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The “Royal Tomb” at Arslantepe and the 3rd Millennium BC in Upper Mesopotamia

Giulio Palumbi

Abstract

Long considered an isolated and exceptional tomb of an elite, the so-called “Royal Tomb” at Arslantepe has proven to be representative of a geographically widespread phenomenon of ‘elite tombs’ at the end of the 4th millennium BC in the Upper Euphrates and Tigris valleys in Anatolia. They are characterised by burials in stone-lined cists, containing an abundance of grave goods, especially including metal artefacts. Basing on comparisons with the richly furnished tombs in Hassek Höyük and Bashur Höyük, the tomb in Arslantepe is shown to be an example of such high-rank burials. Further, they are indicative of large scale changes, including the introduction of new social structures and value-systems, which in turn mark the beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

Introduction

Discovered in 1996, the so-called “Royal Tomb” at Arslantepe with its impressive concentration of metals, witnesses radical changes in the paradigms of “power” that took place in the Anatolian Upper Euphrates Valley after the collapse of the local Uruk-related centralised institutions towards the end of the 4th millennium BC. For a long time, the “Royal Tomb” at Arslantepe has been considered as an isolated and rather exceptional case of an elite tomb. However, by piecing together old evidence, such as that from Hassek Höyük on the southern slopes of the Taurus Mountains in the Middle Anatolian Euphrates Valley, and new discoveries, such as the wealthy stone-cists at Bashur Höyük in the Anatolian Upper Tigris Valley (both sites in present-day southeastern Turkey), it seems that these elite tombs, which stand out in their abundance of metal artefacts, speak for a geographically wider phenomenon than hypothesised so far (Fig. 1).

Previous studies have highlighted that these elite tombs, which were associated with the introduction of stone-lined cists in the Taurus region¹, expressed the emergence of new figures of warriors, possibly to be assimilated as new founding “fathers” or heroes², and would represent new forms of power based upon the accumulation and control over wealth and luxury goods. These new forms were radically different from the administrative power with strong religious connotations, and founded on control over staple products and their means of production, characterising the economic and political institutions of the Uruk period³.

In this paper, I would like to move from these previous considerations and highlight a series of parallels between the tombs at Arslantepe, Hassek Höyük and Bashur Höyük so as to suggest that these prestige or high-rank burials could have mirrored a large-scale and profound process of transformation that may have seen the emergence of new types of pastoral societies and

² Helwing 2012.
the construction of new ideologies and systems of values founded on the cultural and socio-economic role that metals started to play at the end of the 4th millennium BC, thus marking the actual beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

The historical, structural and cultural premises of high-status tombs in Eastern Anatolia: between sacrificial and archival social systems

In order to fully grasp the complexity of these changes, it is necessary to look at them through a historical perspective, as both the ideological and structural roots of these prestige tombs as well as of the new early 3rd millennium societies of the eastern Taurus could have been the result of the expansion of radically different trajectories that developed during the 4th millennium BC in very distant regions and that, eventually, came to interfere in the political and cultural dynamics of the East Anatolian communities.

One of these trajectories, the so-called Maikop Culture, developed in the northern Caucasus as early as the second quarter of the 4th millennium BC and was specifically characterised by burial mounds (or kurgans)\(^4\). The funerary representations enacted in the often imposing kurgans of the Maikop period (first half of the 4th millennium BC) and the Novosvobodnaya period (last quarter of the 4th millennium BC) stand out in their amazing arrays and concentrations of metals and prestige objects. Metals of different types (arsenical copper, silver and gold) were employed for artefacts related to a broad range of practical, and presumably also highly symbolic, activities, ranging from weapons (daggers or knives), cauldrons and vessels (Fig. 2a–b), zoomorphic statuettes (Fig. 2c), tools presumably related to animal husbandry and animal-driven transport (pitchforks, looped nose rings and hooks), carpentry (axes, chisels and

\(^4\) Ivanova 2008; Ivanova 2013.
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strong elite-based connotation of these funerary monuments.6

Quite interestingly, the monumentality and visibility of the kurgans seem to have stood in sharp contrast with the flimsy evidence of what often appear as short-lived settlements constructed of perishable material7. While agriculture certainly played some role in the primary economy of North Caucasian communities, it is also important to stress the special focus on cattle in local husbandry strategies, thus suggesting that the “light” architectural remains of the Maikop settlements may have reflected some type of mobility of the local communities of cattle breeders8. By taking into account this mobile lifestyle, kurgans by hosting the bodies of high-status individuals might have served as gauges) (Fig. 2d–e), to end with body ornaments (golden appliques sown onto clothes and silver, golden, carnelian and rock-crystal necklaces)5.

The spectacular display of metal and luxury objects is often proportional to the dimensions of the funerary tumuli, and kurgans seem to have been the material projection of the social organisation of the 4th millennium North Caucasian societies, where the accumulation of wealth in the form of metals seems to have been the main principle that legitimised status and structured vertical social differences. Even if some cases of multiple burials are attested, and in some cases practices of human sacrifice have been also hypothesised, in general the Maikop kurgans hosted single burials and seem to have been built for few people only, thus further highlighting the

6 Smith 2015.
8 Kohl 2007, 76–78.

Fig. 2 Cauldrons, vessels, chisels, axes and zoomorphic figurines from the kurgans of the Maikop and Novosvobodnaya horizons.
ancstral territorial markers and time-enduring monuments in the local landscape.

Towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, the Maikop cultural horizon gave way to the Novosvobodnaya horizon. The persistence of wealthy and monumental kurgans also in the Novosvobodnaya horizon shows that the socio-economic principles of North Caucasian societies remained basically unchanged, and that funerary contexts still remained the main social arena in which principles of vertical social inequality founded on the accumulation of metals were acted out and naturalised along lines of ancestral descent.

The “spectacular” sacrifice of wealth in the form of impressive concentrations of metals that characterise the funerary representations of kurgans, seems to represent some of the most precious attestations of a cultural system linking the funerary sphere and the social rank of the dead with new highly symbolic values, values that metalwork (bronze) started to acquire in 4th and early 3rd millennium North Caucasian societies.

On these matters, David Wengrow suggested that the “deliberate burial of finished metalwork in copious and impressive quantities, in association with human remains and the construction of visible monuments above ground” could be markers of “sacrificial cultural systems”. In the frame of this perspective, the phenomenon of the North Caucasian kurgans could be considered as one of the earliest expressions in Bronze Age Eurasia of a type of society, in which rank and status were derived from the possession of the most highly valued “iconic” objects. Metals could have represented the most “iconic” and valuable possessions of 4th millennium Eurasian societies and, according to Wengrow, metals were valued primarily as something to be held and hoarded (but not shared, displayed and circulated) in order to sacrifice them exclusively in public spectacular performances. In these societies, the sacrificial performance would have represented the social context and the venue that allowed the “great man” to publicly demonstrate the value of his possessions.

While the Maikop Culture was developing in the northern Caucasus, southern Mesopotamia was the theatre of a radically different phenomenon. The so-called Uruk phenomenon, after the name of the largest centre of the south Mesopotamian alluvium, was the expression of the earliest urban societies in the Near East. Characterised by large settlements hosting monumental public architecture, the Uruk phenomenon was the result of the emergence of early state societies founded on a centralised economy. The political economy of south Mesopotamian early state institutions and their elites was financed through forms of centralised control over the production of staple products and redistribution of foodstuffs. The entrenchment of a centralised economic model went hand in hand with a radical reorganization towards specialisation in both craft and primary productions. As to the latter, specialised animal husbandry strategies focused on sheep and goat were a characterising trait of the primary economy of the Uruk period and possibly mirrored the new role of both primary and secondary animal products in the centralised economy. During the second half of the 4th millennium BC, the hierarchical, centralised and specialised Uruk model expanded over a large area of the Near East, reaching as far as the Anatolian regions of the Upper Euphrates and Upper Tigris Valleys, where the sites of Arslantepe and Bashur Höyük represent some of the northernmost attestations of Uruk “expansion”.

Period VIA at Arslantepe shows clear evidence of the Uruk impact over the local community through the construction of a monumental palatial complex. The monumental complex consisted of a series of buildings with specialised functions, ranging from representative to bureaucratic, economic and ceremonial. The widespread presence of thousands of ration mass-produced bowls in the complex as well as of an archive consisting of hundreds of

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10 Wengrow 2011, 137.
11 Wengrow 2011.
12 Pollock 1999; Frangipane 2018.
14 Frangipane 2012, 29; Frangipane 2016.
clay-sealings are evidence for the redistribution of foodstuffs and centrally administered economic transactions. Faunal data from period VIA confirm specialised caprine-oriented animal husbandry strategies in full consequence with the general trend recorded in regions impacted by the Uruk "phenomenon"\(^\text{15}\). Worth mentioning is the metal hoard found in one of the buildings of the monumental complex, consisting of nine swords and twelve spearheads\(^\text{16}\). Such concentrations of metals in the Uruk society are extremely rare and certainly, as suggested by Marcella Frangipane, metals were intended as a means of displaying the position of these elites in the social order\(^\text{17}\). However, according to Wengrow metals in these types of cultural systems, which he defines as "archival", were incorporated in larger networks of circulation and exchange controlled by centrally administered institutions and were meant to be transformed within the frame of trade transactions; they were not, like in the case of Maikop, hoarded, obliterated and “frozen” in the tombs\(^\text{18}\).

Towards the end of the 4th millennium BC, the demise of the Uruk “phenomenon” in the Upper Euphrates Valley, which was accompanied (or determined) by the collapse of the centralised institutions in the region, coincided with the expansion of another large scale socio-cultural phenomenon, which started developing in the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia as early as the mid-4th millennium BC. The Kura-Araxes Culture, which owes its name to the two main rivers of the Southern Caucasus, was the expression of small-scale agro-pastoral communities of the eastern Anatolian and Caucasian highlands, sharing a distinctive set of material cultural traditions\(^\text{19}\). Conversely to Uruk cities, the Kura-Araxes villages did not display any presence of administrative buildings, and there is no trace of centralised economic or political institutions. It was rather the household that played a central role in the productive, political and ceremonial life of these communities\(^\text{20}\). The centrality of the household was also foreground in the funerary sphere as pit burials, horse-shoe shaped tombs, kurgans and the stone-lined cists, which are among the most common Kura-Araxes funerary structures. They often held multiple burials of individuals who, presumably, belonged to the same kinship-groups\(^\text{21}\). Metals are present in the funerary inventories, usually in the form of body ornaments, such as the typical double-spiral headed pins, hair spirals and, in the case of the Shida Kartli region, diadems. However, large concentrations of metal items in the Kura-Araxes tombs are very rare; they certainly do not compare with those of the masses in North Caucasian kurgans. Instead, they are associated with a rather standard funerary set of ceramics, pointing to a basically equalitarian funerary ideology\(^\text{22}\).

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\(^\text{23}\). Eastern Anatolia and the Upper Euphrates Valley were among the first regions to be caught in the so-called Kura-Araxes expansion, and Arslantepe and its "Royal Tomb" witness unequivocal evidence for this "phenomenon".

It seems likely that the expansion of the Kura-Araxes Culture triggered new communication and exchange networks connecting Anatolia and the Caucasus, and this process could explain the dynamics behind the appearance of new funerary customs and high-status tombs that appeared in the Upper Euphrates and Tigris valleys.

**Arslantepe VIB1**

The Arslantepe "Royal Tomb" is a clear expression of these new funerary customs. The tomb dates to the very end of period VIB\(^\text{14}\) that fol-

\(\text{15} \) Siracusano/Bartosiewicz 2012.
\(\text{16} \) Frangipane/Palmieri 1983.
\(\text{17} \) Frangipane 2018; Frangipane 2017.
\(\text{18} \) Wengrow 2011.
\(\text{19} \) Sagona 2017.
\(\text{20} \) Smith 2015.
\(\text{21} \) Palumbi 2016.
\(\text{22} \) Palumbi 2007–2008; Smith 2015.
\(\text{23} \) Chataigner/Palumbi 2014.
\(\text{24} \) A new publication suggests the dating of the Arslantepe "Royal Tomb" to the beginning of period VIB2, see Frangipane/Erdal 2020.
allowed the destruction of the Uruk-related monumental complex of period VIA. The earliest levels of period VIB1 record a series of light wooden structures, pits and postholes, which all together point to temporary, possibly cyclical, modalities of occupation of the settlement. Animal husbandry of period VIB1 reveals very specialised strategies focused on caprines (70–90%), analogous to those found at Arslantepe during the Uruk period. It has been suggested that temporary occupations coupled with specialised caprine strategies confer a strong pastoral connotation to the period VIB1 occupation. It has been further suggested that these pastoral groups could have been the direct descendants of a pastoral socio-economic component generated in the Uruk period as a result of the entrenchment of a centralised and specialised economy.

In a mature phase of period VIB1, the settlement shows a more structured spatial organisation possibly mirroring a semi-sedentary type of occupation. It is in this phase that an imposing mud-brick ceremonial building (Building 36) was constructed on the upper slopes of the mound. Building 36 stands out from the surrounding huts not only for its dimensions and building techniques but also for the impressive quantity and quality of the in situ materials among which drinking vessels and two metal spearheads analogous to those of the hoard found in the monumental complex of period VIA.

As concerns pottery, the hand-made red-black and monochrome burnished wares represent the almost totality of the ceramic production of period VIB1 and witness the very first impact of the Kura-Araxes ceramic traditions over the Arslantepe ceramic repertoires. This is clearly visible in the appearance of new vessels’ shapes (double-handled jars with ovoid bodies and cylindrical necks and circular lids) and in the constant presence of handles applied on both closed and open vessels recalling the same morphological and functional repertoires of the south Caucasian Kura-Araxes ceramics. However, in spite of these changes, meaningful traits of continuity with the former local pottery traditions (the “alternate” red-black pattern featuring also the red-black burnished ware of period VIA) point to the persistence of local firing techniques and manufacturing traditions.

It is in this highly hybridised cultural environment, resulting from a mix of local and Kura-Araxes traditions, which was the expression of transhumant pastoral groups that the construction of the “Royal Tomb” has to be contextualised.

The Arslantepe “Royal Tomb” was constructed after the dismissal of the ceremonial Building 36 and possibly during a short phase of abandonment of the settlement. In terms of absolute chronology, one single radiocarbon date, coupled with new but still unpublished data, confidently place this funerary event somewhere around 3100 BC. The “Royal Tomb” consisted of a stone-lined cist (Fig. 3a) and was the scene of a complex and dramatic funerary ritual subdivided at least in two different moments. The final and very dramatic moment is represented by the upper collective burial consisting of the human sacrifice of two couples of adolescents, adorned with metal ornaments (Fig. 3b–c) recalling the Kura-Araxes traditions (double spiral-headed pins, hair-spirals and diadems). The earlier and spectacular moment is represented by the underlying stone cist, containing the body of a man accompanied by an astonishing quantity and variety of grave goods. The majority of them consisted of metals (65 items) and the rest of ceramic vessels and necklaces composed of silver, gold, carnelian and rock crystal beads.

In previous works I emphasised that three main cultural components coexisted in the funerary representation of this tomb. The first component consists of the Uruk and post-Uruk...
traditions expressed by the wheel-made, 'plain simple', and 'reserved slip' jars and by the leaf-shaped spearheads (Fig. 3d), the latter showing striking analogies with those of the hoard found in the public complex of period VIA. The second component relates to the Kura-Araxes traditions visible under the form of body ornaments – metal hair spirals, diadems, double-spiral headed pins (Fig. 3b–c) – and of some specific shapes of red-black burnished jars. As concerns the third component, metal vessels, swords, daggers, knives, carpentry tools (Fig. 3e–i) and necklaces made of carnelian, rock crystal, gold and silver beads, all recall the inventories of the kurgans of the North Caucasus. I suggested elsewhere that even the act of building a wealthy tomb on an anthropic mound that looked like a ready-made tumulus, which was a prominent place and a territorial marker of the landscape reminds of the same principles of the North Caucasian kurgans. Finally, regardless of the specific cultural components, the impressive concentration of metal and precious objects "sacrificed" as an act of conspicuous consumption performed in the frame of a "spectacular" funerary ritual, which also involved human sacrifice, seems to be one the earliest attestations in highland Anatolia of a new funerary ideology, which is not comparable either with the Kura-Araxes or with previous chalcolithic traditions. Rather, the funerary representation of the Arslantepe "Royal Tomb" recalls the same principles of the sacrificial cultural systems featuring Maikop and Novosvobodnaya funerary ideologies in North Caucasian kurgans.

Like in the latter kurgans, the selection of the metal objects in the funerary representation was presumably aimed at symbolising the qualities and roles of the new chiefs. As suggested by Marcella Frangipane and Barbara Helwing, the emphasis on weapons in the funerary representation points to the new role of chief as a warrior. However, it also seems that the variety of metal items composing the funerary assemblage also hints at other qualities of the chief that were related to conviviality (metal vessels and cauldrons), wood-working and carpentry (axes, chisels and gauges) and finally to the ability of trading and hoarding metals from distant regions.

The "Royal Tomb" at Arslantepe was a high-status burial, and the concentration of wealth in it represents a totally new phenomenon in comparison to the previous chalcolithic funerary traditions. Several authors have dealt with the question of the origins and cultural identity of the lord buried in the tomb. While a foreign, Caucasian, origin of this "warrior-chief" and of the community cannot be excluded, the stratigraphic data, the culturally hybrid funerary representation and the close analogies with the metal and ceramic repertoires of periods VIB1, VIA (spearsheads) and VIB2 (wheelmade, plain simple, and reserved slip wares) point to a local origin of the lord buried in the tomb, who could have been a leader, or the chief, of the period VIB1 pastoral community.

The Euphrates Valley

The "Royal Tomb" of Arslantepe was not a unique or an isolated case, as this new wealthy funerary ideology, associated with the diffusion of the stone-lined cists, crossed the Taurus Mountains and spread south, along the Euphrates Valley, towards northern Syria. Not all of the funerary evidence from the stone-lined cists recovered along Anatolian and north Syrian Euphrates Valley display the same quantity of grave goods as the "Royal Tomb" of Arslantepe. However, the stone-lined cists that appear south of the Taurus range at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC mark a radical change in local funerary traditions as they are the first in which funerary rituals are associated with symbolic "sacrifice" of significant quantities of metals.

For instance, Hassek Höyük, on the Lower Anatolian Euphrates Valley, provides meaningful evidence on these changes. The settlement records an occupation dating to the Uruk period.

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37 Palumbi 2011.  
39 Frangipane 2001; Helwing 2012.  
40 Palumbi 2011.  
41 Palumbi 2008; Porter 2012.  
followed by an occupation dating to the Early Bronze Age I. At the very end of the Early Bronze Age I period, two isolated tombs (Grave 12A and Grave 12) were constructed during a phase (level 0) that does not record any trace of a domestic settlement therefore suggesting that the two tombs were built in a phase of abandonment of the site.

Grave 12A, which was heavily damaged, had an inventory consisting of ceramic vessels and some metal items (one pin, one axe, one chisel and one dagger). The second tomb, Grave 12, was a cist built with stone boulders and hosted the body of a man equipped with a funerary inventory composed of ceramic vessels and eight metal objects (Fig. 4a–b). Some of these metal items (spearheads, dagger, axes and chisel), foregrounding activities linked to warfare and carpentry, closely recall the funerary inventory of the metals from the “Royal Tomb” at Arslantepe, thus referring to the chief ideology as that at Arslantepe and indirectly to those symbols already present in North Caucasian kurgans.

It is not possible to determine whether the socio-cultural milieu of the two individuals buried in the wealthy tombs at Hassek can be ascribed to a pastoral milieu in a similar way as in the case of the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb”. However, the fact that these tombs were constructed during a phase of abandonment of the settlement opens the possibility that they belonged, or were linked, to a community that did not reside permanently at the settlement.

**Bashur Höyük**

Recent extraordinary discoveries at Bashur Höyük, in the Anatolian Upper Tigris on the southern piedmont of the eastern Taurus, show significant analogies with the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb”, thus highlighting that the phenomenon

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of the wealthy tombs was not exclusively limited to the Euphrates Valley, but extended farther east than this latter region.

At Bashur Höyük a cemetery of 17 tombs, most of which stone-lined cists (Fig. 5a), was brought to light during rescue excavations for the Ilısu dam. Stratigraphic data show that the stone cists were built immediately after the Uruk occupation, and the absolute dates point out that they were fully contemporary to the “Royal Tomb” of Arslantepe. Also at Bashur Höyük, there is no evidence of a “domestic” settlement contemporary to the cemetery.

The rich pottery inventory found in the stone cists directly recalls the Ninevite V ceramic horizon that developed in the Syrian Jezirah and in the Tigris Valley after the Uruk period. But conversely to the funerary evidence coming to the Early Bronze Age I discovered in the northwest and southwest sectors of the mound. However, the excavations were carried out in a limited area, and future excavations will clarify if this domestic occupation is contemporary with the stone-cists cemetery or not.
from the farming-based Ninevite V communities of Upper Mesopotamia, mainly represented by pit graves or mud-brick tombs featuring a rather standard, often modest, funerary inventory⁴⁹, the funerary inventory of the stone cists from the upland site of Bashur Höyük is, in spite of the ceramic commonalities, radically different from that of the lowlands.

The stone cists from Bashur Höyük contained extraordinary concentrations of metals, numbering from dozens up to hundreds⁵⁰. In the frame of this astonishing abundance of metals, some functional categories of the objects, such as the spearheads (Fig. 5c), axes (Fig. 5b) and drinking vessels (Fig. 5d) recalls the same categories found at Arslantepe and Hassek Höyük⁵¹. These commonalities in terms of metal repertoires, where weapons (and spearheads in particular) are the most recurring type of artefact, stress the existence of a shared funerary ideology where war, libations and carpentry were the activities and qualities connoting the new early 3rd millennium chiefs or élites that emerged in the Euphrates and Tigris valleys. To strengthen the analogies with the “Royal Tomb” of Arslantepe, also at Bashur Höyük some of the stone-cists were theatre of very elaborate rituals that seem to have also included human sacrifices⁵². Finally, the absence of a domestic settlement contemporary with the cemetery seems to point again to connections with non-residential, possibly mobile, communities. On this note the emphasis on the representation of caprids and cattle on the metal objects from Bashur Höyük (Fig. 5d–f) could hint at the symbolic importance of these animals in the economy and life-style of these communities.

Concluding remarks

The high-status burials from Arslantepe, Bashur and Hassek Höyük witness the emergence of new funerary traditions (the stone cists) associated with lavish concentrations of metals. This new phenomenon, which stands out in comparison to the striking lack of funerary evidence of the former Uruk period, was not only limited to the Euphrates Valley but stretched as far as the Upper Tigris Valley, thus involving a larger area that comprised both the northern and southern ranges of the eastern Taurus Mountains.

In the frame of this new “post-Uruk” funerary evidence, fine-grained data from Arslantepe not only allow sound considerations to be drawn on the socio-cultural identity of the high status individual buried in the “Royal Tomb” and of his community, but also provide some explanatory hints for eventually interpreting the evidence from Bashur and Hassek Höyük.

The following comparison highlights a series of analogies concerning the historical and cultural dynamics of the three settlements, as well as the modalities of occupation of the settlements at the time when the high-status tombs were constructed.

First of all, it is important to recall that all three settlements were occupied during the Uruk period and that this could be a proxy for similar transformations in terms of the socio-economic organisation (entrenchment of a centralised economy and development of specialised productive sectors), which communities at Arslantepe, Hassek and Bashur Höyük underwent in the 4th millennium BC.

Secondly, the construction of these tombs took place in phases immediately following the Uruk period, which in itself must have represented a moment of radical change of the former social orders and systems of values.

The third analogy concerns the occupational dynamics related to (or behind) the construction of these tombs. As also observed by Helwing, these high-status burials were constructed in elevated positions on abandoned settlement mounds⁵³. Evidence from Arslantepe shows that the construction of the “Royal Tomb” could have taken place during a short phase of abandonment of the settlement at the very end of period VIB1, whose sequence of layers records temporary but
repeated, possibly cyclical, occupations of communities of pastoralists.

Also in the cases of Bashur and Hassek Höyük, the construction of these tombs takes place during phases without an evidence for a related permanent “domestic settlement”\(^54\). This absence of evidence could either stand for an actual abandonment of the settlement or eventually for “light” and scarcely visible occupations. Both cases seem to highlight that the communities who built these tombs were not residing at these settlements on a permanent basis and, in the case of Bashur Höyük, the construction of numerous stone cists, hinting at a reiteration in the use of the same settlement as a cemetery, points to periodical and cyclical, stays and transits of these communities.

It has been hypothesised that, in the frame of these temporary occupations of mobile communities, the construction of these wealthy tombs may look like an act of new foundation aimed at the construction and materialisation of new ancestral lines and that these tombs could have worked as a form of symbolic legitimisation of the possession of the settlements\(^55\).

However, it also seems that the construction of these ancestral tombs was not random, but rather it seemed to have been a meaningful and selective choice that was operated towards those settlements occupied (until few decades before) during the Uruk period as if the foundation of new lineages were to find their roots in the symbolic and physical “substratum” linked to the social, genealogical or cultural heritage of the previous Uruk communities.

In the case of Arslantepe, the search for connections with the Uruk heritage finds a plausible explanation by considering that the pastoralists of period VIB1 could have been the direct descendants of those pastoral groups generated during the Uruk period. An analogous Uruk “origin or descent” cannot be ruled out for the non-residential communities that built their tombs at Bashur and Hassek Höyük.

The relation between Uruk socio-economic developments, mobile communities, post-Uruk ancestral tombs and the new symbolic value acquired by the concentration and display of large quantities of metals in the frame of funerary rituals still remains an open question.

But the above-presented data, by highlighting a series of parallels between the three settlements are coherent enough to allow proposing a tentative hypothesis

If we assume that these “mobile” communities were pastoral communities that already existed in the Uruk period, their movements of transhumance could have favoured since the mid-4th millennium connections with rich in copper ores regions and metal networks.

However, while in the Uruk period their role as traders of metalliferous raw materials and metal artefacts was controlled and administrated by the centralised institutions, the collapse of the latter would have allowed these pastoral groups to interact more freely with regional and inter-regional metal networks. On this note, data on the composition of metals from the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb” seem to confirm this hypothesis. On the one hand, these data highlight a continuity in the exploitation of the same sources that already supplied metal (or metal artefacts) to the centralised institutions of the Uruk-related period VIA, and, on the other hand, new additional sources are recorded as concerns the metals of the “Royal Tomb”\(^56\). These sources are those located in a large area stretching from Central to Eastern Anatolia as far as the Pontic steppes and which could have also represented the mountainous areas that the pastoralist of period VIB1 reached during their movements of seasonal transhumance. What is more, there is little doubt that the metalliferous regions of the South and North Caucasus also provided large potential in terms of metals supply, and the Kura-Araxes and North Caucasian connotation of the metal objects from the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb” definitely speak in favour of contacts with these regions.

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\(^54\) Clearly, this hypothesis has to be revised in the case the domestic structures unearthed at Bashur Höyük were contemporary with the tombs.


\(^56\) Hauptmann et al. 2002, 49.
While data on the metal composition of the artefacts from the cist graves at Bashur Höyük are not available yet, those from Hassek Höyük show significant matching with the metals from the Arslantepe “Royal Tomb” thus highlighting that the high-status individuals buried at Hassek were supplied by, or got access to, the same metal networks as those of the pastoral “élite” at Arslantepe\textsuperscript{57}.

As pointed out by several authors, the post-Uruk period may have been a phase of radical change and political and social reorganisation. In the frame of these changes, the new communities of pastoralists who, after the Uruk collapse, were trying to re-organise themselves in political and territorial terms, could have triggered power struggles and dynamics of competition also in order to get stronger or exclusive connections to regional and interregional metal networks. This could explain why in the funerary representations the large quantity of metal weapons stresses the new connotations of the chiefs as warriors and military leaders.

But this emphasis on metal weapons was also a feature characterising the funerary “ideology” of the North Caucasian kurgans. For this reason, we could speculate that the interregional networks of metals did not only channel raw materials and finished items, but they could have also channelled a funerary ideology heavily founded on metals which first developed among the North Caucasian communities and was transmitted, via these networks and through pastoral groups, to Eastern Anatolia and the Taurus region.

Possibly, a “sacrificial” funerary ideology, such as that enacted in and through the North Caucasian kurgans emphasising the role of leader as a warrior that legitimised status and social rank on the basis of the unequal possession and hoarding of metals which, in their turn, were sacrificed during spectacular funerary rituals, could have represented, for the new societies of Anatolian pastoralists and metal traders, a conceptual “reservoir” to strengthen their power positions and legitimise the use and appropriation of new territories through the construction of new ancestral places.

Between the end of the 4th and the very beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, the intersection between local trajectories of social and political development and trajectories linked to the development of new transregional systems of trade and exchange may have transformed the Taurus Mountains in a region bridging together different geographic and cultural areas: the East Anatolian and Caucasian highlands and the northern stretches of Upper Mesopotamia. The valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers could have become the main North-South arteries along which trade and circulation of metal goods, as well the transfer of new funerary ideologies, were channelled through the movements of increasingly powerful pastoral communities.

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\textsuperscript{57} Hauptmann et al. 2002, 49.
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