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Pathways through Arslantepe

Essays in Honour of Marcella Frangipane

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Feasting the collapse. Ceremonial buildings at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age between highlands and lowlands: some considerations.

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To Marcella,

“who still believes in culture, and in hard work, and in the history of humanity and who’s in the field because she loves it...”

Flannery 1982

ABSTRACT

After the demise of the Uruk phenomenon and the collapse of the economic centralised institutions, a reorganisation of the political systems, coupled with the emergence of new forms of power, seems to have taken place in the Anatolian and Iranian highlands towards the end of the fourth millennium. Building 36 at Arslantepe, constructed by the pastoral groups that occupied the sites during period VIB₁, provides meaningful evidence on these changes. In this paper we present two comparable case studies at Godin Tepe and Hassek Hoyuk, highlighting how ceremonial feasting could have represented a new practice of power enacted by the post-Uruk Anatolian and Iranian communities at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

Keywords: Feasting, Ceremonial Building, Uruk, Kura-Araxes, Pastoralism, Arslantepe, Godin Tepe, Hassek Hoyuk.

The dynamics of social and cultural change framed into the processes of formation, collapse and transformation of the economic and political systems and the encounter between communities structured along different forms of social organisation have been some of the most privileged themes of Marcella Frangipane’s research. Dealing with the archaeological evidence from Arslantepe, she was able to approach them through an anthropological framework, rigorously respectful of the archaeological data and contextualised in an historical perspective. Her numerous works on these themes have been an inspiring source for our considerations on past cultures and societies. The present paper deals with these themes and builds upon a previous work, published in 2017 with Marcella Frangipane and other colleagues, dealing extensively with the “Building 36” dating to Period VIB₁ at Arslantepe¹. The analysis of the rich archaeological evidence gathered from and around Building 36 allowed us to hypothesise that this large structure had a ceremonial function and periodically hosted feasting events consisting of large-scale consumption of food and liquids. We also highlighted that Building 36, in spite of the nature of the occupation of Period VIB₁ recording levels of wooden and wattle and daub architecture, represented a surprising trait of continuity with the recently discovered ceremonial area of the previous Period VIA monumental complex, in spite of the radically different nature of the occupation of the two periods. This continuity seemed to us a meaningful choice replete with political and symbolic contents, even more striking if we consider that in Periods VIA and VIB₁ the communities living at Arslantepe were caught into radically different cultural phenomena, linked to

1 Palumbi *et alii* 2017.

the development of equally different trajectories of socio-economic complexity originating in the 4th millennium BC in two distinct and far-away geographical regions.

In several articles, M. Frangipane highlighted that one of these trajectories was connected to the formation of early-state political organisations founded on a centralized and tributary economy². The roots of this trajectory are to be searched for in Southern Mesopotamia, where large urban centres, such as Uruk, started to develop in the 4th millennium BC. One of the most characterising features of these centres was the monumental architecture of the religious and ceremonial buildings that presumably also were the seats of the activities of the ruling élites. This may be confirmed by the iconographic evidence often emphasising a relation between high-ranking individuals (priests, kings) and specific types of buildings. On this note, the famous vessel of Warka, clearly expresses a ceremonial narrative in the frame of which food is offered to those occupying the highest rank in the hierarchy³ and is methodically stored beyond them thus emphasising the food-based and tributary connotation of these ceremonies. The lower registers of the vessel emphasise the economic symbolism attached to these ceremonies by depicting, from bottom to top, water courses, ears of cereals and finally a row of animals exclusively composed of caprines. These images seem to symbolically and figuratively represent the basis and founding resources of the staple-based economy of the South-Mesopotamian centres of the Uruk period: extensive irrigated agriculture⁴ and specialised husbandry strategies focused on sheep and goat⁵ all aimed at feeding with cereal-based foodstuffs, mutton and animal secondary products, the tributary economy and the redistributive activities of the South-Mesopotamian early-state institutions⁶. During the second half of the 4th millennium BC, this vertically structured socio-economic trajectory, framed into a cultural package strongly inspired to the South-Mesopotamian material traditions – the so-called Uruk culture – exerted a profound influence over the communities of a vast area of the Near East reaching north as far as the Taurus mountains and the Anatolian and Iranian highlands. While explanations for the expansion of the Uruk culture are multiple and, as Marcella Frangipane and other authors highlighted⁷, cannot be reduced to single factors, it is clear that the interplay between stimuli linked to expansive socio-economic and ideological needs of the Mesopotamian centres and indigenous socio-cultural dynamics in the regions surrounding the Mesopotamian alluvium played a fundamental role in the way this South-Mesopotamian trajectory was perceived, adopted and re-adapted. All the more so because while the Uruk culture was spreading in a large area of the Near East, the small communities of South Caucasus, Eastern Anatolia and North-Western Iran emerged in the second half of the 4th millennium BC as centres of elaboration of a completely different social trajectory framed into an absolutely original package of material cultural traditions. The so-called Kura-Araxes culture, after the name of the two main rivers of South Caucasus, featured a set of very distinctive traits shared by the highland communities, starting for instance with a distinctive ceramic horizon characterised by specific technical, morphological and functional traits. Conversely to the Uruk-related settlements, the small Kura-Araxes villages did not host monumental buildings – be they public, administrative or ceremonial – and they were exclusively composed of domestic units. The absence of central political institutions was completely replaced by the focal role played by the household not only in the productive, but also in the ritual and ceremonial life of these communities as it is for instance suggested by the symbolic centrality of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic andirons in the domestic space⁸. Founded on a mixed agro-pastoral economy with no clear evidence of any form of specialisation in the animal husbandry strategies⁹, the Kura-Araxes communi-

2 Frangipane 1996: 177-216; 2001a; 2016; 2017.

3 Pollock 1999.

4 Adams, 1981; Pollock 1999; Mc Corrison 1997.

5 Zeder 1988.

6 Sherrat 1997; Mc Corrison 1997.

7 Frangipane 2001a; Schwartz 2001; Stein 2001.

8 Greenberg, Palumbi 2015.

9 Sagona 2017: 247-278.

ties seem to have been homogeneously organised along ties of kinship and, as it is also suggested by a strongly equalitarian funerary ideology, there is no hint in the material record allowing to recognise the existence of social élites. Towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, the Kura-Araxes traditions broke their pristine geographic boundaries to spread across an impressively large area of the Near East by following two main axes: the Zagros and the Taurus mountains. Migrations of Kura-Araxes communities from the “homeland” have often been advocated to explain the “expansion” of Kura-Araxes cultural markers. However, the archaeological evidence from some sites points to the fact that the dynamics that triggered-off this phenomenon should be searched in the socio-political developments taking place in the Iranian and Anatolian highlands where the political collapse of the Uruk-related centres opened new social and political opportunities to encourage the expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture¹⁰.

In the time-frame stretching approximately from 3500 and 2900 BC, Arslantepe recorded the impact of these two different trajectories that overlapped diachronically and gave way to hybrid cultural developments towards the end of the 4th millennium BC. It seems to us that the ceremonial Building 36 needs to be contextualised to these developments and in this paper we would like to extend the scopes of our previous work by looking for regional comparisons that may further elucidate the nature and meanings attached to this types of buildings and the related social developments. As a matter of fact, cogent comparisons for the communal Building 36 are absent in the Upper Euphrates and so they are in Eastern Anatolia and South Caucasus. In this paper we propose two comparable cases at Godin Tepe in the Kangavar Valley of the Central Zagros, and Hassek Höyük, in the Middle Anatolian Euphrates valley on the southern piedmont of the Taurus range (Fig. 1, *a*). These parallels do not only concern architectural analogies but they can also be extended to comparable socio-cultural trajectories that took place at these sites.

ARSLANTEPE

We start this comparison from Arslantepe, as we would like to summarise some of the most salient features of Building 36 which seem tightly linked, in functional and possibly also in symbolic terms, to the developments that took place at the site during the previous Period VIA (3500-3200 BC ca). In this period, Arslantepe witnessed the construction of a multi-functional monumental complex where an élite controlled, by means of a complex bureaucratic apparatus, economic transactions and redistributive activities of a centralised political and economic institution. Recent excavations revealed that the northernmost sector of the monumental complex consisted of a large court and an “audience-ceremonial hall” (A1358) that presumably hosted public gatherings linked to special ceremonies¹¹. The development of a centrally controlled economy at Arslantepe had a profound impact on specialised craft and primary products production. As concerns the latter, faunal data reveals a marked change towards specialisation, as husbandry strategies at Arslantepe VIA saw a steep increase in caprines (70%), when compared to the first half of the 4th millennium BC, in full concordance with the strategies adopted in the regions impacted by the Uruk phenomenon¹². It has been suggested that specialised husbandry at Arslantepe was conducted by groups of transhumant pastoralists, that developed in this period as the result of the entrenchment of a centralised economy in the region¹³ and that the Red-Black Burnished Ware (RBBW), recalling traditions from contemporary Central Anatolia, that constituted about 10% of the ceramic assemblage of Period VIA monumental complex, was a cultural marker of these pastoral groups.

10 Palumbi 2017.

11 Frangipane 2016.

12 Frangipane, Siracusano 1998: 237-246; Zeder 1988.

13 Palumbi 2010.

Towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, the VIA complex was destroyed by a violent fire. The new occupation at Arslantepe (Period VIB₁) that immediately followed the filling of the ruins of the monumental complex, spanned between 3200 and 2900 BC approximately¹⁴ and consisted of several levels of occupation. The earliest levels recorded a series of light wooden structures, pits, postholes (possibly the remains of fences for animals) separated by black thin layers of organic material that, altogether, point to repeated but non permanent modalities of occupation¹⁵. These black layers have been interpreted as the result of the decomposition of wood and vegetation that grew after each abandonment of the site¹⁶. It is noteworthy to recall that since these earliest levels of occupation faunal data show, as it also was in the previous VIA period, specialized herding strategies focused on caprines (70-90%)¹⁷. On the basis of this evidence, it has been hypothesized that in the earliest moments of period VIB₁ the settlement was seasonally occupied by groups of pastoralists, following the movements and rhythms of transhumance¹⁸.

The appearance of these transhumant pastoralists in Period VIB₁ is also accompanied by significant changes in terms of cultural developments clearly tangible in the ceramic traditions that recorded an almost exclusive production of hand-made red-black ware, recalling the same firing techniques as the analogous production of Period VIA but featured morphological repertoires clearly inspired to the Kura-Araxes traditions.

The second level of occupation at Arslantepe VIB₁ showed a more structured organisation. While the southern slopes of the mound were occupied with wattle and daub huts and fences, further north the recent excavations exposed the imposing mud-brick Building 36, that was constructed right on the top of hall A1358 of the previous VIA Period, thus representing a strong trait of continuity, in topographical and symbolic terms with the earlier public monumental complex¹⁹. In its second phase of construction, which is the best preserved, Building 36 (Fig. 1, *b*) consisted of the large hall A1000 (9,35x4,10m) accessible through two entrances on the long southern wall and was equipped with a big central circular fireplace and a small protruding “closet” (A1374). On its western shorter side A1000 communicated with the rear-room A1369 (5,8x4,8m). Building 36 stood out from the surrounding huts not only for its dimensions and building techniques but also for the impressive quantity and quality of in situ materials. The conspicuous presence of decorated vessels (almost absent in the surrounding residential huts) as well as unusual shapes related to special drinking functions have suggested that the hall A1000 could have hosted special events unfolding around the large fireplace. At the same time, the abundant evidence of heavy duty stone tools and of one small fireplace in the rear-room A1369 point to food processing activities, while the two metal spear-heads and numerous large jars suggest that it could have also been used as a storage room for food and valuable items. The special function of this building was also confirmed by the presence, immediately to the north of it, of an open area where thousands of animal bones interspersed with layers of ashes and ceramics were retrieved. These bones belonged almost exclusively to the best part of sheep and goats²⁰ and ceramics mainly consisted of open shapes (bowls) thus pointing to a dump related to activities of food consumption. This data altogether have encouraged to interpret Building 36 as a ceremonial building that hosted feasting events consisting of the consumption of large amounts of beverages and meat, the leftovers of which were successively dumped in the adjacent northern area. Building 36 was destroyed by a fire and underwent a last phase of use when it seems to have lost its ceremonial function and feasting connotation²¹.

14 Palumbi *et alii* 2017: 118.

15 Frangipane 2014.

16 Palmieri, Cellai 1983.

17 Siracusano, Bartosiewicz 2012; Palumbi, Siracusano 2014.

18 Frangipane *et alii* 2005; Frangipane 2014.

19 Palumbi *et alii* 2017: 90-91, 119-120.

20 Palumbi, Siracusano 2014; Siracusano, Bartosiewicz 2012.

21 Frangipane 2014.

Worth mentioning is that the very end of period VIB₁ is marked by the construction of a stone-cist tomb, the so-called “Royal Tomb”, located on the western slope of the hill, emphasising the existence of powerful élites that, according to the types and styles of the grave-goods, must have entertained intense relations with the Eastern Anatolian and Caucasian communities²².

GODIN TEPE

The site of Godin is located in the Kangavar valley, on the Zagros Mountains in Central Western Iran. During the second half of the 4th millennium BC, the settlement recorded, in Period VI:1, the construction of the “Oval Compound” that appeared as a large multifunctional complex comprising several adjoining buildings around a central courtyard, surrounded by an enclosure²³. Among these buildings, the largest, possibly “monumental”, northernmost one certainly had special administrative functions judging from the presence of numerical tablets. Several traits of the material culture retrieved from the Oval Compound are linked to the Uruk traditions, going from the typical niches and buttresses decorating the buildings, technologies applied to accountancy and administration (numerical tablets and cylinder seals), the iconography of the seals and clay sealings and, finally, the wheel-made pottery and its morphological repertoires. As concerns the primary production, a picture comparable to that of the animal husbandry at Arslantepe Period VIA is also recorded at Godin, by showing a marked predominance of caprines (82%) over the rest of the reared species according to the main husbandry trend recorded in the Uruk period²⁴.

Somewhere around the end of the 4th millennium the Oval Compound was abandoned and possibly very little time passed between this abandonment and the re-occupation of the site (Period IV). According to a recent reconstruction proposed by M. Rothman, Period IV at Godin Tepe was composed of at least two main occupations²⁵. The earlier one (Period IV:2) dating between the very end of the 4th millennium and the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, recorded, like in the earliest levels of Period VIB₁ at Arslantepe, flimsy remains of architectural structures built in light materials such as wood or wattle and daub. Rothman suggests that the use of light architectural materials could point to seasonal occupations related to transhumant people²⁶. Faunal data from Period IV at Godin Tepe, by recording specialized husbandry strategies focused on caprines (85%)²⁷, could confirm this “pastoral transhumant” connotation of the community of phase IV and simultaneously stresses a strong continuity with the animal strategies of the former Uruk phase. Finally, it is also important to remark that, like at Arslantepe VIB₁, the appearance of these transhumant groups at Godin Tepe is accompanied by the first large-scale production of ceramics featuring technical, morphological and decorative traits clearly inspired to the Kura-Araxes traditions. The flimsy occupations of Period IV:2 were followed by more substantial mud-brick architecture in Period IV:1 featuring a large rectangular building (Building 3) and a radial complex of domestic structures hinting at a more permanent occupation of the settlement. Building 3²⁸, that stood out in terms of its dimensions (13x9m) was composed of two rooms (Fig. 1, c). The entrance room 8 had black painted benches running along its walls and painted geometric designs on north-eastern wall and, in the middle, a raised platform. In comparison to the other structures from the same level, the contents of room 8 are different in terms of quantity and nature starting with an abundant concentration of animal bones, mostly sheep and goat, and a high number of serving and eating vessels. Room 8 communicated through a small stair

22 Frangipane *et alii* 2001; Frangipane 2001b.

23 Weiss, Young 1975; Rothman, Badler 2011: 93-99.

24 Crabtree 2011a.

25 Rothman 2011: 160-163.

26 *Ib.*: 181-183.

27 Crabtree 2011b.

28 Rothman 2011: 183-184.

with the smaller rear-room 7, which was also equipped with benches along the walls. At its interior, besides animal bones, heavy-duty tools for food preparation and some eating and serving vessels were also found. Under the floor of Building 3 trashing pits were discovered which contained numerous animal bones. As concerns the Kura-Araxes related ceramics, which do not differ from those of the phase IV:2, decorated pottery associated to Building 3 seems to be abundant. The life-use of Building 3 was long and even if it went through several changes especially concerning furniture and equipment, it did not seem to change its function. As concerns the latter, M. Rothman, by taking into account its features and contents, considers it as being a public building for ritual sacrifice or public feasting²⁹.

HASSEK HÖYÜK

The site of Hassek Höyük is located in the Middle Anatolian Euphrates valley on the southern piedmont of the Taurus range. In the second half of the 4th millennium BC the small settlement was surrounded by an enclosure wall and hosted a large residential tripartite structure with a central room equipped with two fireplaces and niches recalling the Uruk architectural traditions³⁰. In addition, other rectangular and monocellular structures were interpreted, judging by the remains, as productive units with different purposes, including lithic production and storage. Both architectural and ceramic evidence show that the Late Chalcolithic Hassek Höyük was a small Uruk related community practising agriculture and husbandry, with an unusual preference for pig, but also specialised craft-work connected to lithic production. Formerly interpreted as the outpost of a foreign Uruk community, later studies have highlighted the indigenous character of its material culture³¹ that nonetheless shows strong southern connections.

At the beginning of the Early Bronze I, in Phase 4b, immediately following the Uruk occupation, the site underwent a deep change. A large, rectangular building (the so-called “Kellergebäudes”-11x3,5-4m) north-south oriented was built, apparently isolated, in the central area of the settlement (Fig. 1, *d*). It had an imposing stone foundation, 1,20 m wide, that points to the existence of two storeys; the lower one, discovered during the excavations, was probably subterranean³². Inside the building no material was found, with the exception of the skeleton of a pig in the north-eastern corner, interpreted as a ritual offer. According to the excavators, the large dimensions of the building, its architectural features, its central position and finally the animal skeleton lying on the floor point to a communal and ritual or cultic function³³. In sub-phase 4a, a small rectangular structure composed of two rooms was built to the east of the building when it was still in use³⁴. In the following Phase 3, while the settlement saw the construction of several rectangular domestic structures organised along two perpendicular streets, the large building was abandoned. While the causes for this abandonment are not clear, archaeological evidence shows that the depression left by its collapse was filled with ashes and large quantities of pig bones consisting of skulls and limbs in anatomical connection³⁵.

On the one hand, the large quantity of pig bones highlights a strong continuity with the Late Chalcolithic husbandry strategies, on the other hand the selection of skulls and limbs could have been related to cultic activities³⁶. This data can hint at practices of large scale consumption of pork in Phase 3 and the fact that the leftovers were dumped in the area previously occupied by the building may not

29 *Ib.*: 184.

30 Behm-Blanke 1984: 34-40.

31 Helwing 1999.

32 Behm-Blanke 1981: 20.

33 *Ib.*: 20-21.

34 Behm-Banke 1984: 46.

35 Behm-Blanke 1981: 17-18; 1984: 46-47.

36 Behm-Blanke 1981: 18.

have been haphazard, but a symbolic act of dumping, considering the special connection with ritual consumption of pig that the building witnessed in its first phase of use.

In the following Phases 2 and 1 the settlement changed its former layout, but its occupation continued uninterrupted. It is only at the very end of the Early Bronze Age I that Hassek was abandoned, and it was probably after its abandonment, that can be dated a cist tomb containing the body of a man accompanied with a rich array of funerary goods³⁷, comprising a series of metal objects recalling some of the repertoires of the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb”³⁸.

CEREMONIAL BUILDINGS IN THE HIGHLANDS: COMPARISON AND INTERPRETATION

The buildings analysed in this paper show various degrees of comparability starting from the fact that they are all significantly larger than the surrounding built environment, thus transmitting a well codified “sense” of dimensional and functional difference from the adjacent domestic or residential structures. Their large dimensions could suggest a collective or communal function, but dimensional criteria alone cannot be considered as sufficient to identify their special purposes. Beyond these, admittedly very general, dimensional analogies, our impression is that Arslantepe and Godin Tepe show a series of cogent parallels, that can only partially be extended to Hassek Höyük, which will be discussed in a second moment.

This is because the parallels between Arslantepe and Godin Tepe not only concern the layout of the two buildings and related types of activities, but they can also be drawn to the modalities and dynamics of occupation of the sites, the analogous historical and socio-cultural developments and finally a comparable geographical location. In spite of the differences in the axes of access, entrances (two lateral at Arslantepe and one entrance on the main frontal axis at Godin) and the plan of the front-rooms (rectangular elongated at Arslantepe and almost quadrangular at Godin) both of the buildings were organised in two interconnecting rooms. The front-room was equipped with a fixed central furniture, a large circular fireplace at Arslantepe and a platform at Godin Tepe, pointing to their central role in the activities carried out in them. As concerns the latter, the concentration of special containers for liquid consumption (Arslantepe), decorated ceramics (at both sites) and wall paintings (Godin Tepe) confirm the practical and symbolic importance of the front-rooms in the general function of these buildings. In a fully comparable way, at both sites the rear-rooms probably were auxiliary spaces, as they both hosted pieces of furniture and working tools related to the processing, preparation and cooking of food.

As to food, there is abundant piece of information pointing to the fact that food-consumption was one of the main activities carried out in or around these buildings. The large quantities of animal bones found inside (Godin Tepe) and in dumps immediately outside of the buildings (Arslantepe) suggest that they could have been leftovers of meals consumed in the frame of collective ceremonies. While there is no trace of charred cereal grains, animal meat represented a substantial, if not the exclusive, ingredient of these ceremonial meals. Faunal data confirm that animals consumed were not “special” or exotic species, but rather the most common ones reared at these sites (sheep and goat). On this note, it is worth reminding that animal husbandry in Period VIB₁ at Arslantepe and in Period IV at Godin Tepe was carried out according to specialised strategies focused on caprines, analogous to those recorded in the previous Uruk-related phases and corresponding to the general “trend” of the Uruk animal husbandry.

It is also noteworthy to observe that at both sites, this strong emphasis on specialised caprine strategies is also coupled, immediately after the Uruk phases, with occupations recording flimsy ar-

37 Behm-Blanke 1984: 48-53.

38 Palumbi 2007-2008.

chitectural remains interpreted as temporary camp-sites of transhumant pastoralists³⁹. In their turn, these temporary occupations were followed at both Arslantepe and Godin Tepe by the construction of large ceremonial buildings, pointing to more substantial and permanent forms of occupation at both settlements. At the same time, the fact that the material culture from the ceremonial contexts, and in particular the Kura-Araxes related ceramics, shows striking traits of continuity with the ceramics of the previous temporary occupations and points to cultural connections between these ceremonial buildings and the transhumant pastoralists that previously occupied both settlements.

Finally, in terms of the broader regional developments, the two buildings can be comparable as their construction has to be contextualised to a phase of radical change that saw, after the end of the Uruk influence, the impact of the Kura-Araxes culture at Arslantepe and Godin Tepe like, more in general, in the whole East-Anatolian and Iranian highlands.

From this point of view, as we suggested in a previous work⁴⁰, the presence of domestic furniture in these large buildings may have conferred a connotation of monumental ceremonial “houses” by possibly borrowing the new “house concept” from the Kura-Araxes culture as a symbolic and practical institution that played a central role in the organisation of the social and political relationships of the community. However, in spite of the new Kura-Araxes oriented socio-cultural environment, the monumental character of these ceremonial houses, as well as their socio-economic contexts of ascription, possibly to be identified with transhumant pastoral communities, seem to represent a persistency of the former Uruk cultural and socio-economic legacy.

CEREMONIAL BUILDINGS IN THE LOWLANDS

These two interrelated traits inherited from the Uruk developments seem to have evolved in the regions of highlands in quite a sharp contrast with the “post-Uruk” developments in the Upper Mesopotamian lowlands. In the same period, small-scale communities sharing a specific ceramic tradition (the so-called Ninevite 5 horizon) populated the Syrian Jezirah and the Upper Tigris valley. Also the Ninevite 5 settlements hosted a very specific type of large scale specialised architecture consisting of silos and platforms, as documented at Tell Atij and Tell Knedig, and of monumental granaries, as in the case of the “Round Building” at Raqa’i⁴¹. The fact that cereal-processing infrastructures took monumental forms⁴² emphasises, also from a symbolic point of view, the fundamental role played by the agricultural economy in these communities⁴³. Conversely, in the Ninevite 5 settlements, ritual architecture was comparatively smaller than the cereal-processing infrastructures and as in the case of Raqa’I, it was even incorporated in the monumental granary⁴⁴. It has been suggested that the small ritual Ninevite 5 buildings, that could have hosted more “intimate” types of religious ceremonies, institutionalised a rural ideology aimed at legitimising the mobilisation of the agricultural surplus to the benefit of regional élites⁴⁵.

This “model” of monumental rural architecture expressed by the Ninevite 5 farming communities, presumably sedentary and structured along a system of cohesive co-residentiality, seems to have been radically different from the model of monumental ceremonial architecture observed in the highlands at Arslantepe and Godin Tepe. First of all, because the ceremonial buildings of the highlands were not exclusively related to the storage of food, but rather to its consumption, more specifically meat (mutton), which was the primary product of specialised caprine husbandry. Secondly, their large

39 Frangipane 2014; Palumbi 2010; Rothman 2011: 182-183.

40 Palumbi *et alii* 2017.

41 Rova 2013; Akkermans, Schwartz 2003.

42 Schwartz 2000; Frangipane 2001a.

43 Rova 2013; Akkermans, Schwartz 2003.

44 Dunham 1993.

45 Schwartz 2000: 178.

dimensions point to commensal practices involving a large number of people. Finally, because they seem to be related to pastoral transhumant communities.

The case of Hassek Hoyuk, on the southern piedmont of the Taurus mountains, does not seem to fit either the case of the Ninevite 5 ritual buildings (in terms of the architectural plan, dimensions and related findings), nor exactly that of the buildings at Arslantepe and Godin Tepe in the highlands. We cannot exclude that this mismatch with the latter could be partly due to the poor state of preservation of the Kellergebäudes, but other differences seem to be more “structural” in nature. First of all because at Hassek there is no trace of temporary occupations, neither before nor after the construction of the monumental building, and conversely the settlement seems stable and permanent throughout the Early Bronze Age sequence. The sedentary nature of the settlement could also explain why pig, that can be raised according to different husbandry practices but which is not typical of long-distance transhumance⁴⁶, played such an important role in the husbandry at Hassek and consequently why pork (and not mutton) was the meat consumed in or around the large building. Finally, the cultural developments at Hassek (as in the all Euphrates valley south of the Taurus mountains) unfolded in terms of a stronger continuity with the Uruk period (with no traces of Kura-Araxes intrusion) than in the Anatolian and Iranian highlands. However, in spite of these differences, the large quantities of meat associated to the use and post-use phases of the possibly ceremonial building at Hassek points to commonalities with the ceremonial buildings of the highlands. This may suggest that new political strategies, under the form of feasting practices, were breaking through the north in the southern piedmont of the Taurus mountains and were possibly re-adapted to local socio-economic contexts and political dynamics that may have seen, for instance, the emergence of new élites as witnessed by the rich grave, marking the final occupation of Hassek.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Piecing this data together and on the basis of these considerations, we propose that the ceremonial buildings from the highlands could be framed into the strategies and political practices of an emergent “pastoral ideology”.

First of all, because if we consider that these large ceremonial “houses” were built after temporary occupations, their construction could have been a strategy to occupy monumentally, and consequently more visibly and permanently, the settlements. In the case of Arslantepe, this strategy, that may not have been dissimilar from that behind the construction of the Royal Tomb⁴⁷, could have been aimed at legitimising the occupation of the site in the face of other contemporary sedentary and farming-based communities that still lived in territory around Arslantepe in this period⁴⁸.

Simultaneously, by considering the non-residential and territorially mobile nature of these communities (or at least of part of them), ceremonial, possibly periodical, meetings could have allowed them to tighten and strengthen internal social ties and inter-group political networks.

Finally, if feasting is a social strategy allowing to transform informal power into institutionalised formal political roles⁴⁹, the commensal events hosted in these ceremonial buildings could have been for these pastoral communities, and especially for their élites such as those that appear in the Royal Tomb at Arslantepe, a strategy to institutionalise their new political role after the collapse of the centralised institutions of the Uruk period.

From this point of view, the resources available in the Anatolian and Iranian highlands, such as the large pastures and metals (as highlighted in the Arslantepe Royal Tomb) could have encouraged

46 Price *et alii* 2017.

47 Palumbi 2007-2008.

48 Frangipane 2015.

49 Dietler, Hayden 2001: 17.

the development of a new economic role of the pastoral communities associated with a growing political role resulting from the preferential relations that they started to entertain with the Kura-Araxes communities from Southern Caucasus.

Marcella Frangipane wrote that “*what is thought of as a «collapse» was merely a change, in other words a few elements – even important ones – were transformed within the overall system that had fashioned a civilisation, while other elements are simultaneously retained and adapted to the new conditions representing the continuation of what are often equally important aspects of traditional relations between the members of a given society*”⁵⁰.

The ceremonial buildings discussed in this paper could have been the result of the collapse of a trajectory linked to the formation of the earliest centralised economies of the Near East, where food represented a fundamental source for political negotiation and construction of inequality, and where architectural monumentality symbolised the power of hierarchized institutions. The new post-Uruk ceremonial buildings seem to stand in direct continuity with those of the Uruk period in terms of the semiotics attached to monumental architecture, but also as a novelty in terms of the practices they hosted and were conceived for. While food still remained central, feasting events may have replaced the former hierarchized modalities of food-consumption of the Uruk period with new socialised practices of commensality that were the expression of a different type of social organisation⁵¹. Although not bureaucratised as the previous chalcolithic ones, the new post-Uruk pastoral societies showed anyway forms of inequality with the emergence of élites that may have been able to mobilise food for feasting in order to acquire new institutionalised political roles. Feasting could have represented, in the frame of an emerging pastoral ideology, a vehicle of transformation of the political system, as well as of affirmation of pastoral societies who remained one of the main socio-economic “components” of continuity between past and present, and the protagonists of the new late 4th/early-3rd millennium BC political and cultural developments of the Anatolian and Iranian highlands.

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50 Frangipane 2009.

51 Palumbi *et alii* 2017.

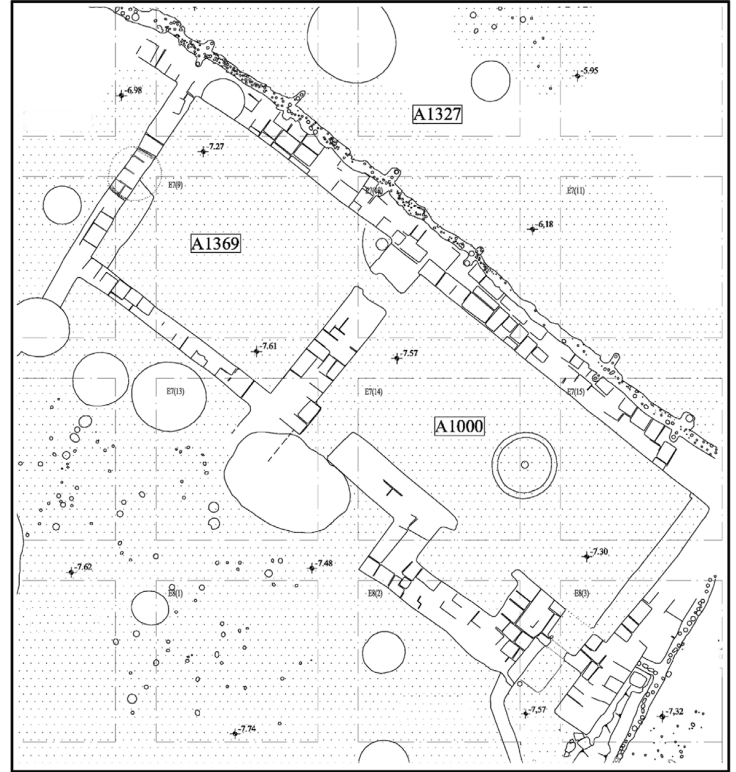
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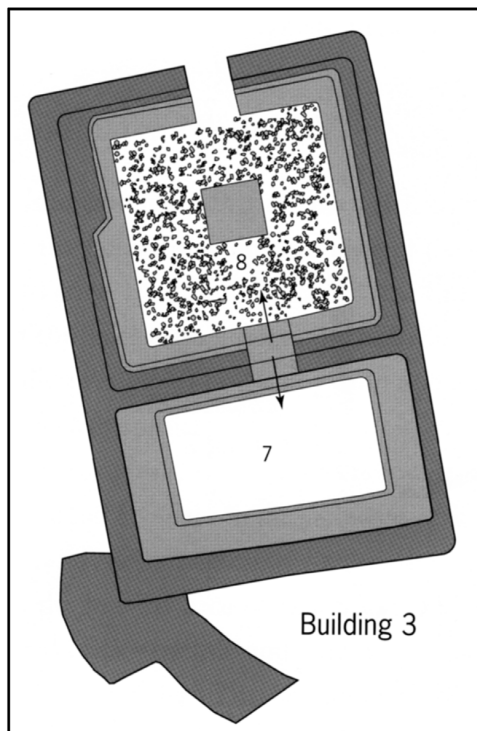
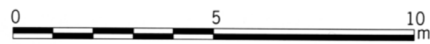
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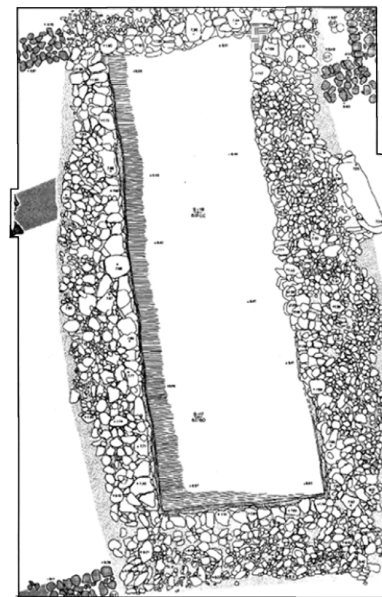
a)



b)



c)



d)

Fig. 1 - a) Map of the Near East with the main sites mentioned in the text; b) Arslantepe: Building 36, Period VIB1 (Archivio Missione Archeologica Italiana nell'Anatolia Orientale); c) Godin Tepe: Building 3, Phase IV:1b (Gopnik, Rothman 2011: 162, Fig. 5.16); d) Hassek Höyük: Kellergebäudes, Phase 4b (Behm-Blanke 1984: 45, Fig. 6).

Feasting the collapse. Ceremonial buildings at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age between highlands and lowlands: some considerations.

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To Marcella,

“who still believes in culture, and in hard work, and in the history of humanity and who’s in the field because she loves it...”

Flannery 1982

ABSTRACT

After the demise of the Uruk phenomenon and the collapse of the economic centralised institutions, a reorganisation of the political systems, coupled with the emergence of new forms of power, seems to have taken place in the Anatolian and Iranian highlands towards the end of the fourth millennium. Building 36 at Arslantepe, constructed by the pastoral groups that occupied the sites during period VIB₁, provides meaningful evidence on these changes. In this paper we present two comparable case studies at Godin Tepe and Hassek Hoyuk, highlighting how ceremonial feasting could have represented a new practice of power enacted by the post-Uruk Anatolian and Iranian communities at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

Keywords: Feasting, Ceremonial Building, Uruk, Kura-Araxes, Pastoralism, Arslantepe, Godin Tepe, Hassek Hoyuk.

The dynamics of social and cultural change framed into the processes of formation, collapse and transformation of the economic and political systems and the encounter between communities structured along different forms of social organisation have been some of the most privileged themes of Marcella Frangipane’s research. Dealing with the archaeological evidence from Arslantepe, she was able to approach them through an anthropological framework, rigorously respectful of the archaeological data and contextualised in an historical perspective. Her numerous works on these themes have been an inspiring source for our considerations on past cultures and societies. The present paper deals with these themes and builds upon a previous work, published in 2017 with Marcella Frangipane and other colleagues, dealing extensively with the “Building 36” dating to Period VIB₁ at Arslantepe¹. The analysis of the rich archaeological evidence gathered from and around Building 36 allowed us to hypothesise that this large structure had a ceremonial function and periodically hosted feasting events consisting of large-scale consumption of food and liquids. We also highlighted that Building 36, in spite of the nature of the occupation of Period VIB₁ recording levels of wooden and wattle and daub architecture, represented a surprising trait of continuity with the recently discovered ceremonial area of the previous Period VIA monumental complex, in spite of the radically different nature of the occupation of the two periods. This continuity seemed to us a meaningful choice replete with political and symbolic contents, even more striking if we consider that in Periods VIA and VIB₁ the communities living at Arslantepe were caught into radically different cultural phenomena, linked to

1 Palumbi *et alii* 2017.

the development of equally different trajectories of socio-economic complexity originating in the 4th millennium BC in two distinct and far-away geographical regions.

In several articles, M. Frangipane highlighted that one of these trajectories was connected to the formation of early-state political organisations founded on a centralized and tributary economy². The roots of this trajectory are to be searched for in Southern Mesopotamia, where large urban centres, such as Uruk, started to develop in the 4th millennium BC. One of the most characterising features of these centres was the monumental architecture of the religious and ceremonial buildings that presumably also were the seats of the activities of the ruling élites. This may be confirmed by the iconographic evidence often emphasising a relation between high-ranking individuals (priests, kings) and specific types of buildings. On this note, the famous vessel of Warka, clearly expresses a ceremonial narrative in the frame of which food is offered to those occupying the highest rank in the hierarchy³ and is methodically stored beyond them thus emphasising the food-based and tributary connotation of these ceremonies. The lower registers of the vessel emphasise the economic symbolism attached to these ceremonies by depicting, from bottom to top, water courses, ears of cereals and finally a row of animals exclusively composed of caprines. These images seem to symbolically and figuratively represent the basis and founding resources of the staple-based economy of the South-Mesopotamian centres of the Uruk period: extensive irrigated agriculture⁴ and specialised husbandry strategies focused on sheep and goat⁵ all aimed at feeding with cereal-based foodstuffs, mutton and animal secondary products, the tributary economy and the redistributive activities of the South-Mesopotamian early-state institutions⁶. During the second half of the 4th millennium BC, this vertically structured socio-economic trajectory, framed into a cultural package strongly inspired to the South-Mesopotamian material traditions – the so-called Uruk culture – exerted a profound influence over the communities of a vast area of the Near East reaching north as far as the Taurus mountains and the Anatolian and Iranian highlands. While explanations for the expansion of the Uruk culture are multiple and, as Marcella Frangipane and other authors highlighted⁷, cannot be reduced to single factors, it is clear that the interplay between stimuli linked to expansive socio-economic and ideological needs of the Mesopotamian centres and indigenous socio-cultural dynamics in the regions surrounding the Mesopotamian alluvium played a fundamental role in the way this South-Mesopotamian trajectory was perceived, adopted and re-adapted. All the more so because while the Uruk culture was spreading in a large area of the Near East, the small communities of South Caucasus, Eastern Anatolia and North-Western Iran emerged in the second half of the 4th millennium BC as centres of elaboration of a completely different social trajectory framed into an absolutely original package of material cultural traditions. The so-called Kura-Araxes culture, after the name of the two main rivers of South Caucasus, featured a set of very distinctive traits shared by the highland communities, starting for instance with a distinctive ceramic horizon characterised by specific technical, morphological and functional traits. Conversely to the Uruk-related settlements, the small Kura-Araxes villages did not host monumental buildings – be they public, administrative or ceremonial – and they were exclusively composed of domestic units. The absence of central political institutions was completely replaced by the focal role played by the household not only in the productive, but also in the ritual and ceremonial life of these communities as it is for instance suggested by the symbolic centrality of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic andirons in the domestic space⁸. Founded on a mixed agro-pastoral economy with no clear evidence of any form of specialisation in the animal husbandry strategies⁹, the Kura-Araxes communi-

2 Frangipane 1996: 177-216; 2001a; 2016; 2017.

3 Pollock 1999.

4 Adams, 1981; Pollock 1999; Mc Corrison 1997.

5 Zeder 1988.

6 Sherrat 1997; Mc Corrison 1997.

7 Frangipane 2001a; Schwartz 2001; Stein 2001.

8 Greenberg, Palumbi 2015.

9 Sagona 2017: 247-278.

ties seem to have been homogeneously organised along ties of kinship and, as it is also suggested by a strongly equalitarian funerary ideology, there is no hint in the material record allowing to recognise the existence of social élites. Towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, the Kura-Araxes traditions broke their pristine geographic boundaries to spread across an impressively large area of the Near East by following two main axes: the Zagros and the Taurus mountains. Migrations of Kura-Araxes communities from the “homeland” have often been advocated to explain the “expansion” of Kura-Araxes cultural markers. However, the archaeological evidence from some sites points to the fact that the dynamics that triggered-off this phenomenon should be searched in the socio-political developments taking place in the Iranian and Anatolian highlands where the political collapse of the Uruk-related centres opened new social and political opportunities to encourage the expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture¹⁰.

In the time-frame stretching approximately from 3500 and 2900 BC, Arslantepe recorded the impact of these two different trajectories that overlapped diachronically and gave way to hybrid cultural developments towards the end of the 4th millennium BC. It seems to us that the ceremonial Building 36 needs to be contextualised to these developments and in this paper we would like to extend the scopes of our previous work by looking for regional comparisons that may further elucidate the nature and meanings attached to this types of buildings and the related social developments. As a matter of fact, cogent comparisons for the communal Building 36 are absent in the Upper Euphrates and so they are in Eastern Anatolia and South Caucasus. In this paper we propose two comparable cases at Godin Tepe in the Kangavar Valley of the Central Zagros, and Hassek Höyük, in the Middle Anatolian Euphrates valley on the southern piedmont of the Taurus range (Fig. 1, *a*). These parallels do not only concern architectural analogies but they can also be extended to comparable socio-cultural trajectories that took place at these sites.

ARSLANTEPE

We start this comparison from Arslantepe, as we would like to summarise some of the most salient features of Building 36 which seem tightly linked, in functional and possibly also in symbolic terms, to the developments that took place at the site during the previous Period VIA (3500-3200 BC ca). In this period, Arslantepe witnessed the construction of a multi-functional monumental complex where an élite controlled, by means of a complex bureaucratic apparatus, economic transactions and redistributive activities of a centralised political and economic institution. Recent excavations revealed that the northernmost sector of the monumental complex consisted of a large court and an “audience-ceremonial hall” (A1358) that presumably hosted public gatherings linked to special ceremonies¹¹. The development of a centrally controlled economy at Arslantepe had a profound impact on specialised craft and primary products production. As concerns the latter, faunal data reveals a marked change towards specialisation, as husbandry strategies at Arslantepe VIA saw a steep increase in caprines (70%), when compared to the first half of the 4th millennium BC, in full concordance with the strategies adopted in the regions impacted by the Uruk phenomenon¹². It has been suggested that specialised husbandry at Arslantepe was conducted by groups of transhumant pastoralists, that developed in this period as the result of the entrenchment of a centralised economy in the region¹³ and that the Red-Black Burnished Ware (RBBW), recalling traditions from contemporary Central Anatolia, that constituted about 10% of the ceramic assemblage of Period VIA monumental complex, was a cultural marker of these pastoral groups.

10 Palumbi 2017.

11 Frangipane 2016.

12 Frangipane, Siracusano 1998: 237-246; Zeder 1988.

13 Palumbi 2010.

Towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, the VIA complex was destroyed by a violent fire. The new occupation at Arslantepe (Period VIB₁) that immediately followed the filling of the ruins of the monumental complex, spanned between 3200 and 2900 BC approximately¹⁴ and consisted of several levels of occupation. The earliest levels recorded a series of light wooden structures, pits, postholes (possibly the remains of fences for animals) separated by black thin layers of organic material that, altogether, point to repeated but non permanent modalities of occupation¹⁵. These black layers have been interpreted as the result of the decomposition of wood and vegetation that grew after each abandonment of the site¹⁶. It is noteworthy to recall that since these earliest levels of occupation faunal data show, as it also was in the previous VIA period, specialized herding strategies focused on caprines (70-90%)¹⁷. On the basis of this evidence, it has been hypothesized that in the earliest moments of period VIB₁ the settlement was seasonally occupied by groups of pastoralists, following the movements and rhythms of transhumance¹⁸.

The appearance of these transhumant pastoralists in Period VIB₁ is also accompanied by significant changes in terms of cultural developments clearly tangible in the ceramic traditions that recorded an almost exclusive production of hand-made red-black ware, recalling the same firing techniques as the analogous production of Period VIA but featured morphological repertoires clearly inspired to the Kura-Araxes traditions.

The second level of occupation at Arslantepe VIB₁ showed a more structured organisation. While the southern slopes of the mound were occupied with wattle and daub huts and fences, further north the recent excavations exposed the imposing mud-brick Building 36, that was constructed right on the top of hall A1358 of the previous VIA Period, thus representing a strong trait of continuity, in topographical and symbolic terms with the earlier public monumental complex¹⁹. In its second phase of construction, which is the best preserved, Building 36 (Fig. 1, *b*) consisted of the large hall A1000 (9,35x4,10m) accessible through two entrances on the long southern wall and was equipped with a big central circular fireplace and a small protruding “closet” (A1374). On its western shorter side A1000 communicated with the rear-room A1369 (5,8x4,8m). Building 36 stood out from the surrounding huts not only for its dimensions and building techniques but also for the impressive quantity and quality of in situ materials. The conspicuous presence of decorated vessels (almost absent in the surrounding residential huts) as well as unusual shapes related to special drinking functions have suggested that the hall A1000 could have hosted special events unfolding around the large fireplace. At the same time, the abundant evidence of heavy duty stone tools and of one small fireplace in the rear-room A1369 point to food processing activities, while the two metal spear-heads and numerous large jars suggest that it could have also been used as a storage room for food and valuable items. The special function of this building was also confirmed by the presence, immediately to the north of it, of an open area where thousands of animal bones interspersed with layers of ashes and ceramics were retrieved. These bones belonged almost exclusively to the best part of sheep and goats²⁰ and ceramics mainly consisted of open shapes (bowls) thus pointing to a dump related to activities of food consumption. This data altogether have encouraged to interpret Building 36 as a ceremonial building that hosted feasting events consisting of the consumption of large amounts of beverages and meat, the leftovers of which were successively dumped in the adjacent northern area. Building 36 was destroyed by a fire and underwent a last phase of use when it seems to have lost its ceremonial function and feasting connotation²¹.

14 Palumbi *et alii* 2017: 118.

15 Frangipane 2014.

16 Palmieri, Cellai 1983.

17 Siracusano, Bartosiewicz 2012; Palumbi, Siracusano 2014.

18 Frangipane *et alii* 2005; Frangipane 2014.

19 Palumbi *et alii* 2017: 90-91, 119-120.

20 Palumbi, Siracusano 2014; Siracusano, Bartosiewicz 2012.

21 Frangipane 2014.

Worth mentioning is that the very end of period VIB₁ is marked by the construction of a stone-cist tomb, the so-called “Royal Tomb”, located on the western slope of the hill, emphasising the existence of powerful élites that, according to the types and styles of the grave-goods, must have entertained intense relations with the Eastern Anatolian and Caucasian communities²².

GODIN TEPE

The site of Godin is located in the Kangavar valley, on the Zagros Mountains in Central Western Iran. During the second half of the 4th millennium BC, the settlement recorded, in Period VI:1, the construction of the “Oval Compound” that appeared as a large multifunctional complex comprising several adjoining buildings around a central courtyard, surrounded by an enclosure²³. Among these buildings, the largest, possibly “monumental”, northernmost one certainly had special administrative functions judging from the presence of numerical tablets. Several traits of the material culture retrieved from the Oval Compound are linked to the Uruk traditions, going from the typical niches and buttresses decorating the buildings, technologies applied to accountancy and administration (numerical tablets and cylinder seals), the iconography of the seals and clay sealings and, finally, the wheel-made pottery and its morphological repertoires. As concerns the primary production, a picture comparable to that of the animal husbandry at Arslantepe Period VIA is also recorded at Godin, by showing a marked predominance of caprines (82%) over the rest of the reared species according to the main husbandry trend recorded in the Uruk period²⁴.

Somewhere around the end of the 4th millennium the Oval Compound was abandoned and possibly very little time passed between this abandonment and the re-occupation of the site (Period IV). According to a recent reconstruction proposed by M. Rothman, Period IV at Godin Tepe was composed of at least two main occupations²⁵. The earlier one (Period IV:2) dating between the very end of the 4th millennium and the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, recorded, like in the earliest levels of Period VIB₁ at Arslantepe, flimsy remains of architectural structures built in light materials such as wood or wattle and daub. Rothman suggests that the use of light architectural materials could point to seasonal occupations related to transhumant people²⁶. Faunal data from Period IV at Godin Tepe, by recording specialized husbandry strategies focused on caprines (85%)²⁷, could confirm this “pastoral transhumant” connotation of the community of phase IV and simultaneously stresses a strong continuity with the animal strategies of the former Uruk phase. Finally, it is also important to remark that, like at Arslantepe VIB₁, the appearance of these transhumant groups at Godin Tepe is accompanied by the first large-scale production of ceramics featuring technical, morphological and decorative traits clearly inspired to the Kura-Araxes traditions. The flimsy occupations of Period IV:2 were followed by more substantial mud-brick architecture in Period IV:1 featuring a large rectangular building (Building 3) and a radial complex of domestic structures hinting at a more permanent occupation of the settlement. Building 3²⁸, that stood out in terms of its dimensions (13x9m) was composed of two rooms (Fig. 1, c). The entrance room 8 had black painted benches running along its walls and painted geometric designs on north-eastern wall and, in the middle, a raised platform. In comparison to the other structures from the same level, the contents of room 8 are different in terms of quantity and nature starting with an abundant concentration of animal bones, mostly sheep and goat, and a high number of serving and eating vessels. Room 8 communicated through a small stair

22 Frangipane *et alii* 2001; Frangipane 2001b.

23 Weiss, Young 1975; Rothman, Badler 2011: 93-99.

24 Crabtree 2011a.

25 Rothman 2011: 160-163.

26 *Ib.*: 181-183.

27 Crabtree 2011b.

28 Rothman 2011: 183-184.

with the smaller rear-room 7, which was also equipped with benches along the walls. At its interior, besides animal bones, heavy-duty tools for food preparation and some eating and serving vessels were also found. Under the floor of Building 3 trashing pits were discovered which contained numerous animal bones. As concerns the Kura-Araxes related ceramics, which do not differ from those of the phase IV:2, decorated pottery associated to Building 3 seems to be abundant. The life-use of Building 3 was long and even if it went through several changes especially concerning furniture and equipment, it did not seem to change its function. As concerns the latter, M. Rothman, by taking into account its features and contents, considers it as being a public building for ritual sacrifice or public feasting²⁹.

HASSEK HÖYÜK

The site of Hassek Höyük is located in the Middle Anatolian Euphrates valley on the southern piedmont of the Taurus range. In the second half of the 4th millennium BC the small settlement was surrounded by an enclosure wall and hosted a large residential tripartite structure with a central room equipped with two fireplaces and niches recalling the Uruk architectural traditions³⁰. In addition, other rectangular and monocellular structures were interpreted, judging by the remains, as productive units with different purposes, including lithic production and storage. Both architectural and ceramic evidence show that the Late Chalcolithic Hassek Höyük was a small Uruk related community practising agriculture and husbandry, with an unusual preference for pig, but also specialised craft-work connected to lithic production. Formerly interpreted as the outpost of a foreign Uruk community, later studies have highlighted the indigenous character of its material culture³¹ that nonetheless shows strong southern connections.

At the beginning of the Early Bronze I, in Phase 4b, immediately following the Uruk occupation, the site underwent a deep change. A large, rectangular building (the so-called “Kellergebäudes”-11x3,5-4m) north-south oriented was built, apparently isolated, in the central area of the settlement (Fig. 1, *d*). It had an imposing stone foundation, 1,20 m wide, that points to the existence of two storeys; the lower one, discovered during the excavations, was probably subterranean³². Inside the building no material was found, with the exception of the skeleton of a pig in the north-eastern corner, interpreted as a ritual offer. According to the excavators, the large dimensions of the building, its architectural features, its central position and finally the animal skeleton lying on the floor point to a communal and ritual or cultic function³³. In sub-phase 4a, a small rectangular structure composed of two rooms was built to the east of the building when it was still in use³⁴. In the following Phase 3, while the settlement saw the construction of several rectangular domestic structures organised along two perpendicular streets, the large building was abandoned. While the causes for this abandonment are not clear, archaeological evidence shows that the depression left by its collapse was filled with ashes and large quantities of pig bones consisting of skulls and limbs in anatomical connection³⁵.

On the one hand, the large quantity of pig bones highlights a strong continuity with the Late Chalcolithic husbandry strategies, on the other hand the selection of skulls and limbs could have been related to cultic activities³⁶. This data can hint at practices of large scale consumption of pork in Phase 3 and the fact that the leftovers were dumped in the area previously occupied by the building may not

29 *Ib.*: 184.

30 Behm-Blanke 1984: 34-40.

31 Helwing 1999.

32 Behm-Blanke 1981: 20.

33 *Ib.*: 20-21.

34 Behm-Banke 1984: 46.

35 Behm-Blanke 1981: 17-18; 1984: 46-47.

36 Behm-Blanke 1981: 18.

have been haphazard, but a symbolic act of dumping, considering the special connection with ritual consumption of pig that the building witnessed in its first phase of use.

In the following Phases 2 and 1 the settlement changed its former layout, but its occupation continued uninterrupted. It is only at the very end of the Early Bronze Age I that Hassek was abandoned, and it was probably after its abandonment, that can be dated a cist tomb containing the body of a man accompanied with a rich array of funerary goods³⁷, comprising a series of metal objects recalling some of the repertoires of the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb”³⁸.

CEREMONIAL BUILDINGS IN THE HIGHLANDS: COMPARISON AND INTERPRETATION

The buildings analysed in this paper show various degrees of comparability starting from the fact that they are all significantly larger than the surrounding built environment, thus transmitting a well codified “sense” of dimensional and functional difference from the adjacent domestic or residential structures. Their large dimensions could suggest a collective or communal function, but dimensional criteria alone cannot be considered as sufficient to identify their special purposes. Beyond these, admittedly very general, dimensional analogies, our impression is that Arslantepe and Godin Tepe show a series of cogent parallels, that can only partially be extended to Hassek Höyük, which will be discussed in a second moment.

This is because the parallels between Arslantepe and Godin Tepe not only concern the layout of the two buildings and related types of activities, but they can also be drawn to the modalities and dynamics of occupation of the sites, the analogous historical and socio-cultural developments and finally a comparable geographical location. In spite of the differences in the axes of access, entrances (two lateral at Arslantepe and one entrance on the main frontal axis at Godin) and the plan of the front-rooms (rectangular elongated at Arslantepe and almost quadrangular at Godin) both of the buildings were organised in two interconnecting rooms. The front-room was equipped with a fixed central furniture, a large circular fireplace at Arslantepe and a platform at Godin Tepe, pointing to their central role in the activities carried out in them. As concerns the latter, the concentration of special containers for liquid consumption (Arslantepe), decorated ceramics (at both sites) and wall paintings (Godin Tepe) confirm the practical and symbolic importance of the front-rooms in the general function of these buildings. In a fully comparable way, at both sites the rear-rooms probably were auxiliary spaces, as they both hosted pieces of furniture and working tools related to the processing, preparation and cooking of food.

As to food, there is abundant piece of information pointing to the fact that food-consumption was one of the main activities carried out in or around these buildings. The large quantities of animal bones found inside (Godin Tepe) and in dumps immediately outside of the buildings (Arslantepe) suggest that they could have been leftovers of meals consumed in the frame of collective ceremonies. While there is no trace of charred cereal grains, animal meat represented a substantial, if not the exclusive, ingredient of these ceremonial meals. Faunal data confirm that animals consumed were not “special” or exotic species, but rather the most common ones reared at these sites (sheep and goat). On this note, it is worth reminding that animal husbandry in Period VIB₁ at Arslantepe and in Period IV at Godin Tepe was carried out according to specialised strategies focused on caprines, analogous to those recorded in the previous Uruk-related phases and corresponding to the general “trend” of the Uruk animal husbandry.

It is also noteworthy to observe that at both sites, this strong emphasis on specialised caprine strategies is also coupled, immediately after the Uruk phases, with occupations recording flimsy ar-

37 Behm-Blanke 1984: 48-53.

38 Palumbi 2007-2008.

chitectural remains interpreted as temporary camp-sites of transhumant pastoralists³⁹. In their turn, these temporary occupations were followed at both Arslantepe and Godin Tepe by the construction of large ceremonial buildings, pointing to more substantial and permanent forms of occupation at both settlements. At the same time, the fact that the material culture from the ceremonial contexts, and in particular the Kura-Araxes related ceramics, shows striking traits of continuity with the ceramics of the previous temporary occupations and points to cultural connections between these ceremonial buildings and the transhumant pastoralists that previously occupied both settlements.

Finally, in terms of the broader regional developments, the two buildings can be comparable as their construction has to be contextualised to a phase of radical change that saw, after the end of the Uruk influence, the impact of the Kura-Araxes culture at Arslantepe and Godin Tepe like, more in general, in the whole East-Anatolian and Iranian highlands.

From this point of view, as we suggested in a previous work⁴⁰, the presence of domestic furniture in these large buildings may have conferred a connotation of monumental ceremonial “houses” by possibly borrowing the new “house concept” from the Kura-Araxes culture as a symbolic and practical institution that played a central role in the organisation of the social and political relationships of the community. However, in spite of the new Kura-Araxes oriented socio-cultural environment, the monumental character of these ceremonial houses, as well as their socio-economic contexts of ascription, possibly to be identified with transhumant pastoral communities, seem to represent a persistency of the former Uruk cultural and socio-economic legacy.

CEREMONIAL BUILDINGS IN THE LOWLANDS

These two interrelated traits inherited from the Uruk developments seem to have evolved in the regions of highlands in quite a sharp contrast with the “post-Uruk” developments in the Upper Mesopotamian lowlands. In the same period, small-scale communities sharing a specific ceramic tradition (the so-called Ninevite 5 horizon) populated the Syrian Jezirah and the Upper Tigris valley. Also the Ninevite 5 settlements hosted a very specific type of large scale specialised architecture consisting of silos and platforms, as documented at Tell Atij and Tell Knedig, and of monumental granaries, as in the case of the “Round Building” at Raqa’i⁴¹. The fact that cereal-processing infrastructures took monumental forms⁴² emphasises, also from a symbolic point of view, the fundamental role played by the agricultural economy in these communities⁴³. Conversely, in the Ninevite 5 settlements, ritual architecture was comparatively smaller than the cereal-processing infrastructures and as in the case of Raqa’I, it was even incorporated in the monumental granary⁴⁴. It has been suggested that the small ritual Ninevite 5 buildings, that could have hosted more “intimate” types of religious ceremonies, institutionalised a rural ideology aimed at legitimising the mobilisation of the agricultural surplus to the benefit of regional élites⁴⁵.

This “model” of monumental rural architecture expressed by the Ninevite 5 farming communities, presumably sedentary and structured along a system of cohesive co-residentiality, seems to have been radically different from the model of monumental ceremonial architecture observed in the highlands at Arslantepe and Godin Tepe. First of all, because the ceremonial buildings of the highlands were not exclusively related to the storage of food, but rather to its consumption, more specifically meat (mutton), which was the primary product of specialised caprine husbandry. Secondly, their large

39 Frangipane 2014; Palumbi 2010; Rothman 2011: 182-183.

40 Palumbi *et alii* 2017.

41 Rova 2013; Akkermans, Schwartz 2003.

42 Schwartz 2000; Frangipane 2001a.

43 Rova 2013; Akkermans, Schwartz 2003.

44 Dunham 1993.

45 Schwartz 2000: 178.

dimensions point to commensal practices involving a large number of people. Finally, because they seem to be related to pastoral transhumant communities.

The case of Hassek Hoyuk, on the southern piedmont of the Taurus mountains, does not seem to fit either the case of the Ninevite 5 ritual buildings (in terms of the architectural plan, dimensions and related findings), nor exactly that of the buildings at Arslantepe and Godin Tepe in the highlands. We cannot exclude that this mismatch with the latter could be partly due to the poor state of preservation of the Kellergebäudes, but other differences seem to be more “structural” in nature. First of all because at Hassek there is no trace of temporary occupations, neither before nor after the construction of the monumental building, and conversely the settlement seems stable and permanent throughout the Early Bronze Age sequence. The sedentary nature of the settlement could also explain why pig, that can be raised according to different husbandry practices but which is not typical of long-distance transhumance⁴⁶, played such an important role in the husbandry at Hassek and consequently why pork (and not mutton) was the meat consumed in or around the large building. Finally, the cultural developments at Hassek (as in the all Euphrates valley south of the Taurus mountains) unfolded in terms of a stronger continuity with the Uruk period (with no traces of Kura-Araxes intrusion) than in the Anatolian and Iranian highlands. However, in spite of these differences, the large quantities of meat associated to the use and post-use phases of the possibly ceremonial building at Hassek points to commonalities with the ceremonial buildings of the highlands. This may suggest that new political strategies, under the form of feasting practices, were breaking through the north in the southern piedmont of the Taurus mountains and were possibly re-adapted to local socio-economic contexts and political dynamics that may have seen, for instance, the emergence of new élites as witnessed by the rich grave, marking the final occupation of Hassek.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Piecing this data together and on the basis of these considerations, we propose that the ceremonial buildings from the highlands could be framed into the strategies and political practices of an emergent “pastoral ideology”.

First of all, because if we consider that these large ceremonial “houses” were built after temporary occupations, their construction could have been a strategy to occupy monumentally, and consequently more visibly and permanently, the settlements. In the case of Arslantepe, this strategy, that may not have been dissimilar from that behind the construction of the Royal Tomb⁴⁷, could have been aimed at legitimising the occupation of the site in the face of other contemporary sedentary and farming-based communities that still lived in territory around Arslantepe in this period⁴⁸.

Simultaneously, by considering the non-residential and territorially mobile nature of these communities (or at least of part of them), ceremonial, possibly periodical, meetings could have allowed them to tighten and strengthen internal social ties and inter-group political networks.

Finally, if feasting is a social strategy allowing to transform informal power into institutionalised formal political roles⁴⁹, the commensal events hosted in these ceremonial buildings could have been for these pastoral communities, and especially for their élites such as those that appear in the Royal Tomb at Arslantepe, a strategy to institutionalise their new political role after the collapse of the centralised institutions of the Uruk period.

From this point of view, the resources available in the Anatolian and Iranian highlands, such as the large pastures and metals (as highlighted in the Arslantepe Royal Tomb) could have encouraged

46 Price *et alii* 2017.

47 Palumbi 2007-2008.

48 Frangipane 2015.

49 Dietler, Hayden 2001: 17.

the development of a new economic role of the pastoral communities associated with a growing political role resulting from the preferential relations that they started to entertain with the Kura-Araxes communities from Southern Caucasus.

Marcella Frangipane wrote that “*what is thought of as a «collapse» was merely a change, in other words a few elements – even important ones – were transformed within the overall system that had fashioned a civilisation, while other elements are simultaneously retained and adapted to the new conditions representing the continuation of what are often equally important aspects of traditional relations between the members of a given society*”⁵⁰.

The ceremonial buildings discussed in this paper could have been the result of the collapse of a trajectory linked to the formation of the earliest centralised economies of the Near East, where food represented a fundamental source for political negotiation and construction of inequality, and where architectural monumentality symbolised the power of hierarchized institutions. The new post-Uruk ceremonial buildings seem to stand in direct continuity with those of the Uruk period in terms of the semiotics attached to monumental architecture, but also as a novelty in terms of the practices they hosted and were conceived for. While food still remained central, feasting events may have replaced the former hierarchized modalities of food-consumption of the Uruk period with new socialised practices of commensality that were the expression of a different type of social organisation⁵¹. Although not bureaucratised as the previous chalcolithic ones, the new post-Uruk pastoral societies showed anyway forms of inequality with the emergence of élites that may have been able to mobilise food for feasting in order to acquire new institutionalised political roles. Feasting could have represented, in the frame of an emerging pastoral ideology, a vehicle of transformation of the political system, as well as of affirmation of pastoral societies who remained one of the main socio-economic “components” of continuity between past and present, and the protagonists of the new late 4th/early-3rd millennium BC political and cultural developments of the Anatolian and Iranian highlands.

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50 Frangipane 2009.

51 Palumbi *et alii* 2017.

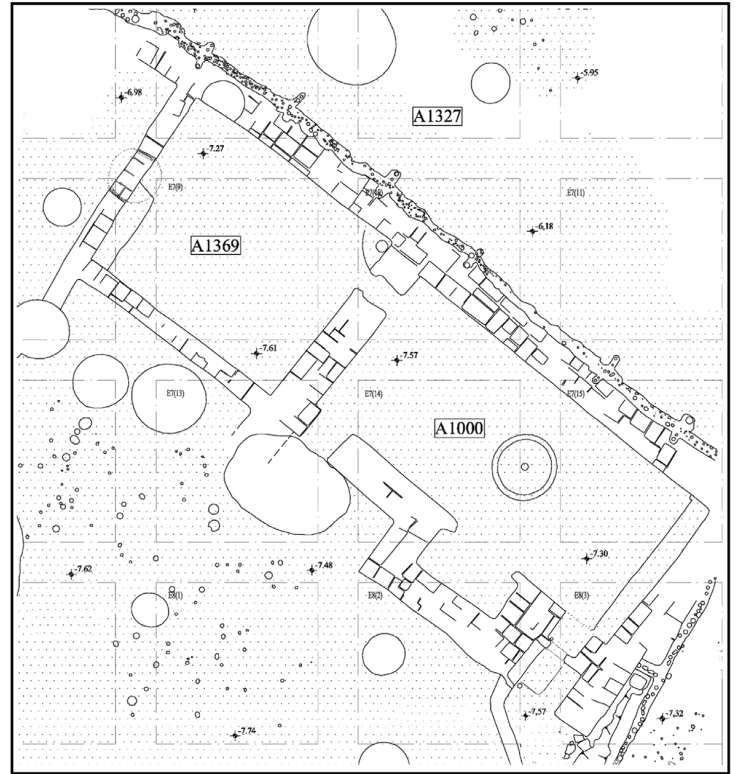
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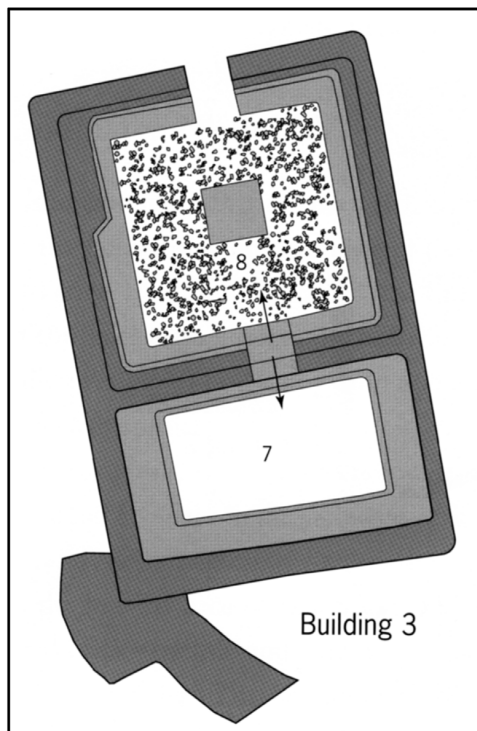
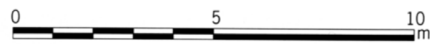
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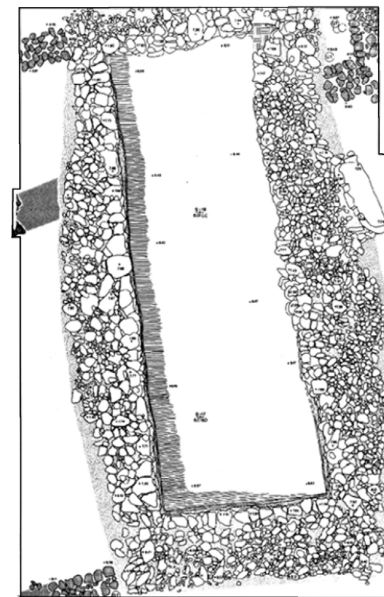
a)



b)



c)



d)

Fig. 1 - a) Map of the Near East with the main sites mentioned in the text; b) Arslantepe: Building 36, Period VIB1 (Archivio Missione Archeologica Italiana nell'Anatolia Orientale); c) Godin Tepe: Building 3, Phase IV:1b (Gopnik, Rothman 2011: 162, Fig. 5.16); d) Hassek Höyük: Kellergebäudes, Phase 4b (Behm-Blanke 1984: 45, Fig. 6).