

A Specialised Pastoral System Focused on Caprinae during the Chalcolithic in the Araxes Valley (South Caucasus):

A View from Ovçular Tepesi (Azerbaijan)

Ovçular Tepesi

The site is located on the southern flanks of the Lesser Caucasus, close by the confluence of the Arpaçay and Araxes Rivers. The Late Chalcolithic occupation is divided into two phases. The earlier phase I (ca. 4350-4250 BC) is characterised by the presence of semi-subterranean circular structures surrounded by post-holes. In phase II (ca. 4250-3900 BC) the architectural remains consist of free standing, multicellular, mud brick houses. In both phases the pastoral system is focused on sheep and goats. In the second phase, the system slightly evolves with relatively more cattle and goats than in the first phase. The kill-off pattern, at least in the first phase, indicates some mobility or complementary with other sites.

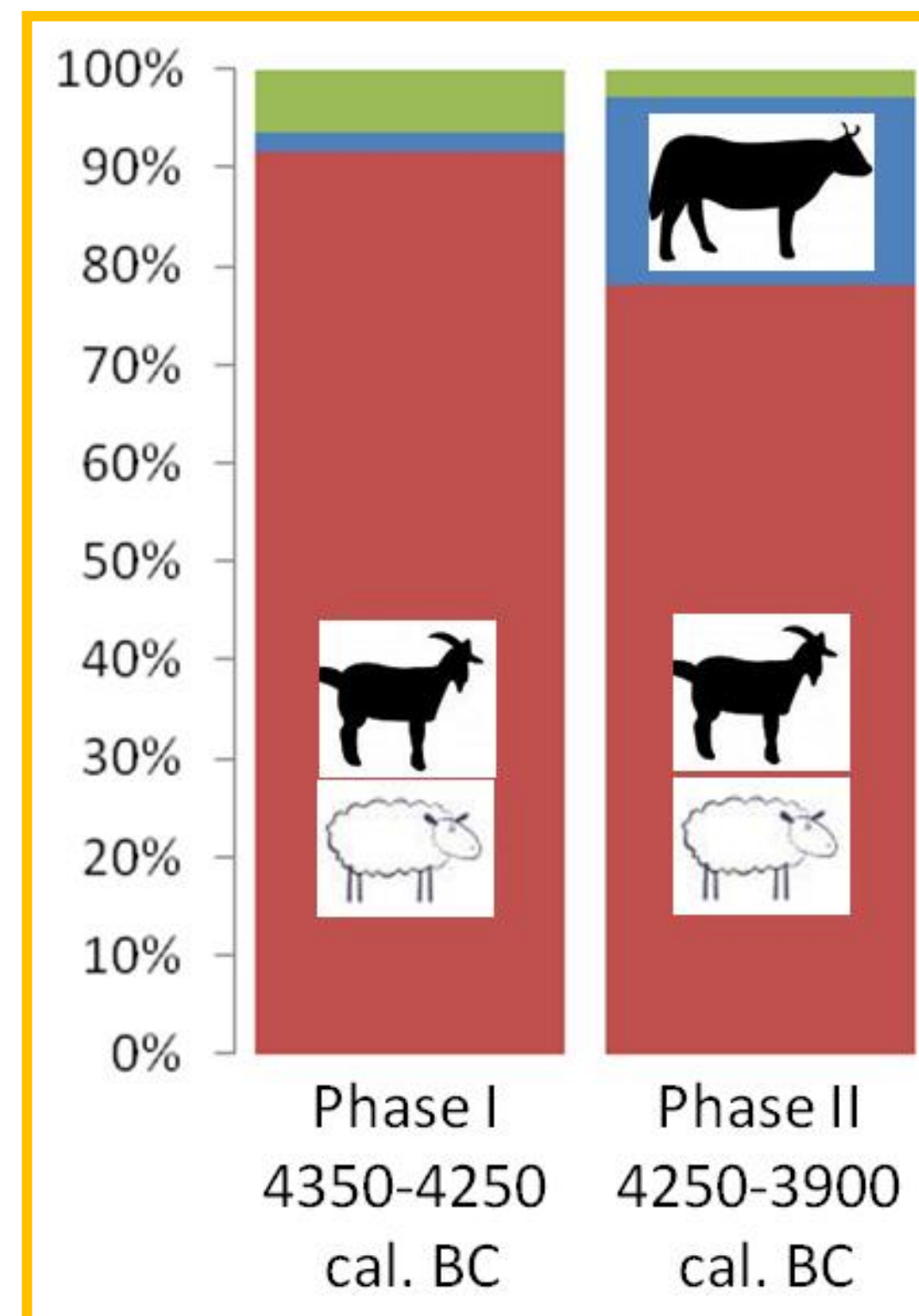


Fig. 1 Relative representation of domestic and wild mammals (green area)

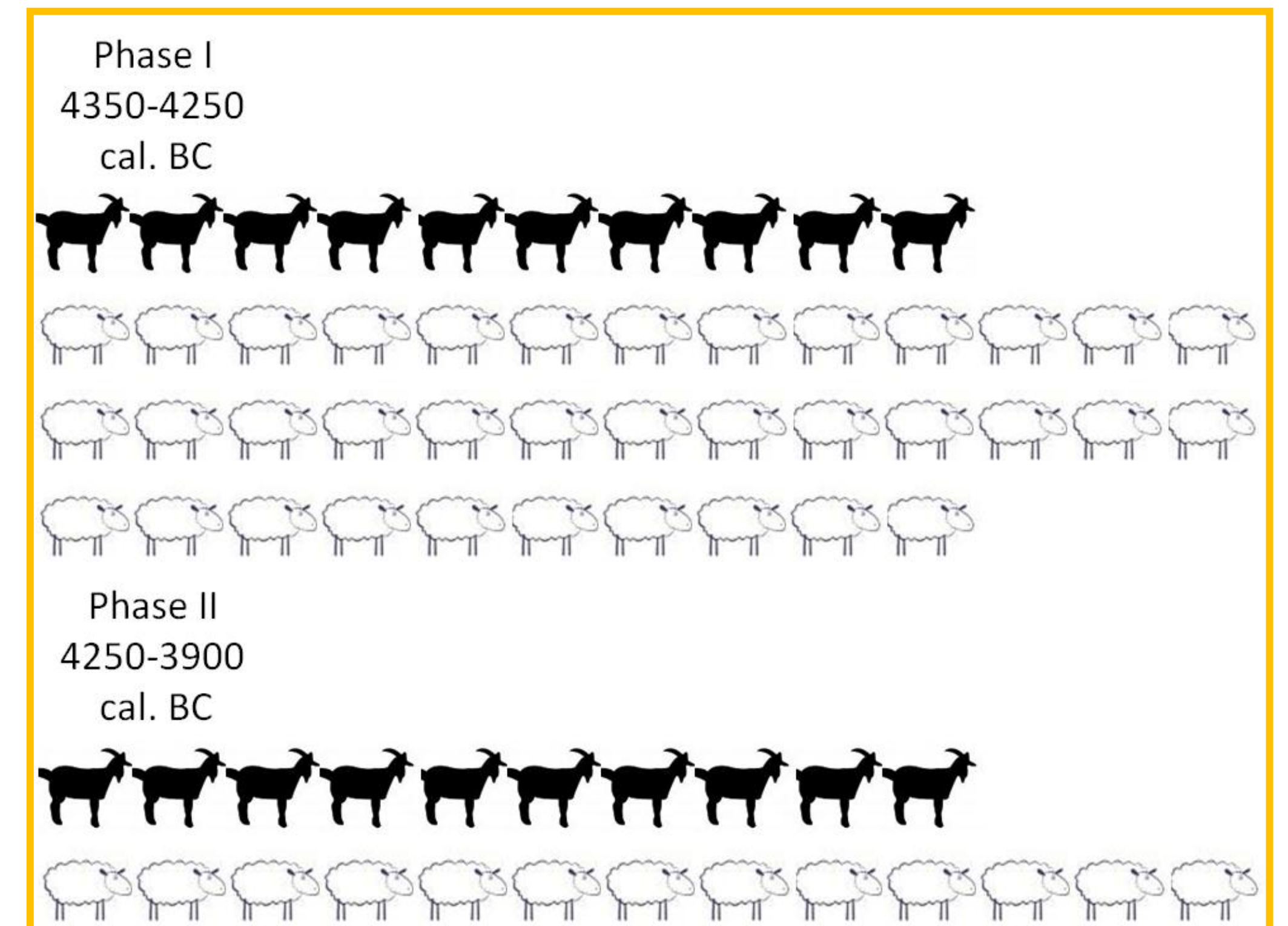


Fig. 2 Relative representation of Sheep and Goat in the two phases.

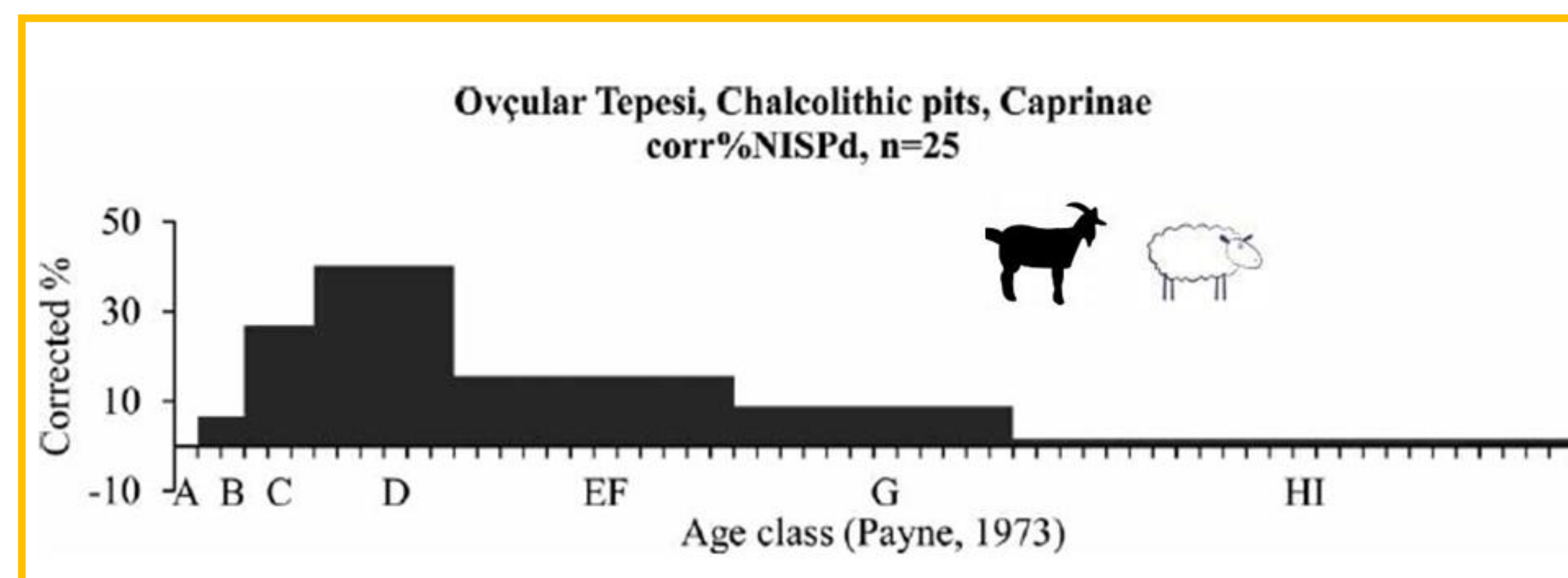


Fig. 3 Kill-off pattern for Sheep and Goat in the first phase.

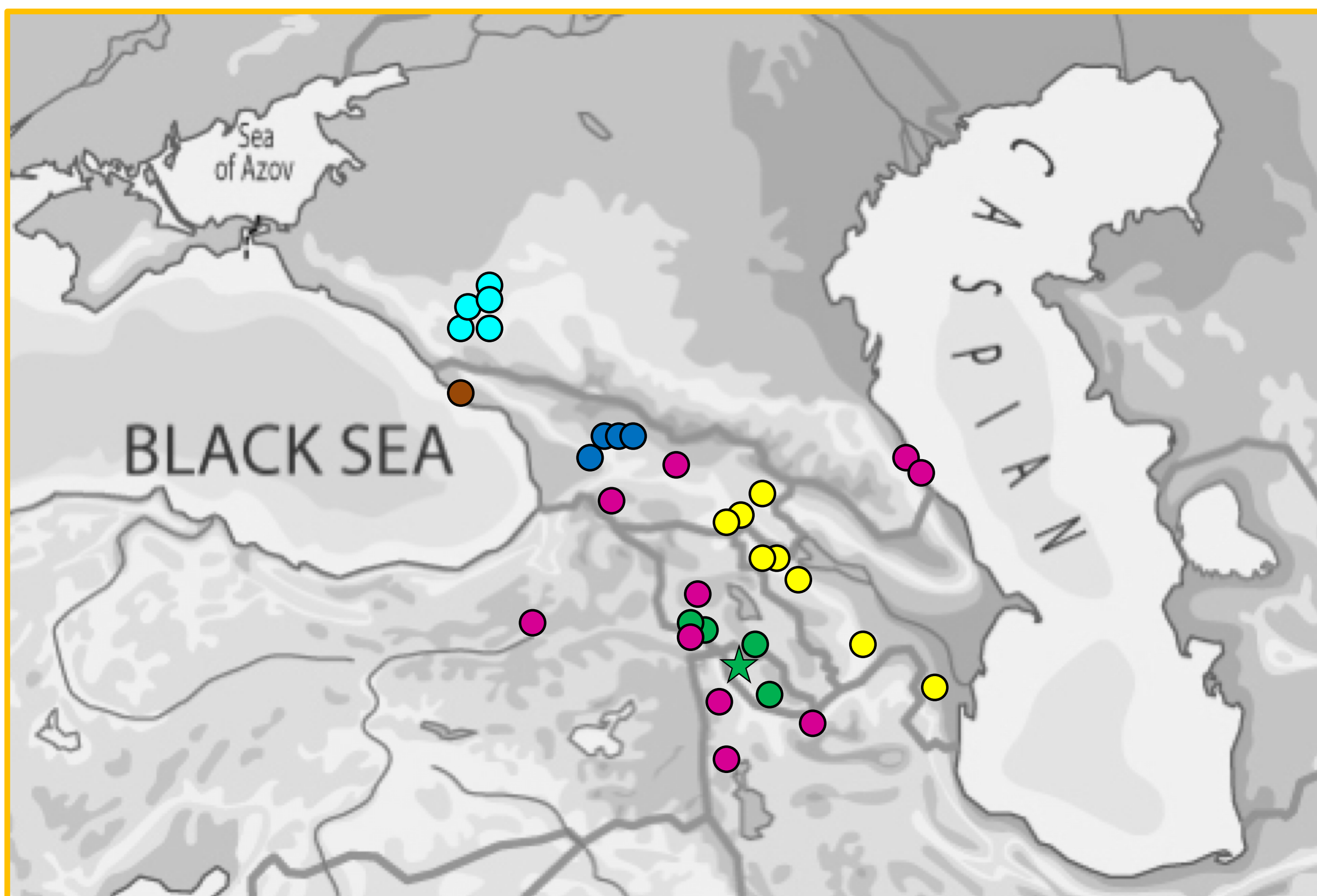


Fig. 4 Location of the sites used in Figure 5 with the same colors. Ovçular Tepesi is the green star.

Regional trends in the exploitation of animal resources

There are clear regional patterns in the exploitation of animal resources. They are probably linked with the specific environmental and climatic conditions of each area. When both Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites are present in an area, they can't be distinguished from each other. Another point of interest is the pattern of the Kura-Araxes culture which spread all over the Caucasus during the Early Bronze Age. Despite the widespread location of the Kura-Araxes settlements, their patterns of animal exploitation are quite homogeneous. There is a clear break between the subsistence practices of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic groups and the one of the Kura-Araxes in all areas except in the Araxes River valley. It could be a clue for the origin of the Kura-Araxes cultural complex.

Ovçular Tepesi among the other settlements of the Araxes valley

The subsistence strategies evidenced at Ovçular Tepesi for the Chalcolithic period are not an exception in the Araxes River valley area. Such a specialised pastoral system is also known at the contemporary site of Areni in Armenia. Furthermore, it appears that the subsistence strategies in these Chalcolithic sites are also very similar to the ones evidenced at the nearby Neolithic sites of Aknashen, Aratashen and Kültepe I, all dated to the 6th millennium BC. It is interesting to note that the faunal spectra don't allow to sort the Neolithic from the Chalcolithic sites. In term of subsistence strategies the two chronological periods are in a strong continuum. This is a piece of evidence for challenging the current definition of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic. The same assessment can be made for the Kura River valley area, north of the Lesser Caucasus.

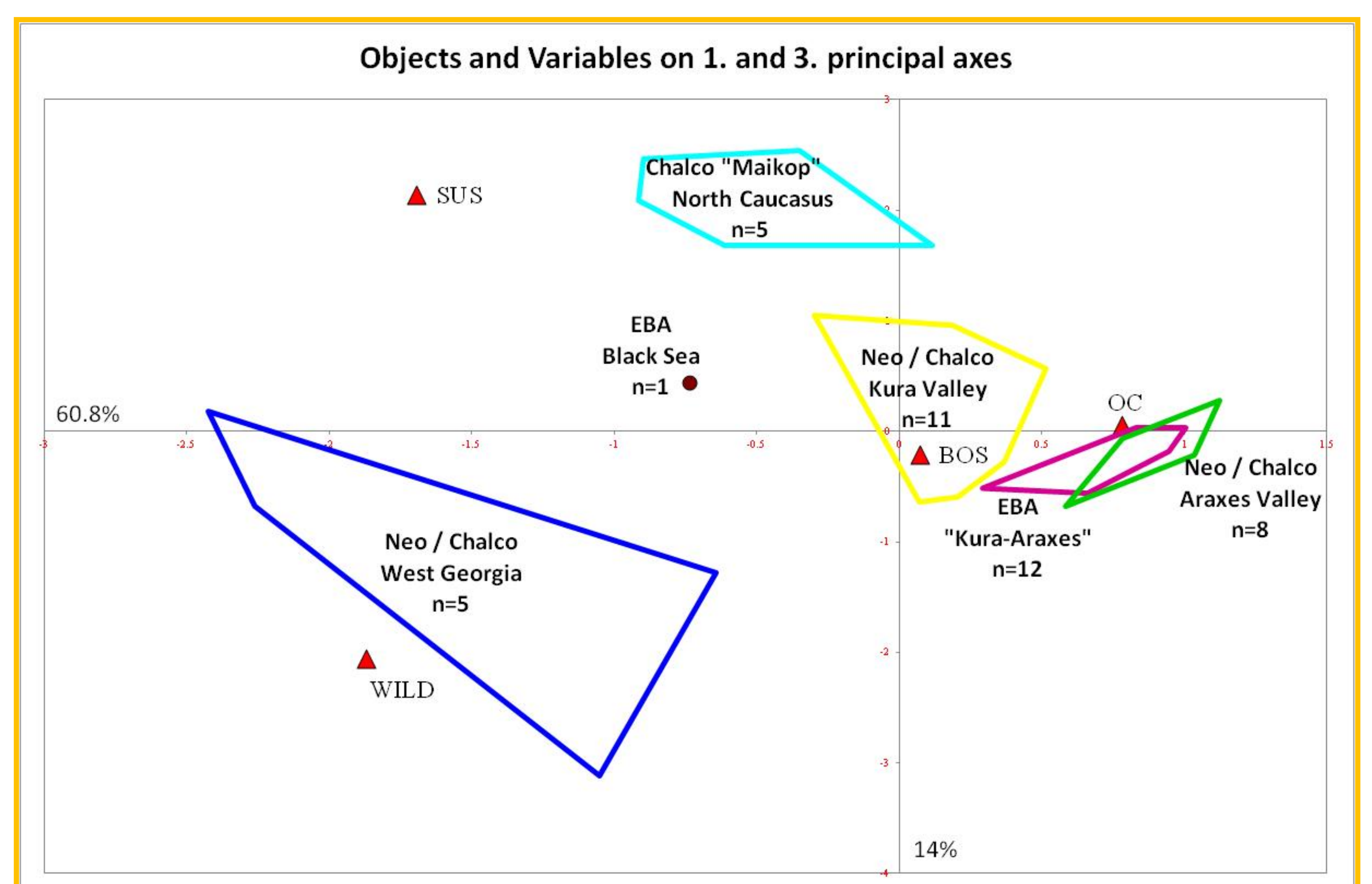


Fig. 4 Correspondence analysis of faunal spectra from different chrono-cultural groups.