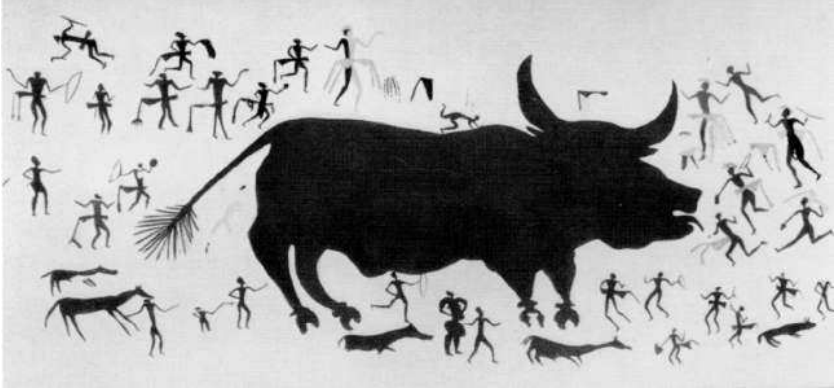


## Violence and the Sacred in the Ancient Near East

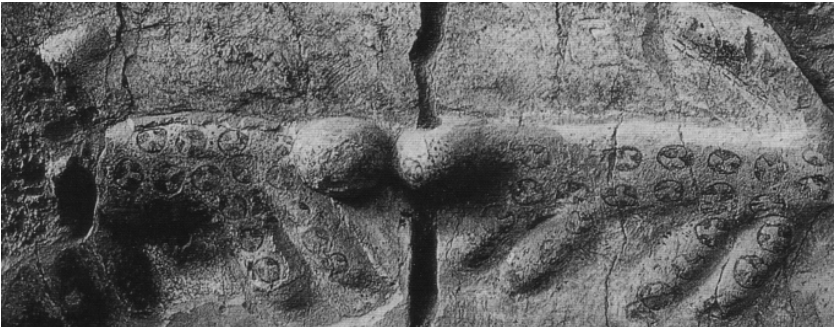
This volume brings together two groups engaged with understanding the relationships between religion and violence. The first group consists of scholars of the mimetic theory of René Girard, for whom human violence is rooted in the rivalry that stems from imitation. To manage this violence of all against all, humans often turn to violence against one, the scapegoat, thereafter incorporated into ritual. The second group consists of archaeologists working at the Neolithic sites of Çatalhöyük and Göbekli Tepe in Turkey. At both sites there is evidence of religious practices that center on wild animals, often large and dangerous in form. Is it possible that these wild animals were ritually killed in the ways suggested by Girardian theorists? Were violence and the sacred intimately entwined and were these the processes that made possible and even stimulated the origins of farming in the ancient Near East? In this volume, Ian Hodder and a team of contributors seek to answer these questions by linking theory and data in exciting new ways.

Ian Hodder is Dunlevie Family Professor of Archaeology at Stanford University. A Fellow of the British Academy, he has received numerous awards for his accomplishments, including the Oscar Montelius Medal from the Swedish Society of Antiquaries, the Huxley Memorial Medal by the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Fyssen International Prize, and the Gold Medal by the Archaeological Institute of America, along with honorary doctorates from the universities of Bristol and Leiden. Hodder is the author of numerous books, including *Symbols in Action*, *Reading the Past* and *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*.

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Bull and figures from north wall of James Mellaart's "Shrine F.V.1," transcribed by Miss Raymonde Enderlé Ludovici. Permission: Alan Mellaart.



Pair of "leopards" from west wall of James Mellaart's "Shrine VII.44." Permission: Alan Mellaart.

# Violence and the Sacred in the Ancient Near East

*Girardian Conversation at Çatalhöyük*

Edited By

IAN HODDER

*Stanford University*



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## Contributors

**James Alison**, Priest-theologian, Fellow of Imitatio

**Mark R. Anspach**, Institut Marcel Mauss, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

**Benoît Chantre**, Centre International d'Études de la Philosophie Française Contemporaine, President of the Association Recherches Mimétiques

**Lee Clare**, Berlin German Archaeological Institute, Orient Department, Berlin

**Oliver Dietrich**, German Archaeological Institute, Orient Department, Berlin

**Jean-Pierre Dupuy**, Department of Philosophy, Ecole Polytechnique, Paris

**Bonnie Glencross**, Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University

**Julia Gresky**, German Archaeological Institute, Scientific Department, Berlin

**Ian Hodder**, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University

**William A. Johnsen**, Professor and Editor, Department of English, Michigan State University

**Christopher J. Knüsel**, De la Préhistoire à l'Actuel: Culture, Environnement, et Anthropologie (PACEA), Université de Bordeaux

**Marco Milella**, Department of Anthropology and Anthropological Museum, Universität Zürich-Irchel

**Jens Notroff**, German Archaeological Institute, Orient Department, Berlin

**Wolfgang Palaver**, Department of Systematic Theology, University of Innsbruck

**Joris Peters**, Institute of Palaeoanatomy, Domestication Research and the History of Veterinary Medicine, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich

**Nadja Pöllath**, Institute of Palaeoanatomy, Domestication Research and the History of Veterinary Medicine, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich

## Preface

The process that resulted in this book began in 2007 at Stanford. At that time the Çatalhöyük Research Project (excavating the 9,000-year-old site of Çatalhöyük in central Turkey – see Hodder 2006) was seeking novel ways of integrating wider debates into the research process. As part of that endeavour, groups of cultural and social anthropologists, philosophers, theologians and religious scholars were brought to the site during the excavation season each year to discuss the interpretations of the site. The aim was to bring major thinkers in these fields into a dialogue with the archaeologists and archaeological data at the site. The result has been a series of volumes that deal with the role of religion in early farming societies in the Middle East and Anatolia (Hodder 2010, 2014, 2018).

At times it was not possible to bring all the interdisciplinary scholars to the site and over the weekend of 14–15 October 2006 a meeting took place in the seminar room of the Archaeology Center at Stanford. The meeting was funded by the Templeton Foundation as part of a project entitled ‘Spirituality and Religious Ritual in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study’. One of the participants was René Girard who had been invited because of his work on the intersections between the sacred and violence (Girard 1972), given the apparent evidence for violent imagery at Çatalhöyük. While most of the discussants presented initial thoughts and asked preliminary questions, Girard rather took the group aback by presenting a fully worked through and thorough analysis of the symbolism from the site. It is a version of this paper that was later presented at UC Riverside in 2008 (published in Antonello and Gifford 2015).

In 2008, thanks to the help of Peter Thiel, the financier of PayPal and Facebook, and a former student of Girard's, a foundation named *Imitatio* was set up to foster the dissemination and discussion of Girard's theory. Given Girard's interest in Çatalhöyük, in 2012 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, a member of the *Imitatio* Board, wrote to Hodder suggesting a meeting.

So began a series of conversations and on 1–4 July 2013 the group met at Çatalhöyük for the first time. As a result of this meeting it was decided to work together as a group and move towards writing a volume. The idea was to discuss the application of Girard's ideas to Çatalhöyük and to the early development of settled life in the Middle East. The group came together at Çatalhöyük again in the summer of 2014. Because of the group's interest in violence and sacrifice there were intense discussions with the human remains team at the site, especially with Chris Knüsel. The seminar at Çatalhöyük was followed by a visit to Göbekli Tepe where the group was shown round by Lee Clare who agreed to join the book-writing project. The group again met in Paris on 3 June 2015 to discuss the first drafts of the chapters presented here, followed by a meeting in San Francisco on 14–15 January 2016.

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