

SYMBOLIC THOUGHT, COGNITION, PREHISTORIC MIND: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WORDS,
THOUGHT AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Steven Mithen

University of Reading, UK

s.j.mithen@reading.ac.uk

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To understand the profound cultural, social and economic developments of the Neolithic in the Near East, we must view these in the long term perspective of the evolution of human mind and language. What cognitive and linguistic capacities were required for the Neolithic transition? How did the new lifestyles and material cultural influence the further development thought and communication? How should we conceive of the prehistoric mind within the Neolithic world? To address these issues I will review evidence for the evolution of cognitive and linguistic capacities in *Homo*, promoting the view that compositional language evolved from a complex vocal and gestural communication system by the invention of words at around 100,000 years ago. I will then focus on the relationships between words and thought within the cultural developments during the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene, with particular reference to the creation and sharing of new concepts that provided the foundations for the Neolithic. Such concepts encompassed the role of clay objects and incised marks as means of extending cognitive capacities by the use of material culture.