

NEW STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture

Jacques Cauvin has worked on the beginnings of the Neolithic in the Near East for twenty years, excavating key sites and developing new ideas to explain the hugely significant cultural, social and economic changes involved in the transformation of mobile hunter-gatherers into the first village societies and farmers in the world. This book is the confident synthesis of his mature understanding of the process that began around 14,000 years ago. Cauvin challenges the ecological and materialist interpretations, and argues for a quite different kind of understanding that is influenced by the ideas of structuralist archaeologists such as André Leroi-Gourhan and members of the French Annales school of historians. He defines the Neolithic Revolution as essentially a restructuring of the human mentality that is expressed in terms of new religious ideas and symbols. The survey ends around 9,000 years ago, when the developed religious ideology, the social practice of village life and the economy of mixed farming had become established throughout the Near East and east Mediterranean, and was already spreading powerfully into Europe.

JACQUES CAUVIN is Directeur de Recherches émérite of the CNRS. He is the founder of a CNRS-funded multidisciplinary research team that has worked at the Institut de Préhistoire Orientale at Jalès for more than twenty years on the beginnings of sedentary village life and the origins of farming in the Near East.

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NEW STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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JACQUES CAUVIN

The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture

Translated by
TREVOR WATKINS



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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The purpose of this English language edition of Jacques Cauvin's book is to make it accessible to a wider international readership. While many of us will read an article or a short report in a language that is not our own, most of us, I am sure, balk at reading a whole book. I have known the work of Jacques Cauvin for a long time. I have been interested in very much the same field of research for many years, and it has been a pleasure and a gesture of homage to translate his important book. Jacques Cauvin's work is always original, based on a vast knowledge, deeply thought, deeply felt and passionately written.

Which is better? To have a translation that is professionally done by someone who does not know the author's subject at all intimately, or one that is written by an amateur translator who is fairly conversant with the sites, the technical literature, the ideas and the arguments? This translation is the latter. And since Jacques' book is centrally concerned with a rereading of a great deal of detailed information in order to criticise many of the ideas of the rest of us and propose a case for some very individual ideas of his own, it seems to me to make sense that the translator should be sensitive to what the author is thinking and talking about, as much as the specific words that he uses.

I had the very great advantage of being able to discuss this translation with Darren Noyes, whose knowledge of French is much greater than mine will ever be. And finally, in a return visit to the Institut de Préhistoire Orientale at Jalès in Ardèche, I was able to work through the translation with Jacques Cauvin himself, making final corrections, adjustments and additions to ensure that the text is exactly as he would wish it to be. Where the English translation departs from the French edition for the sake of clarity and readability in English, the reader can be assured that the author has read the translation with meticulous care and approved. He has also saved the translator from a number of errors and infelicities. I was particularly keen that Jacques should have the opportunity to take note of new information and important publications that had come into print since he revised the French edition (completed in 1996). Some of these new references and further pieces of relevant information have been put into place in the text. And Jacques has also added a Postscript (completed 13 November 1998) which summarises further considerations that have arisen since the French original was published.

The only liberties I have taken have been to substitute spellings for site names more usually seen in English language books than some of the francophone renderings of Arabic, and, very occasionally, to use an equivalent term rather than a literal

translation. There are many places in the text, where, as an archaeologist, I would have wanted to put things differently, but that amounts to taking a different view from Jacques Cauvin, which is not the translator's job. I have also added a small number of references to publications more recent than the second French edition, where authors cited by Jacques Cauvin have published more up-to-date information or advances on the account of their own views.

One or two words in Jacques Cauvin's vocabulary deserve comment. He uses the word *néolithisation* frequently to mean the process of becoming Neolithic, essentially beginning to cultivate crops and to herd animals, and the term 'neolithisation' is the practically unpronounceable English equivalent. Because Cauvin defines the Neolithic in terms of subsistence strategy, he is left with a period which is neither Palaeolithic (or Epi-palaeolithic for the last millennia of the Palaeolithic) nor yet Neolithic, because the Palaeolithic conventionally ends in step with the geological Pleistocene period. He therefore uses the term Mesolithic, as it is used in Britain and Europe, for the pre-agricultural times at the beginning of the Holocene period. Others use the term Mesolithic for the final millennia of the Pleistocene, because they consider the cultures equivalent to the European Mesolithic cultures of the early Holocene, but Cauvin observes the more usual convention of labelling these final Palaeolithic cultures Epi-palaeolithic. I have also chosen to use the spelling Çatalhöyük, the form preferred in Turkey and in use by the new Çatalhöyük Research Project, for the site more widely known in the archaeological literature as Catal Hüyük. The site of 'Ain Mallaha or Eynan, with an Arabic and a Hebrew name, always causes difficulties for those unfamiliar with it. Cauvin usually uses the Arabic name, but I think that the site is better known among English-speaking archaeologists as Eynan, and I have usually used that form.

Trevor Watkins

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND FRENCH EDITION

The present edition appeared only three years after the first. The framework of the book and its general conclusions have scarcely been modified. However, that a revised edition was already necessary is some measure of how ‘things change fast’ in Near Eastern prehistory and how excavations and discoveries continue to accumulate rapidly.

The main events since 1994 that bear on the Near Eastern Neolithic have been on the one hand the renewal of salvage excavations at aceramic Neolithic settlements on the Middle Euphrates in northern Syria, where another new dam was being built, and where Spanish, French and Franco-Syrian teams have worked; and on the other hand the discovery of a phase of occupation on the island of Cyprus several centuries earlier than the Khirokitia culture, previously thought to be the oldest occupation of the island, which is very important for the understanding of the diffusion of the Neolithic; and finally, the spectacular advances in research in Anatolia achieved by Turkish and German teams. These new facts have led us to overhaul certain chapters quite significantly, in particular chapters 4, 9 and especially 15. Otherwise, there are corrections of detail that have been made in response to suggestions that have been made to me.

I thank Thomas Mourier, the editor of CNRS Editions, for his understanding and his patience in the face of all the corrections and Jacqueline Traincat who took care of the finalisation of the text at our Institute of Near Eastern Prehistory, Jalès.

I also thank my colleagues Jean Guilaine, Miguel Molist, Eric Coqueugniot, Danielle Stordeur, Harald Hauptmann and Paul Sanlaville for having kept me regularly informed of the advances in their research and their still unpublished results.

JACQUES CAUVIN
Jalès, December 1996

FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

It is important to me that I have this opportunity to present this synthesis to anglo-phone readers, who are generally accustomed to an interpretation of prehistory that is more strictly socio-economic than this. Without seeking to bring into question the results that have been obtained by means of that perspective, I have tried by contrast to incorporate a cultural perspective on the Neolithic Revolution in the Near East that is concerned with the propensities of the human mind. This complementary component is important: it gives greater place in the transformation of the affairs of our species to human agency and to human cognitive and psychological dispositions. It may go some way to serving as a useful corrective to today's economic 'fatalism' which is the source of so much pessimism about the future.

When the second French edition was published in 1997, it was necessary to bring the book up to date, and this present edition requires some more up-dating. There are now many archaeologists working in the Near East, and their discoveries and most recent publications need to be included here. I have chosen the path of not modifying the text of the 1997 edition, excepting some new references here and there among the notes at the end of each chapter. The general bibliography has been augmented, and the most important advances in research during the last two or three years have been dealt with in a 'Postscript' at the end of the book. They have generally given support to the views I had expressed, and have required only a few corrections of detail to the essential thesis of this work.

I am particularly glad that this English edition has been translated by my colleague and friend Trevor Watkins. He also works on the recent prehistory of the Near East and is also concerned with the less material indications of the data that he recovers. He knows the subject treated here very well, and I have found agreement and confidence in the ability to discuss freely with him some of the French passages that are difficult to translate. He has my warm gratitude for his efficiency and patience.

Jacques Cauvin
Jalès, November 1998

PREFACE

Among the great turning points in human history, the one called the Neolithic Revolution is one of the most critical: it concerned the beginning of the first manipulations of the natural environment by our species, and it lies directly at the origins of our present power. The analysis of this metamorphosis, its circumstances and its causes, is therefore an indispensable first stage for those who are interested in how civilisation began. This event occurred first in the Near East, before radiating directly to other regions, or giving place to later imitations elsewhere.

This book is therefore first and foremost the synthesis of recent research on the Neolithic of the Near East. By 'Near East', a region whose extent fluctuates according to the author, I mean the territory designated by that name by UNESCO, that is to say the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan) and the Anatolian peninsula (Turkey).

The period covered is from about 12,000 to 6300 BC, when the transition of prehistoric communities of hunter-gatherers into the first farmers and the first herders was effected in stages, earlier in this part of the world than anywhere else, together with technical and ideological changes which accompanied and sometimes preceded the process.

For readers already somewhat familiar with this subject, these dates will be a surprise: they will appear older than those which they have read elsewhere, including in my own work *Les premiers villages de Syrie-Palestine*, published in 1978. Prehistoric chronology relies on radiocarbon dates, which we now know need to be 'calibrated', that is, corrected as a function of the history of cosmic radiation and its variation (see the Chronological table, pp. xvii).

Now, the calibration tables have only recently extended to periods as ancient as the Near Eastern Neolithic: this synthesis is therefore the first to take account of this revision. I am grateful to Jacques Evin, director of the radiocarbon laboratory of the University of Lyon-1, for having made all the necessary corrections to my text.

Like any history, that of the Neolithic is first of all a narrative, but I wanted to set a theoretical discussion on this narrative, in so far as the events described have had an impact on the rest of human evolution and its significance right up to our form of civilisation today. It was Goëry Delacote, then the director of scientific and technical information at the CNRS, who encouraged me in 1989 to undertake this task of elucidation. I am deeply grateful for his confidence and his interest: this work would not have seen the light of day without him.

Marie-Claire Cauvin and Danielle Stordeur have helped me continually with their

reading of what I have written, their corrections and their advice. I have been able to take advantage of my friend Raymond Vogel with his extensive knowledge of philosophy and epistemology to make sure of the theoretical background on which my analyses of the archaeology were founded. I am also obliged to Patricia Anderson, Olivier Aurenche, Nur Balkan-Atli, Claude Boisson, Daniel Helmer, Jacobus Roodenberg, Paul Sanlaville and George Willcox, consulted on this or that part of the work, for reducing the errors I committed. To all of them I express my gratitude.

Claudine Maréchal had the most sustained and irreplaceable task of rendering the text on to personal computer and, having done that, making me aware of the basic errors into which I had slipped. Her efforts in the finishing of the text and her knowledge of Near Eastern prehistory have been invaluable. I owe the maps to Christine Chataigner, and to Gérard Deraprahamian the rest of the illustrations, both the originals and those redrawn from elsewhere. They have my appreciation and gratitude.

Finally I thank my colleagues Ofer Bar-Yosef, Harald Hauptmann, Alain Le Brun, Jean Perrot, Gary Rollefson, Maurits van Loon and François Valla who kindly allowed me to reproduce photographs.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

Calibrated dates and ^{14}C dates

Since about 1950 it has been known that absolute dates may be proposed, based on the principle of the continuous decay of radiocarbon (^{14}C) that is contained in all organic matter. Little by little, after the death of the organism, this radioactive carbon is transformed into non-radioactive carbon (^{12}C). For a long time it was considered that the quantity of radioactive carbon in the atmosphere and absorbed by living organisms was constant, and therefore it was thought that the residual radioactivity of the samples measured in the laboratory could give a measure of absolute age, within a certain margin of error.

Dating methods such as dendrochronology have subsequently revealed that the flux of cosmic radiation that is the origin of the formation of radioactive carbon had varied over the millennia. This necessitates a calibration of the ^{14}C dates to take account of these variations. This calibration has resulted in dates 'BC' that are absolutely exact, which is not the case for dates 'BP' (before present) and 'bc' (before Christ, but not calibrated). Until quite recently, the impossibility of calibrating by means of dendrochronology alone dates as ancient as those of the Neolithic of the Near East has made it necessary to retain a 'traditional' ^{14}C chronology, that is, one that is not calibrated. This is the situation in all syntheses of Near Eastern prehistory that have appeared until now.

A short while ago, thanks to the application of other methods, calibration became possible up to 20,000 years before the present. This synthesis is therefore the first to give true dates for the Near East for the period covered.

The chronological scheme established by the Maison de l'Orient

A collective enterprise has been under way since 1975 at the Maison de l'Orient in Lyons with the objective of offering an up-to-date synthesis of the evolution of the whole of the Near East from the time of the last hunter-gatherer communities of the Upper Palaeolithic period down to the emergence of urban civilisation. This enterprise has produced a scheme of chronological periods. These are of unequal length, and have been determined on the basis of archaeological and radiometric criteria. The early periods of this scheme each represent a stage in the process of neolithisation.

Calibrated dates BC	Radiocarbon dates BP	Maison de l'Orient periods	Western Anatolia	Central Anatolia	Phoenician Cyprus and Cyprus	Arid zone of the Southern Levant Transjordan Negev-Shai	Jordan valley Damascus basin	Levantine core	Eastern Taurus	Syrian Desert	Sinjar	Zagros
6000	7000 BP	6	Ippinar	Hacılar	<i>Late Neolithic pottery cultures</i> Amuq A-B Ras Shamra VB-A Byblos Early Neolithic	YARMOUKIAN Shahr Ha Golan 'Ain Ghazal <i>Final PPNB of the Black Desert</i> 'Ain Ghazal 'PPNC'	NOMADS ? Ashkelon Ramad III	Sabi Abyad Abu Hureyra 2C Dammishliya	?	ACERAMIC Neolithic nomads El Kowm 2 "PNA" <i>Final PPNB</i> sedentary: El Kowm 2 nomads: Qleir 1	HASSUNA CULTURE <i>Kiltepe (nomads)</i> Soto <i>Umm Dabaghiyah</i> <i>Late PPNB</i> of the Sinjar Maganha	ACERAMIC of the ZAGROS Jarmo
7000	8000 BP	4		Cañahöyük	<i>Late PPNB</i> Shallouf-barabos Res. Sites VC Tell aux Saes	<i>Late PPNB</i> 'Ain Ghazal	<i>Late PPNB</i> Abu Gosh Ramad I-II Besamoun	<i>Late PPNB</i> Tell Assouad Abu Hureyra 2B Halula	<i>Late PPNB</i> Bougras			Aceramic Jarmo Ali Kosh Ganj Dareh
8000	8600 BP	3		ASIKLI CULTURE		<i>Middle PPNB of Palestine</i> Jericho PPNB Mushatta		<i>Middle PPNB</i> Abu Hureyra 2A Hadih Mureybet IV B				
9000	9600 BP	2			<i>KHILAMIAN of Lebanon</i> Sables de Beyrouth	<i>Jericho 'protoneolithic'</i> KHALAMIAN El Khiam, Sulbiyeh IX Hatoula	SULTANIAN Jericho PPNB Netiv Hagatid	<i>Early PPNB</i> Mureybet IV A <i>Late MUREYBETIAN</i> Mureybet III B Chouh el-Hassan, Jer el-Ahmar			NEMRIKIAN Nemrik	?
10,000	10,300 BP	1			Sables de Beyrouth	<i>Recent NATUFIAN of the Negev</i> Rosh Zin Rosh Horebia		<i>Final NATUFIAN</i> Tor Abou Sif Mureybet IA Abu Hureyra I C <i>Late NATUFIAN</i> Abu Hureyra 1A-B			QERMEZIAN Qermez Dere	
11,000					<i>Late NATUFIAN of Lebanon</i> Sables de Beyrouth Saayiqeh	?	<i>Early NATUFIAN</i> Eynan ElWad Huyonim	<i>Early NATUFIAN</i> of El Kowm				Zawi Chemi Shanidar
12,000	12,000 BP	0			<i>GEOMETRIC KEBARAN</i> Abri Bergy	<i>GEOMETRIC KEBARAN</i> Abri Bergy	<i>GEOMETRIC KEBARAN</i>	<i>GEOMETRIC KEBARAN</i>	<i>GEOMETRIC KEBARAN</i>			ZARZIAN