bring about regeneration. The sun also had the magical ability of diurnal regeneration. It would seem that the directionality of burials was in the main linked to the regenerative powers of the sun. Additionally, unaccountable changes in weather conditions were often thought to be linked to the supernatural and the spirit world. In all probability the landscape *per se* would have been thought to have possessed spiritual qualities. However, the beliefs would depend on the person's relationship with, and understanding of, the landscape. In Dynastic, and even in modern times, places such as deserts were frightening and associated with supernatural beings (Blackman 2000[1927], 21). In the Badarian period, the landscape in which the people dwelt would form the cosmos of that society; it would be that society's *axis mundi* (Ashmore and Knapp 1999, 13f). Consequently, the landscape would provide a constant phenomenological experience; one which provided spiritual awareness of the environment. Thus, the Badarian belief system appears to be based on supernatural beings stemming from the natural world rather than on deities for which there is no evidence. Such a belief system would conform to Cauvin's (2000[1996], 23; 66) theory that the aetiology of deities can be found in sedentism whereas the evidence suggests the Badarians were not sedentary but relatively mobile (Section 6.2).

The anthropological theory of personhood/relationality has been applied to explain the meaning and purpose of burials and grave goods both at Gebel Ramlah and at the three Badarian cemetery sites. Persons are composite beings formed from the relations and substances of others. Relations are also objectified as goods, which are also multi-authored, so their exchange also affects the composition of the person. I have stated that death brings about a change in the relations between the dead and the living. The dead undergo ontological change of which the living were aware. Since the later Predynastic and Dynastic Egyptians believed in an afterlife, especially as ethnography has shown also that many early societies held such a belief, I accept that it is feasible that the people of Gebel Ramlah and the Badarian period did too. I have argued that this ontological change, which allows the deceased to enter the afterlife results from a process of transformation. The living because of their relationship with the dead, assisted in this transformational process by placing goods in the grave with the body of the deceased. Whilst not identical, there are similarities

between the grave goods found at Gebel Ramlah and those of the Badarian period. These grave goods would have symbolic meaning to those left behind. The purpose of the grave goods, it may be surmised, was to provide what was thought to be essential for that journey and entry into the community of the dead as Mbiti (1991, 120) stated. These grave goods may evince synecdoche or performative qualities. As far as possible, grave goods analysed in this work came from undisturbed graves to ensure contextual confidence. Using Baines and Derchain's theory of multifunctionality and meaning (Section 3.4.5), I argue that some of the grave goods have an additional purpose. Those with decorative elements of wild fauna might be considered to have additional powers to ensure a successful transformation to the afterlife. Personality/relationality theory also provides for parts of the deceased being extracted and kept within the community which might be an explanation for bodies with skulls in particular being missing.

The mortuary evidence has also revealed that the Badarians (and the people buried at Gebel Ramlah), unlike some societies, as ethnography has shown, believed that sub-adults, even babies, were members of the community and were accorded similar burials as the adults. The question remains to be answered as to whether all the deceased were buried or just a selected few.

The application of shamanic theory shows that the belief system could contain a substratum of shamanism. A number of grave goods indicate that is a possibility. In addition the burial of animals in individual graves in the same manner as human interments could also be indicative of such a belief. Since ritual cattle burials have also been discovered in the Saharan Desert, it is possible that the Badarian burials are a continuation of such practice. Ethnographic data has shown that cattle were very much part of the psyche of the Nuer and Dinka people. I suggest that the Badarians have a similar relationship with cattle. That being so, based on Ingold's (1980, 283) theory in respect of animal spirit masters who are shamanic in character, the Badarians would appear to believe in animal spirits especially those linked to their herds. As indicated above, the reason for the bovine and ?caprid burials would appear to be for the purposes of fertility of the herds after their sacrifice to the spirit of the animal species. Reference was made in Section 4.2 to the many different interpretations of the role of the shaman. In this chapter it is made clear that the shaman could have multi-roles within the community but from the point of view of

this thesis it is the spiritual role that was important. I contend that shamanism forms an important substratum of beliefs and that the shaman in the capacity of the one who could penetrate the boundaries of the spirit world was responsible for performing essential rituals to persuade the spirit world to react benevolently with regard to the community. The shaman played an important role in mortuary rituals (Hutton 2007, 55; Vitebsky 1995, 120) including interceding with the spirit world for a successful transformation of the deceased into a new entity, or accompanying the deceased on the final journey. Such rituals would follow in essence similar procedures to those identified in Chapter 5.

Thus each theoretical approach results in a link which when cabled or considered together provides a more comprehensive overview of the Badarian belief system. From the available evidence discovered in secure contexts, it seems that there are several strands to this belief system: the understanding of nature and the incorporation of this into beliefs; the relationships between the living and the dead and the transformation of the latter into a new entity assisted by the deposition of grave goods by those left behind; and finally a belief in shamanism.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 PRELIMINARIES

The catalyst for this research was a thesis promoted by Miroslav Bárta at the 2010 *First Interdisciplinary Conference* on the “Seeking Origins and Manifestations of Religion” at Pultusk in Poland, which was based on his book *Swimmers in the Sand* published earlier that year. He maintained that rock-art motifs discovered in Wadi Sura provided firm evidence that many concepts traditionally connected with ancient Egypt were formulated several millennia before the state came into being. The cognitive beliefs of the ancient herders became the basis of the key ancient Egyptian religious beliefs. Bárta, using backward projection from the Pharaonic period, identified certain of the motifs as representing the earliest conceptualisations of the ancient Egyptian deities: Nut, Geb Shu and Tefnut. Le Quellec (2005 70f; 2008 31ff and in de Flers *et al.* 2007, 56, 58) also linked this rock-art to later ancient Egyptian religious texts on death and the afterlife but did not identify any motifs as representing deities.

The question this thesis has attempted to answer is:

**“Considering the relatively limited data sets, can the origins and nature of very early Predynastic belief systems be identified?”**

Since the evidence considered was not homogeneous in nature, in order to answer this question I have used a multi-stranded approach incorporating both archaeological and anthropological theory as well as ethnographic data relating to modern pre-literate societies and in particular to societies who live in a similar biosphere and with similar economies as the early Predynastic Egyptians and who therefore might hold similar beliefs. Each approach produces somewhat different results but by using Wylie’s (1989; 1993) theory of cabling these results can be structured into a stronger and sustainable argument.

One reason for this approach stems from the fact there are no direct comparators for any of the sites considered. Even an understanding of death and burial during the Badarian period is not assisted by knowledge of the beliefs of the later Predynastic or Dynastic periods due to developments in social structures and an ever evolving

sophisticated theology. The Badarian problem is compounded by the fact that there is comparatively little archaeological evidence. Another reason is the diverse nature of the evidence: rock-art sites, a megalithic site and burials. No single theoretical approach was suited to such diversity, especially when the focus, the origins of Predynastic religion, is so esoteric. If a single theory were applied much of the evidence would be overlooked and the proper nature of the belief system of this preliterate society would be obscured. Thus recourse has had to be made to ethnography particularly to that relating to shamanism and the Nilotic peoples, the Nuer and the Dinka - and where necessary to anthropological theory. This may be considered to be a possible weakness since ethnography deals with modern and archaeology with ancient societies. However, both are anthropological in the broadest sense and without recourse to such knowledge, the hypothecation of conceivable aspects of esoteric prehistoric belief systems would not be possible. Any conclusions, when not based on empiricism, must in essence be hypothetical since they are based on modern interpretation. The strength of the framework lies in the inclusion of such data and its interpretation based on theoretical and common sense assumptions to allow for suggestive rather than definitive solutions.

The importance of my research is twofold:

- it shows that Bárta and Le Quellec had adopted an inappropriate methodology and thus had arrived at inaccurate conclusions about the links between the rock-art at Wadi Sura and Ancient Egyptian beliefs and in particular Bárta's premise that certain deities could be identified;
- it identifies components of the early Predynastic belief systems, a subject which has been neglected by Egyptologists (see Sections 2.2.2 and 2.7).

However, since belief systems tend to evolve, with strands of belief being woven together over time and do not appear *ex nihilo*, I have commenced with Bárta's (and Le Quellec's) basic premise and considered whether the influential factors originated, as they believed, in the Wadi Sura or from elsewhere in the Western Desert. The reason for focusing on the Western Desert is that climate change, which caused increasing aridity of the land, resulted in the herders migrating to areas where there were permanent water supplies such as the Oases and the river Nile. Scientific evidence supports this change in weather patterns. A result of such movements of

people would, I believe, be a gradual coalescence of belief systems as a consequence of contact with others and the seeking of answers for the situation in which they found themselves.

With the exception of Hornung and he only fleetingly,<sup>162</sup> Egyptologists, with an interest in “religion” have not touched implicitly on early belief systems. Discussions have focused on *later* Predynastic beliefs, namely those of the Naqada Period based on the evidence of decorated pottery and palettes. When discussing early Egyptian beliefs, many commentators use the term “religion” no doubt as a back projection of Dynastic religion and as a “catch-all” term. This, I believe, is an inappropriate usage of the word at this developmental stage of beliefs. Religion is a western concept which has overtones of organised worship together with ethical and/or moral codes based on long traditions of beliefs. It also implies a division between the sacred and the secular, whereas in many preliterate societies, the two are inseparably merged to provide a world view. A belief system is a set of precepts based on experience, which explain the workings of the world and is encapsulated within a world view. “Belief system” and not “religion” is therefore the term adopted in this thesis. Based on the social anthropological approaches identified in Chapter 2, the following definition of belief systems forms the basis of this thesis:

*Belief systems are derived from the reaction of bewilderment or fear of the unknown; in other words they are a human and emotional response to the challenges of the world. These beliefs give meaning to the inexplicable; they can be related to a supernatural entity and if so usually involve a set of practices and trappings that allows engagement with that entity. Symbolism usually plays an important role. These beliefs can be societal or personal.*

Using this definition and building upon it by means of anthropological theory and data has enabled me to propose a different interpretation that shamanism formed one of the major aspects of the early Predynastic belief system. I define shamanism as:

*... a human and emotional response to the challenges of the world. Shamanism is linked to the community; the practices and rituals carried*

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<sup>162</sup> Hornung 1996[1971], pp. 100-101.

*out by the shaman also involve the community in his/her efforts to maintain equilibrium. Therefore by participating, the members of the community have a perception of how the problem may be resolved. Direct contact with the supernatural is the essence of shamanism and this is achieved by the shaman wearing special regalia conducting specific rituals pertinent for the problem in question.*

## **7.2 THEORETICAL APPROACH**

Since, by definition, there is no textual evidence as to the actual thought processes and actions of the early Predynastic Egyptians my conclusions cannot be “proven”. However, as Mithen (1996a, 151ff) has argued the mechanisms enabling the cross processing of data by the modern brain were developed by the Middle Palaeolithic transition, such that the thought processes of today are similar to those of the early Predynastic Egyptians. A belief system is a means of understanding and coping with existence; in order to achieve that end, the existence of supernatural beings is acknowledged and the method of contact with those entities is achieved through symbols and rituals. Belief systems are both individual and societal and in my view early peoples had belief systems.

I accept Bárta’s (2010; 2014) argument that the Western Desert played a role in the development of early Predynastic beliefs but not that they originated at Wadi Sura. However, the evidence is multi-faceted: rock-art sites, a megalithic site; cemetery sites involving both burials and grave goods, hence, the use of a multi-pronged theoretical approach including rock-art, landscape, shamanism, ritual personhood/relationality and multifunctionality/meaning. The most common theory threading through all the sites is that of shamanism, which according to the theoretical approaches of Pentikäinen (1998); Rozwadowski (2012a, 200) and Winkelman (for example: 1986a, 17ff and Table 1; 1990, *passim*; 2006, 139, 142ff), was integral to the belief systems of very early societies. The application of such a methodology results in strands of reasoning, which might be considered tenuous but when cabled together (Wylie 1989, 1993) the result is a stronger argument.

Due to the lack of contemporaneous textual evidence, it has been necessary to consider ethnographic examples, in particular the Nilotes who as cattle herders in an environment comparable to that experienced by the early Predynastic Egyptians may hold similar beliefs to the early Predynastic Egyptians. I accept that no direct

comparisons can be made because of the chronological difference. However, these examples can generate ideas for further deliberation such as the roles of certain individuals within the Dinka (Spear chief) and Nuer (for example: the leopard-skin chief and prophets) societies in maintaining the equilibrium of their societies; the nature of beliefs: animism, totemism and shamanism; the sacrifice of animals and a belief in an afterlife. The need for rain and ensuing fertility was of vital importance for the Nilotes; the responsibility for invoking the supernatural usually rested with one individual. These issues were considered to be of the essence in the consideration of the beliefs held by the early Predynastic Egyptians.

### **7.3 MAIN BELIEFS IDENTIFIED**

I have discussed the fact that both Bárta and Le Quellec used retrospection to arrive at their conclusions namely that the origins of ancient Egyptian beliefs (and in Bárta's case the identification of deities) was evidenced in the rock-art of Wadi Sura by resorting to textual evidence dating from the Middle and New Kingdoms to support their arguments. Bárta also used representational evidence dating from the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty (12<sup>th</sup> century BC) to support his argument. However, using a theoretical framework I have examined:

- the same dataset as Bárta and Le Quellec;
- additional evidence from other sites in the Western Desert, which, I believe, are essential in determining the aetiology of early Predynastic beliefs;
- the evidence provided by the cemeteries of Gebel Ramlah and those of the Badarian period.

This interrogation has resulted in a radically different conclusion.

My theoretical approach has shown *contra* to Bárta that no ancient Egyptian deities can be identified from the Wadi Sura motifs. Rather, these motifs were the encapsulation of a shamanic rain ritual. An inter-site examination of the evidence shows that the following themes may be extrapolated which can be said to form the beliefs of the early Predynastic period. These are:

- water and fertility;
- an afterlife: rebirth and regeneration;
- shamanism.

### **7.3.1 Water and Fertility (Chapters 5 and 6)**

I have identified the major themes of the belief system as being fertility, rebirth and regeneration. Fertility of the land was essential for the wellbeing of herds and communities. Water is the essence of life and this is emphasised in the interpretations of rock-art at Wadi Sura and the Dakhleh oasis and environs and the megalithic structures at Nabta Playa (Chapter 5). Whilst the oases are fed by the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer, the water levels vary due to its recharge. Ethnographic examples of the Nilotes and the San Bushmen suggest that rainmaking was an important ritualistic event; the rituals being led by a member of the tribe thought to be imbued with special abilities to bring such a situation about (Chapters 4 and 5). It is suggested that rain rituals would have been performed by peoples living in the Western Desert since climatic conditions deteriorated due to the southward movement of the monsoon rains, thus affecting the availability of water for both humans and animals with its concomitant effect on the prosperity of both. The Badarian peoples (Chapter 6) were dependent on the inundation of the Nile rather than rain for the fertility of the land. However, the interment of cattle may have been for a similar reason as that at Nabta Playa, as a sacrifice to the supernatural in times of stress to ensure the inundation of the Nile which brought about fertility and the consequent regeneration of the land, thus ensuring the continuation of the herds and the well-being of the communities. It has been established that the early Predynastic peoples believed in the supernatural. It is not inconceivable that they supposed that by sacrificing an animal at times of stress, its spirit returned to the supernatural world, to the being thought to be their spiritual guardian, the animal master, in supplication for the continuance of the herds on which the communities depended. The careful burial of the animals would signify respect for them, which would appease the animal master. It would be thought such appeasement would result in their supplications being answered. Whilst the Nilotic peoples (Section 4.3.4) generally sacrificed oxen to the higher powers, other animals could be sacrificed in their stead and the burial of the caprids may be an example.

### **7.3.2 An Afterlife, Rebirth and Regeneration (Chapters 5 and 6)**

My examination of the funerary evidence shows that the deceased in the cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah and the three Badarian period cemeteries were in the main buried with care. Although the bodies of deceased at Gebel Ramlah do not appear to have

been covered by matting or any other material, there are indicators of a belief in an afterlife. Such indicators include the fact that during primary inhumations every effort was made to preserve the body *in toto*, even to the replacement of teeth *post mortem* as well as the use of red ochre on a number of bodies with its signification of blood and therefore life. That those who died when away from the burial ground were brought back where possible to be buried shows the importance of being buried among the ancestors. The deceased at Badari in the main appear to have been covered in matting, hides or cloth as though asleep. This interpretation is augmented by the fact that a number of the burials contained what appeared to be pillows beneath the heads. Recent research (Jones *et al.* 2014) has indicated that some of the materials used at Mostagedda were impregnated with substances that were used in the mummification process during the dynastic period. However, the numbers of burials involved are so small that they are not statistically viable. It may be the use of such substances represented attempts at mummification to keep the body whole or they were disinfectant agents. Unlike at Gebel Ramlah, red ochre does not appear to have been scattered on any of the bodies. The direction of burial generally was linked to either the diurnal rising or the setting of the sun implying that the dead too would awake from sleep. At Gebel Ramlah, the progress of the sun across the sky also appears to have been important.

I accept that there is an indication of a belief in the afterlife since, despite differences in actual burial practices, the deceased appear to have been buried with care and were provided with grave goods. Thus the underlying concepts of death and burial were the same. Death was the final rite of passage. The dead were disaggregated from the living and entered a period of liminality. Finally they entered the community of the dead as a new entity. The theory of personhood/relationality shows the important role of the living in carrying out mortuary rites that assisted the dead during the process of transformation and the placement of objects in the graves were considered integral to the process. Grave goods would include those that it was deemed were needed during the transformation process or in the afterlife by the deceased. Others could be thought to have another dimension in that their materiality, colour or decoration could be interpreted as meaning rebirth and regeneration. Such goods could be thought to have a synergistic effect on the transformation process.

### 7.3.3 Shamanism (Chapters 5 and 6)

I have identified shamanism as being a substratum of belief at all the major sites considered. The rock-art at Wadi Sura and Dakhleh Oasis and environs has been interpreted as being shamanic relating to rain rituals. All three Western Desert sites contained aggregation areas, that is areas used for the performance of important rituals and ceremonies. Ethnographic parallels emphasise the importance of rainmaking rituals; thus it is believed that these rituals held the same significance for the pastoralists of the Western Desert, especially from *ca.* 5300 calBC when the climate was becoming increasingly hostile resulting in scarcities of water and pasturage. Such rituals would involve the invocation of the supernatural and ancestral spirits. The shaman has been identified as the one responsible for leading the incantations and contacting the supernatural world to persuade the spirits of the need to ensure fertility of the land so that life could continue in its cycle of life, death and rebirth.

The evidence that shamanism existed during the Badarian period rests on two diverse sources. A few of the grave goods can be said to have shamanic characteristics. The most important of these from a shamanistic point of view are the glazed steatite beaded belts. These belts are unusual, from the number of beads that were used and their colouration. I suggested they were buried with their owners because they contained powers specific to them. These belts indicated the deceased had been powerful men within the community. I identified them as being shamans, explaining that as such they would have spiritual, political and societal roles. They would be responsible for the performance of rituals within the community such as mortuary, hunting and fertility rituals. The burial of bovines and caprids could also have shamanic overtones, in particular those that had been wrapped in cloth. The supposition is that they were sacrificed to the spirit world to ensure the fertility and continuity of the herds. By giving them a “proper” burial showed respect for the animals and as a result of the shaman’s intercession, the Master of Animals would be appeased. Thus the shaman’s intercession with the spirit world was therefore for the benefit of the community. The shaman’s actions comply with those contained in my definition of a shaman (Section 4.2). That shamanism (as defined in Section 4.2.1) was part of the belief structures of early societies as shown by Winkelman’s research would suggest that was the case during the Badarian period.

#### 7.4 ORIGINS OF THE BELIEFS

It has been demonstrated (Chapter 5) that the traditions of the pastoralists of Wadi Sura had no influence on the Nile Valley. Therefore Bárta's (2010, 2014) and le Quellec's (2005; 2008; in de Flers *et al.* 2007) hypotheses of the beginnings of ancient Egyptian spiritual beliefs were to be found in Wadi Sura I and II are incorrect. I have argued that the aetiology of Predynastic region was to be found elsewhere in the Western Desert. The evidence I submit is that which relates particularly to the oases but Dakhleh Oasis in particular, Nabta Playa, and the Badarian sites.

Much of the evidence is based on pottery traditions. Black topped ware provides the main evidence for contact across the Western Desert and Nile Valley from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. This ware appeared to be common across the desert area from Nabta Playa to the Dakhleh Oasis and environs. It is postulated that this desert ware could be the predecessor of Badarian black-topped ware. Red-slipped ware was also discovered at the same locations. Examples of caliciform pottery, which were found in the cemeteries at Gebel Ramlah (and further south in the Sudan in funerary contexts at Kadero and Kadada), were also discovered in graves along the desert trails from the Oases to Badarian sites and into the Eastern Desert (a grave in the Wadi Atulla - Friedman and Hobbs, 2002). However, the Mostageddan examples were discovered in settlement rather than funerary contexts. This wide distribution of this pottery type would suggest contacts between populations. Darnell (2002) has discovered ancient routes used during the Predynastic period across the Western desert from the Nile Valley to the Oases along which Badarian pottery has been discovered. Where non-ceramic evidence is concerned, McDonald (2002) has also shown that there was a similarity between goods discovered at Dakhleh and Badarian sites: bracelets, palettes and copper objects. Grave goods at Gebel Ramlah also show a distinct similarity of categories to those found in Badarian period graves palettes, pigments and grinding pebbles, beads, bangles, lithics, and tools. Additionally, the double burial in E-75-8 at Nabta Playa could be considered to be analogous with the burials of the Badarian period. Pulled together this evidence does strongly suggest that there was contact between the Badarian sites and those of the Oases, Nabta Playa and Gebel Ramlah. It could be that with increasing desiccation of the land, groups of transhumants crossed the Nile and continued their existence on the eastern

side. It is feasible that the Badarian peoples were part of, or resulted from, the migrations from the Western Desert, a premise which is supported by geoarchaeology and radiocarbon dating for the Badarian period (Section 6.2). On that basis, I conclude that the beliefs of the Badarian period originated in the south-east and east of the Western Desert.

## **7.5 FUTURE WORK**

Belief systems are esoteric in nature and therefore cannot be explained by empirical approaches. Beliefs encapsulate many different aspects thus no single theory fits all. The multi-stranded theoretical approach adopted in this thesis has allowed for different types of sites to be interrogated. As a result of cabling, it has also provided for a more in-depth understanding of belief systems as each theory applied augments the overall findings. However, in the absence of hard textual data to assist in the interpretation of archaeological findings, recourse has to be made to relevant ethnographic data wherever possible to assist in the reaching of conclusions. The framework has of necessity to be fluid due to the different nature of sites. To state the obvious, rock-art sites are not the same as mortuary sites. Thus the approach has to be adapted accordingly. The frameworks adopted are relevant to the particular type of site and would be applicable to any site of the same nature.

Future work, as I see it, would be to explore how the belief system outlined above developed during the Naqadan period using this flexible framework. Initial research suggests that the present situation prevailed but as the Predynastic Egyptians became more sedentary, there was an important development in the crystallisation of beliefs relating to the conceptualisation of supernatural beings which culminated in the late Naqadan period in the emergence of identifiable deities. Therefore, the framework could be applied to interrogate the material evidence of the early Naqadan period to determine incremental developments in the belief system(s) and to establish whether these indicated a belief in generic deities prior to the crystallisation of cognitive thought of a belief in named gods. Such research would provide the bridge between the Predynastic and Dynastic periods. The framework would also have the advantage in identifying those beliefs held on a personal as well as on a collective basis. Finally, on the basis of Winkelman's (1989; 2006; 2010) theory that the shaman's role evolved with developments in society, such changes should be able to be identified. Thus, the significance of the methodology with its flexibility used in this

thesis is that it is applicable in those instances where the aim is to identify belief systems. Future work, like that identified, would, therefore, build on and extend the principles of this thesis.

## **7.6 SUMMARY**

This thesis has considered the work that has been undertaken on the early Predynastic period in order to produce a systematic overview of the development of beliefs at a time before actual deities emerged. I have identified the origins of the beliefs of the early Predynastic period and shown that both Bárta and Le Quellec were incorrect in concluding that they lay in the south west of the Western Desert at Wadi Sura. Their methodology of using the evidence from the Dynastic period to interpret early beliefs was incorrect resulting in an interpretation that cannot be substantiated. Utilising a framework of theoretical approaches including rock-art, landscape, shamanism and ethnography, which are brought together by cabling, the evidence indicates the origin of early Predynastic beliefs lay in the east (Dakhleh Oasis and environs) and south-east (Nabta Playa) of the Western Desert. It has been demonstrated that there were contacts between those two sites and those of the Badarian period, whereas archaeological evidence shows there was no direct contact between Wadi Sura and the Nile Valley. In order to determine the cognition of the early Predynastic Egyptians, the Badarians, secure funerary contexts were examined. The main theoretical approaches used were those of personhood/relationality, shamanism together with multifunctionality and multi-layered meanings. Relevant ethnographic data was drawn upon where necessary. Again, where strands, rather than large blocks, of evidence exist, Wylie's (1989) theory of cabling has been used in order to draw these threads together. On the basis of these theoretical approaches I have demonstrated that:

- Although the Western Desert played an important role in the development of belief systems in the early Predynastic period, their origins did not lie in the Wadi Sura as has been postulated by Bárta and Le Quellec but in all probability from Dakhleh Oasis and environs and Nabta Playa.
- The early Predynastic belief systems found their origin in the natural world and they were a response to that world and its challenges.
- Shamanism played an important role in the belief system.

- The concept of fertility was paramount.
- There was a belief in an afterlife.
- The living played an important role in the dead reaching the afterlife.
- The supernatural and symbolism played an important role.
- Beliefs could be held on a community or individual basis.
- There were no recognisable deities at this stage.

This thesis has established that early Predynastic beliefs can be encapsulated by the working definition referred to in Chapter 3 and at the beginning of this chapter. I believe that the findings of this thesis allow insight into the minds of the early Predynastic Egyptians in respect of their belief systems. I therefore submit that the thesis has answered the research question and that “relatively limited datasets” can be used to identify early Predynastic belief systems provided they are set into an appropriately robust theoretical context and are interpreted from within their own particular chronological setting rather than through the lens of back-projection from the beliefs of Dynastic period.