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Push or Pull Factors? The Kura-Araxes Expansion from a Different Perspective: the Upper Euphrates Valley

Giulio Palumbi

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Subartu XXXVIII

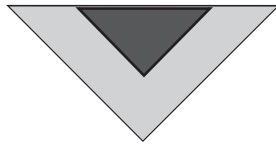
At the Northern Frontier of Near Eastern Archaeology

Subartu

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(editors)

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AN DER NORDGRENZE DER VORDERASIATISCHEN
ARCHÄOLOGIE
NEUE FORSCHUNG ÜBER KAUKASIEN UND ANATOLIEN IN DER
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Push or Pull Factors? The Kura-Araxes ‘Expansion’ from a Different Perspective: the Upper Euphrates Valley

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Abstract

The interpretation of the expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture has been traditionally linked to a set of ‘push’ mechanisms, going from economic and diasporic, that were generated in the core of Kura-Araxes cultural region. Little attention has always been dedicated to the role of the ‘pull’ factors in this expansion as well as to the processes that took place in the Kura-Araxes ‘periphery’. The dynamics of development of the Upper Euphrates valley during the 4th and 3rd millennium BC may suggest a new explanatory model for the Kura-Araxes expansion in which the local pastoral groups may have played a key role in the expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture in the region.

Introduction

During the 4th millennium BC a sharp cultural polarisation emerged in the Near East, resulting from the development of two large-scale phenomena, radically different in their nature, roots and in their dynamics of formation (**Fig. 1**).

The first, known as the Kura-Araxes culture, owes its name to the main rivers of the Southern Caucasus, and developed from c. 3500 BC in a wide region of mountains and highlands in Southern Caucasus, Eastern Anatolia and North-Western Iran. In comparison to earlier Chalcolithic traditions, the Kura-Araxes culture was an expression of a completely new identity in terms of technologies, material culture, social and symbolic traditions. The originality of the Kura-Araxes cultural and material traits might correspond to a renewed intensity of interactions among the communities of the highlands in the 4th millennium BC.

The second phenomenon, to develop in Southern Mesopotamia, owes its name to the largest centre of the Mesopotamian alluvium in this period, the city of Uruk. The ‘Uruk’ cultural tradition first developed in Southern Mesopotamia and was the expression of the earliest urban and state societies of this region. In the second half of the 4th millennium the Uruk culture expanded beyond the geographic boundaries of Southern Mesopotamia to become one of the most extended cultural horizons of the Near East.

In some regions of the highlands however, at roughly the end of the 4th millennium, the end of the Uruk ‘expansion’ coincided with the progressive enlargement of the Kura-Araxes culture, which started to incorporate regions that had been completely extraneous to the earlier developments of this culture. The expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture followed two main directions that involved at first, around 3000 BC, the highlands of Iran and Anatolia (**Fig. 2**), and few decades later, approximately around 2800 BC, also the ‘Amuq region and the Levant.

Several dynamics and multiple factors must have played a role in what was probably a complex process of circulation, transmission and adoption of Kura-Araxes elements, also known as the ‘Kura-Araxes expansion’, that transformed this culture from a specific/regional phenomenon of the highlands to one of the most extensive interregional phenomena of the Near East in the 3rd millennium.

What is striking about the dynamics of the late 4th millennium geographic expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture is that the territories first involved were the Upper Euphrates Valley in Anatolia and the Kangavar Valley in Iran (**Fig. 2**). These were the northernmost territories of the expansion of the Uruk culture in the second half of the 4th millennium. This evidence suggests that these regions witnessed a sort of diachronic

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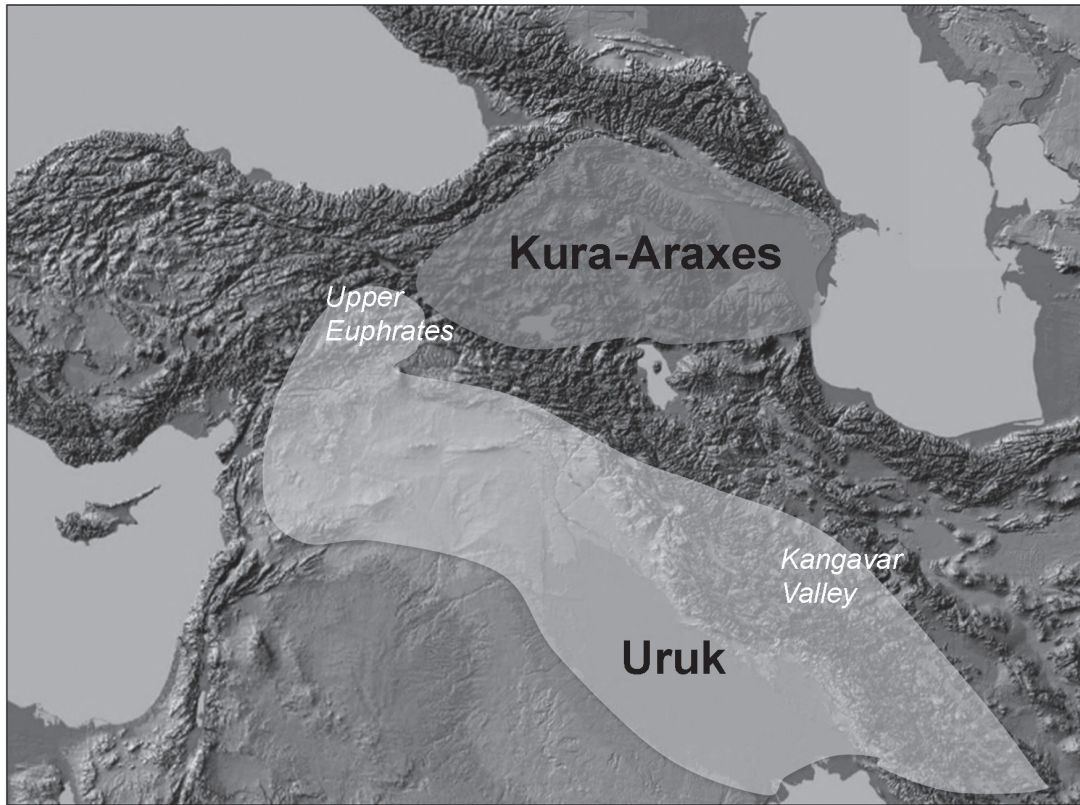


Fig. 1: Map of the Near East showing the regions involved in the Uruk and Kura-Araxes phenomena during the second half of the 4th millennium.

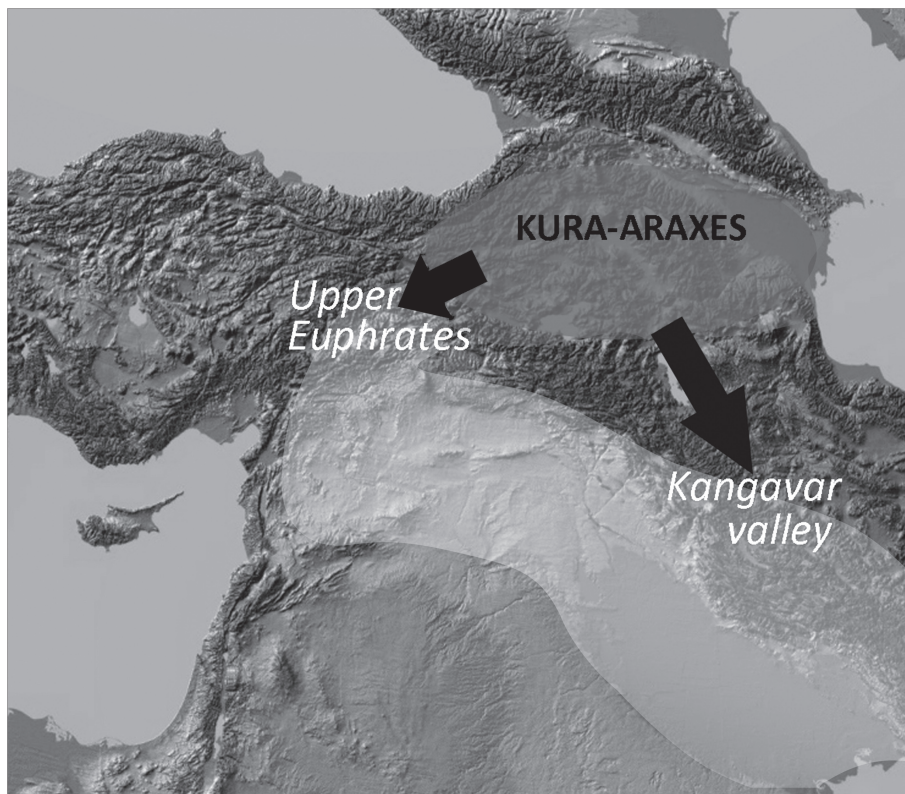


Fig. 2: Map showing the “expansion” of the Kura-Araxes culture in the regions (Upper Euphrates Valley and Kangavar Valley) previously involved in the Uruk phenomenon.

dialectic between these two radically different phenomena: Uruk and Kura-Araxes. Was it just a coincidence, or was there any causal relation between these two phenomena? In which case, what kind of dynamics were behind this Uruk-Kura-Araxes dialectic?

Two different kinds of explanation have been put forward for the dialectic that gave way to the ‘cultural replacement’ of the 4th and 3rd millennia. The first interpreted the demise of the Uruk phenomenon in the highlands, that was focused on the procurement of metals in these regions, as the result of the increasing competition over local resources that was triggered-off by the indigenous Kura-Araxes communities (Algaze 2001: 76-77). The second viewed the expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture as a replacement of the ‘vacuum’ left by the demise of the Uruk phenomenon (Summers 2013). What I would like to propose in this paper is a more constructivist approach advocating that the Kura-Araxes culture expanded in some of the regions formerly incorporated into the Uruk system (such as the Upper Euphrates Valley) because the Uruk impact over these regions created the structural prerequisites, in social and economic terms, for the subsequent expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture.

The Kura-Araxes culture

It is very difficult to summarise a large-scale and long lasting phenomenon such as the Kura-Araxes, characterised as it was by not only a marked regionalisation but also a long chronological development (for overviews on the Kura-Araxes culture see Sagona 1984; Kushnareva 1997; Kohl 2007). However, in spite of the regional and chronological variability, it is possible to identify a set of codified cultural markers that developed at the formation of the Kura-Araxes culture and were invariably reproduced through space and time.

We know that the Kura-Araxes communities lived in small villages composed of monocellular or bicellular dwellings (**Fig. 3a**) built with different materials and techniques (Sagona 1993). Monumental architecture was certainly not a typical feature of the Kura-Araxes settlements and neither were there clearly identifiable buildings with ritual, ceremonial or administrative functions. At the same time, a common element of the Kura-Araxes domestic architecture was the spatial and symbolic centrality of fire-places, which were often decorated with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic motives (**Fig. 3b**), suggesting that domestic buildings could have also hosted ritual practices related to ancestral or totemic cults (Smogorzewska 2004).

An advanced metallurgical know-how is often associated with this culture. Kura-Araxes metallurgy was characterised by an original repertoire, recognisable by specific body ornaments (hair-spirals and double-spiral headed pins) (**Fig. 3c**) and working-tools (flat axes and chisels) (Courcier 2007). However, apart from rare exceptions, large concentrations of metal artefacts have never been recorded either in settlements or in funerary contexts.

The Kura-Araxes ceramics are a clear diagnostic element of this culture as they have a set of distinctive technical and morphological traits. Prevalently grit-tempered and hand-made (slab or coil built), the Kura-Araxes pottery tradition was characterised by a special attention given to surface treatments (Iserlis *et al.* 2010), in particular the constant burnish and the contrasting red-black bi-chromatic effect between exterior and interior surfaces of the vessels. The Kura-Araxes Red-Black Burnished Ware features a fixed pattern with black exterior surfaces and red to brown interior surfaces (Palumbi 2008a: 205). Especially in its early phases, Kura-Araxes ceramics were characterised by a homogeneous morphological repertoire made of truncated-conical necked jars (**Fig. 3f-g**) with ovoid bodies, large S-shaped bowls (**Fig. 3d**) and circular lids (**Fig. 3e**) (Bolger *et al.* 2014). Invariably these vessels have handles on both closed and open shapes as well as on lids.

With regard to primary production, current data shows that the Kura-Araxes communities were founded on an agro-pastoral economy based on cereal agriculture and on non-specialised but rather diversified husbandry strategies (Mohanan 2007; Piro 2008, 2009).

Neither domestic architecture nor funerary customs (often characterised by collective burials) seem to emphasise status differentiation, rank or vertical social stratification, but they rather seem to stress the centrality of horizontal social relations probably founded on kinship and group affiliation (Sagona 2004: 480-481; Palumbi 2007). Kura-Araxes societies were probably structured on a basically equalitarian social ideology and very likely they were organised along ties of kinship and genealogical descent where the household played a fundamental role in terms of basic socio-economic unit.

The Uruk ‘phenomenon’ and its expansion

The Uruk culture was the expression of the earliest city-states in Southern Mesopotamia. This urban phenomenon, recognisable by the large size of the Southern Mesopotamian centres and by the presence of monumental architecture hosting religious, ceremonial and economic activities, was also characterised by the emergence of centralised political institutions. The monumental buildings of the Uruk period were also

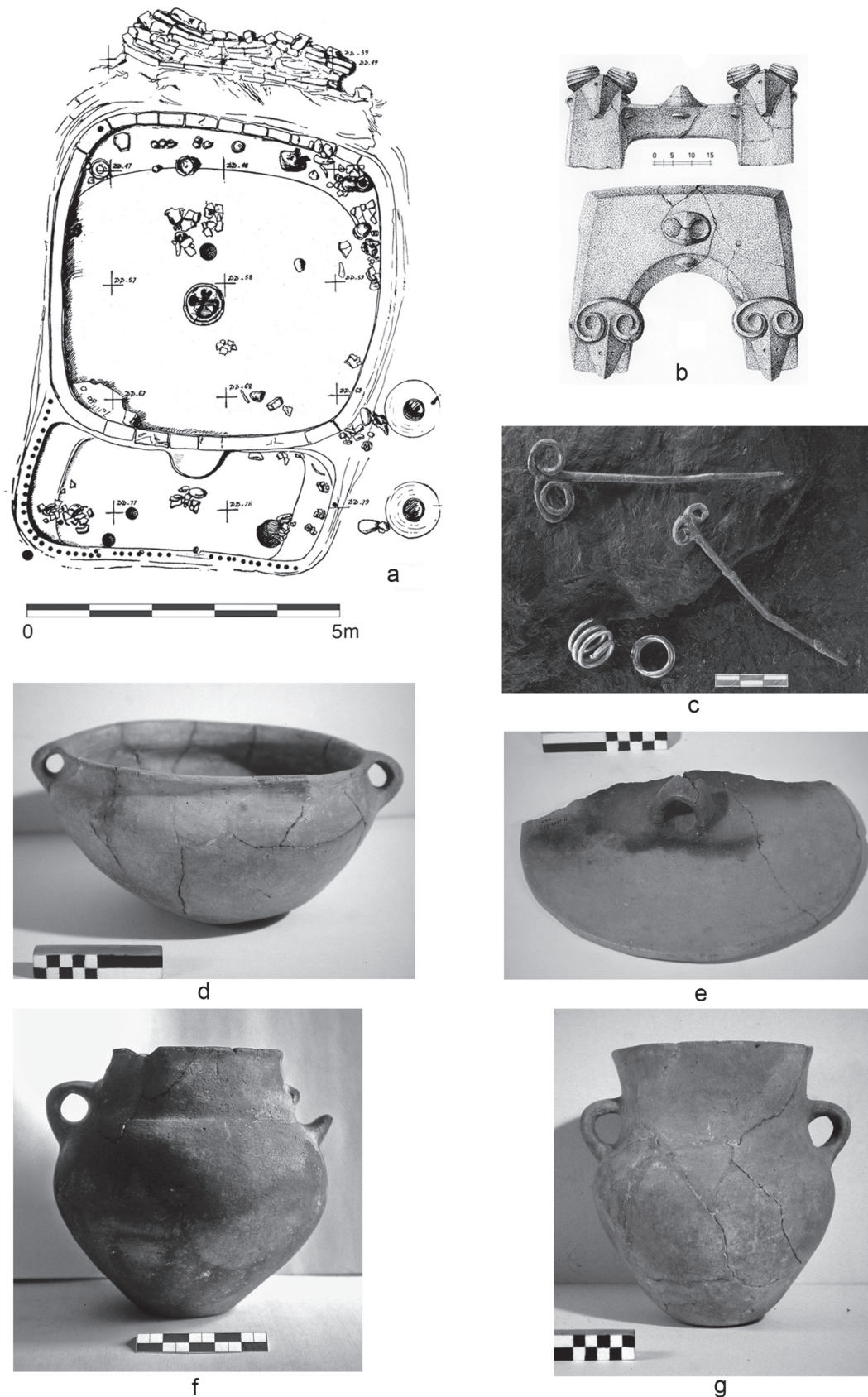


Fig. 3: Diagnostic elements of the Kura-Araxes cultural “package”; a) bicellular wattle and daub dwelling from Kvatskhelebi (Džavakhishvili, Glonti 1962); b) horse-shoe shaped zoomorphic andiron from Kharnut (Badalyan 1985); c) double spiral-headed pins and hair-spirals from the Royal Tomb of Arslantepe (Archivio Missione Archeologica in Anatolia Orientale); d) bowl from Treli (Tbilisi Archaeological Museum); e) lid from Berikldeebi (National Museum of Georgia); f) jar from Samshvilde (National Museum of Georgia); g) jar from Didube (National Museum of Georgia).

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the residences of political and religious élites, and represented the apex of a vertically structured apparatus of functionaries in charge of the control over economic transactions, redistribution of staple products, and over circulation of goods (Forest 1996: 130-139). This control was also exerted to coordinate labour in this period as is witnessed by a radical specialisation in primary and craft production. Specialisation was both a way to intensify production and to increase interdependence between different productive sectors (Frangipane 1996: 192-205). While craftwork shows clear signs of growing sectorialisation and specialisation, data concerning the territory surrounding the Southern Mesopotamian centres seems to record a reorganisation of the land aimed at facilitating an extensive irrigated agriculture and intensified animal exploitation strategies (Adams 1981: 53, 136, 243, 250; Pollock 1999: 67-72). The intensification of primary production carried out by specialised food-producers (peasants and shepherds) was a way of feeding other full-time craftsmen through the intermediation of the centralised economic and political institutions.

As regards primary production, the new husbandry strategies characterising the Uruk period consisted of specialised pastoralism focused on sheep and goats. As several authors have noted, this focus on caprines could have been related to the establishment of a centralised economy (Zeder 1988: 21; Vila 1998: 90-91, 123-129; Frangipane, Siracusano 1998: 242-243). The gregarious nature of these animals, which makes them easy to be managed in large flocks, their high reproductive capacity allowing a quick construction of the animal capital, the new importance of dairy and secondary products for both redistribution and textile production (McCorrison 1997) may all have been factors that determined the new specialised animal strategies of the Uruk period. For all the above cited reasons, the specialised pastoral sector may have emerged in this period as a fundamental socio-economic component of the centralised economies of the early city-states (Porter 2012: 8-24, 86-88).

During the second half of the 4th millennium, while the Kura-Araxes culture was developing in the north-eastern highlands, the Uruk culture was exerting its influence over a vast region of the Near East, by reaching not only the lowlands of Northern Mesopotamia, Syria, South-Eastern Anatolia, but also stretching as far as the highlands of Iran and Anatolia.

The spread of these elements was associated with the intrusive presence of Mesopotamian communities, from the colonial settlements (such as Habuba Kabira and Jebel Aruda in the Syrian Euphrates valley), to the implantation of outposts (*e.g.* Hassek Höyük and Hacinebi in the lower Anatolian Euphrates or Godin Tepe on the Zagros mountains) both in isolation and in coexistence with the indigenous communities (Stein 2001; Gopnik, Rothman 2011: 82-120), and finally to the adoption of Uruk traits in indigenous centres that probably never experienced an intrusive Mesopotamian presence (such as Arslantepe in the Upper Euphrates region) (Frangipane 2001).

On the one hand, the ‘expansion’ of the Uruk culture was certainly the expression of the economic, commercial and territorial interests of the urban polities of the Mesopotamian alluvium (Algaze 1989; Butterlin 2003 for a detailed overview). On the other, this expansion was also the result of the involvement of the non-Mesopotamian polities in a system of interactions with Southern Mesopotamia and of the re-orientation of the indigenous trajectories of social and economic development (already in a phase of full growth of their internal complexity) towards economic and political models analogous to that of the Mesopotamian alluvium (Frangipane 2001; Schwartz 2001).

In fact, the Uruk expansion in a large area of the Near East was not limited to the adoption of a broad spectrum of cultural elements and technologies derived from Southern Mesopotamia (wheel-made ceramics, architecture, iconography and writing). This cultural expansion was also accompanied by a reorganisation of the indigenous societies towards models based on political and economic centralisation, productive specialisation and stratified/vertical social relations.

The Region of the Upper Euphrates in the 4th millennium BC

In the second half of the 4th millennium, the Anatolian Upper Euphrates was the northernmost area affected by the Uruk expansion, and this is clearly recorded by the findings from two sites of the region: Arslantepe, in the Malatya plain, and Tepecik, in the Altinova plain (in the district of Elazığ) (**Fig. 4 a-b**).

Phase VIA at Arslantepe – dating to Late Chalcolithic 5 period of the regional chronology (Rothman 2001) – witnessed the construction of a monumental public complex (**Fig. 4c**), probably the residence of a local élite, that hosted ritual, economic (redistribution of food) and administrative activities (control over economic transactions). In this monumental building the influence of the Uruk culture is clearly visible in some repertoires of the wheel-made ceramics, in the iconographic traits of the glyptic and in the narratives of the wall paintings (Frangipane 1997, 2001).

Also at Arslantepe, the adoption of southern cultural traits was accompanied by a radical political and economic restructuring. The abundance of administrative material found in the public complex testifies to the existence of a hierarchy of functionaries in control of economic activities and transactions as well

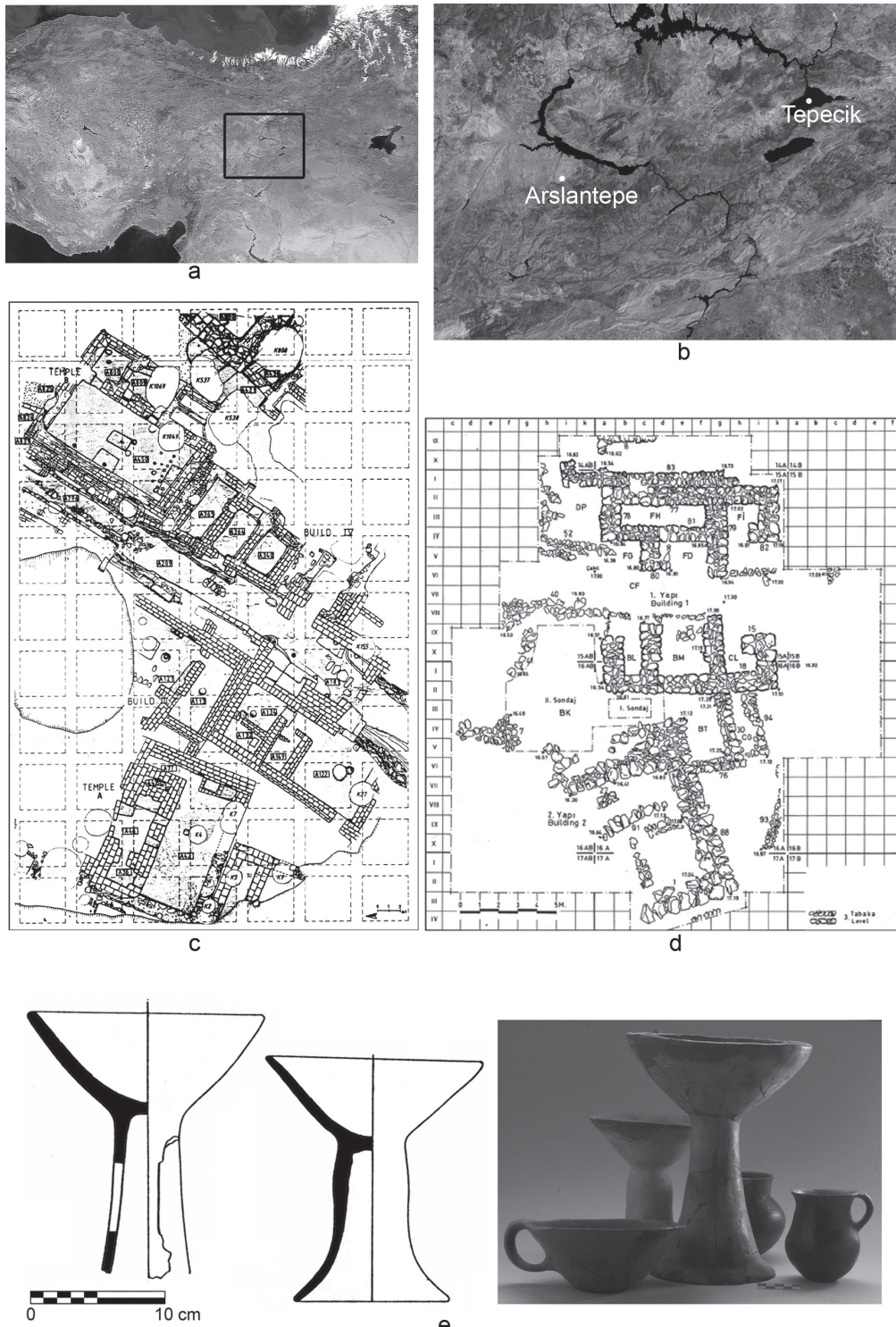


Fig. 4: a) The region of the Upper Euphrates; b) localisation of Arslantepe and Tepecik; c) the public complex at Arslantepe, phase VIA (Archivio Missione Archeologica in Anatolia Orientale); d) the tripartite building at Tepecik, level 3 (Esin 1982); e) Red-Black Burnished Ware from Arslantepe VIA (Archivio Missione Archeologica in Anatolia Orientale).

as redistribution practices that presumably took place inside the building. The implantation of a centrally controlled economy at Arslantepe was coupled with an increasing specialisation in craft and primary production. Both ceramics (wheel-made and mass-produced) and metals (the hoard of weapons found in one of the rooms of the monumental building) provide quantitative and qualitative evidence of these changes (D'Anna, Guarino 2012; Hauptmann *et al.* 2002).

Faunal data also points towards meaningful changes. The new husbandry strategies at Arslantepe phase VIA were characterised by a steep increase of caprines (well beyond 70%) in comparison to those of the earlier Late Chalcolithic period (LC 3-4) that were certainly less specialised because they were more balanced on the whole spectrum of domestic species (Frangipane, Siracusano 1998; Bartosiewicz 2010; Palumbi 2010). These new specialised husbandry strategies are fully consistent with the trend widely attested in the regions impacted by the Uruk phenomenon in the second half of the 4th millennium, and confirm the connection between centralised economy and the development of specialised pastoralism even beyond Southern Mesopotamia.

Unfortunately, there is not sufficient data to understand how the herds were managed in the region of Malatya in the Uruk period, and who was in charge of them. We have no data to say whether the new ‘pastoralist direction’ was imposed by the centralised institution residing at Arslantepe on the village communities around the administrative centre, or if the herds belonging to the centralised institution were managed by specialised groups of pastoralists that acted as an attached component of the centralised system.

Evidence of site distribution on the plain of Malatya has yet to provide any proof of pastoral occupations which date to the second half of the 4th millennium (Frangipane *et al.* 2005; Di Nocera 2009) and therefore the existence of these pastoral groups must be considered as hypothetical even if the faunal data provides meaningful clues to suggest the existence of specialised herders.

Data from Tepecik are unfortunately less exhaustive than those from Arslantepe, and the picture concerning the 4th millennium occupation is limited to the existence of a tripartite building in level 3, vaguely recalling the Uruk tripartite architecture (**Fig. 4d**), and that contained wheel-made ceramics belonging to the Uruk ceramic horizon (Esin 1979, 1982).

It must be pointed out that the ceramic production from both Arslantepe phase VIA and Tepecik level 3 was not only related to the Uruk traditions, but was also characterised by the conspicuous presence of Red-Black Burnished Ware (RBBW). The RBBW of the Upper Euphrates in the 4th millennium was an important part of the local production and at Arslantepe it accounted for 10-12% of the assemblage (Palumbi 2008a: 74-100). The strong similarities that RBBW shows with the analogous production from Central Anatolia stresses the existence of relations and interactions between these two regions that, as suggested in previous works, could have been focused on the circulation of metal artefacts and eventually on the acquisition of metal ores (Frangipane, Palumbi 2007).

The similarities linking RBBW from the Upper Euphrates and from Central Anatolia are represented by shared morphological repertoires (fruit stands, handled jugs and handled mugs) and by an important technical-aesthetic feature represented by the ‘alternate’ red-black pattern (**Fig. 4e**). In the ‘alternate’ red-black pattern, typical of Central Anatolia and of the Upper Euphrates Valley only, the colour black ‘moves’ from the internal to the external surface of the vessel according to the basic function of the container: open shapes feature black interior surfaces and red exterior surfaces, while on closed shapes this pattern is inverted, with black exterior and red interior surfaces (Palumbi 2008b). It has to be stressed that the ‘alternate’ red-black pattern in use in Central Anatolia and in the Upper Euphrates was different from the Kura-Araxes ‘fixed’ red-black pattern (Eastern Anatolia, Southern Caucasus and Iran) where the colour black always remains on the exterior surfaces of the containers (no matter if the shapes are open or closed).

The data available for the Upper Euphrates in the 4th millennium depict a region that was mainly involved in interactions with the Uruk world and with Central Anatolia, while there is no clear evidence of relations with the contemporary Kura-Araxes world that was developing to the east of the Upper Euphrates region in this same period.

At the very end of the 4th millennium, both the public complex at Arslantepe and the tripartite structure at Tepecik were destroyed by heavy fire and were never reconstructed. Several interpretations have been put forward to explain these destructive events: from the demise of the Uruk phenomenon that may have deprived local groups of the power lent to them by exotic legitimisation, to an internal collapse of the indigenous centralised institutions that were unable to adapt a model originating from Mesopotamia to the social, cultural and environmental peculiarities of the Anatolian highlands (Frangipane 2012). It is during this precise phase of economic and political ‘decentralisation’ that new social and cultural entities became materially visible in the archaeological record of the Upper Euphrates for the first time. These new entities started to play a central role in the cultural and possibly also political dynamics of the Upper Euphrates, especially in those concerning the interactions with the neighbouring Kura-Araxes world.

Discussing the Kura-Araxes ‘expansion’

The traditional interpretative framework for the geographic expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture has been that of the physical movement of Kura-Araxes people migrating from the ‘core’ Kura-Araxes regions (Southern Caucasus, Eastern Anatolia, North-Western Iran) to the surrounding territories. The territories involved in this expansion consist of a large and heterogeneous geo-ecological area of the Near East, going from the highlands of Anatolia (the region of the Upper Euphrates valley) and of Iran (the Zagros mountains and the Kangavar valley) to the lowlands of Syria (the ‘Amuq’ plain) as far as the Eastern Mediterranean coast and the Levant.

In spite of the large variability of the regions involved in this phenomenon and of the different chronologies, modalities and rhythms of this expansion, the migrationist interpretation for the Kura-Araxes expansion has never been questioned. More recently, M. Rothman proposed a more complex model of the Kura-Araxes expansion, advocating that it was the result not only of ‘push’ factors (such as demographic shifts) but also of ‘pull’ factors (such as the expanding markets in northern Syria and the Upper Euphrates or the availability of new pasturelands) that directed the Kura-Araxes populations towards particular directions (Rothman 2003: 98-99).

Several types of ‘push’ factors have so-far been considered as determining these movements, from migrating diasporas filling different territories or ‘jumping’ from one territory and the other (Batiuk, Rothman 2007), to trade in metals (Kelly-Buccellati 1979), from search for new grazing or farming lands (Sagona 1984; Rothman 2003), dynamics of social fission and segmentation (Marro 2011) and, more recently, the spread of viticulture (Batiuk 2013) and, in the frame of the movements hypothesised between the ‘Amuq plain and Southern Levant, the search for salt (Tonussi, this volume).

Whatever the ‘push’ factor was, the mechanism of the Kura-Araxes expansion was always imagined as a unidirectional movement originating from the core regions where the Kura-Araxes culture developed in its early stages (*c.* 3500-3000 BC) reaching the surrounding areas at a later date (after 3000 BC). However, some basic issues concerning the expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture have never been properly questioned, or have received scant attention to date. One of them certainly concerns the geographic direction that the Kura-Araxes flow took since its beginnings, that is from the end of the 4th millennium. In particular, the westward direction taken by this expansion, starting from the Upper Euphrates region and proceeding to the ‘Amuq plain and eventually the Levant, has always been taken for granted, as if it was a ‘natural’ or pre-determined migratory destination.

I believe that the direction taken by the Kura-Araxes expansion was not random, and that in order to address the dynamics and the vectors behind its expansion it is crucial to understand which regions were involved and the historical context of this involvement. The evidence from the region of the Upper Euphrates suggests that the Kura-Araxes expansion was a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to single or multiple waves of migrants originating from the Southern Caucasus, but rather that this was the result of a historical dialectic between multiple social, economic and political factors, among which the role played by the indigenous populations was certainly crucial.

Pastoral communities in the Upper Euphrates in the early 3rd millennium BC

At Arslantepe, the phase following the destruction of the public building marked a sharp break from the past. The following phase VIB1, dating to *c.* 3000-2900 BC, consisted of several (at least four) phases of occupation. The earliest of these was built directly above the ruins of the public building of phase VIA, and was characterised by ‘light’ forms of occupation; namely wooden and wattle-and-daub architecture employed for the construction of huts and fences (Frangipane *et al.* 2005; Frangipane 2012) (**Fig. 5 a-b**). Some of these were internally furnished with round fire-places with a central hole for ashes (**Fig. 5 c-d**), thus recalling former Chalcolithic fire installations and suggesting that some of these structures had a domestic function.

An analogous picture is also recorded at Tepecik, where the destruction of the Late Uruk tripartite structure was followed by two levels of occupation (levels 2 and 1) characterised by flimsy architectural remains, such as burned clay floors, the stone foundations of a small rectangular building and several pits (Esin 1979, 1982). These scanty remains would also appear to suggest that Tepecik was occupied in the same ‘light’ pattern as experienced at Arslantepe at the very beginning of the 3rd millennium.

Once again, the faunal data at Arslantepe from the levels with wattle-and-daub architecture suggests that specialised husbandry strategies were employed; caprines outnumber (70-90%) all other reared species (Siracusano, Bartosiewicz 2012; Siracusano, Palumbi 2014). Such specialised herding strategies – focusing on caprines – coupled with ‘light’ occupations seem to indicate that the groups living at Arslantepe at the beginning of the 3rd millennium were pastoral (and mobile).

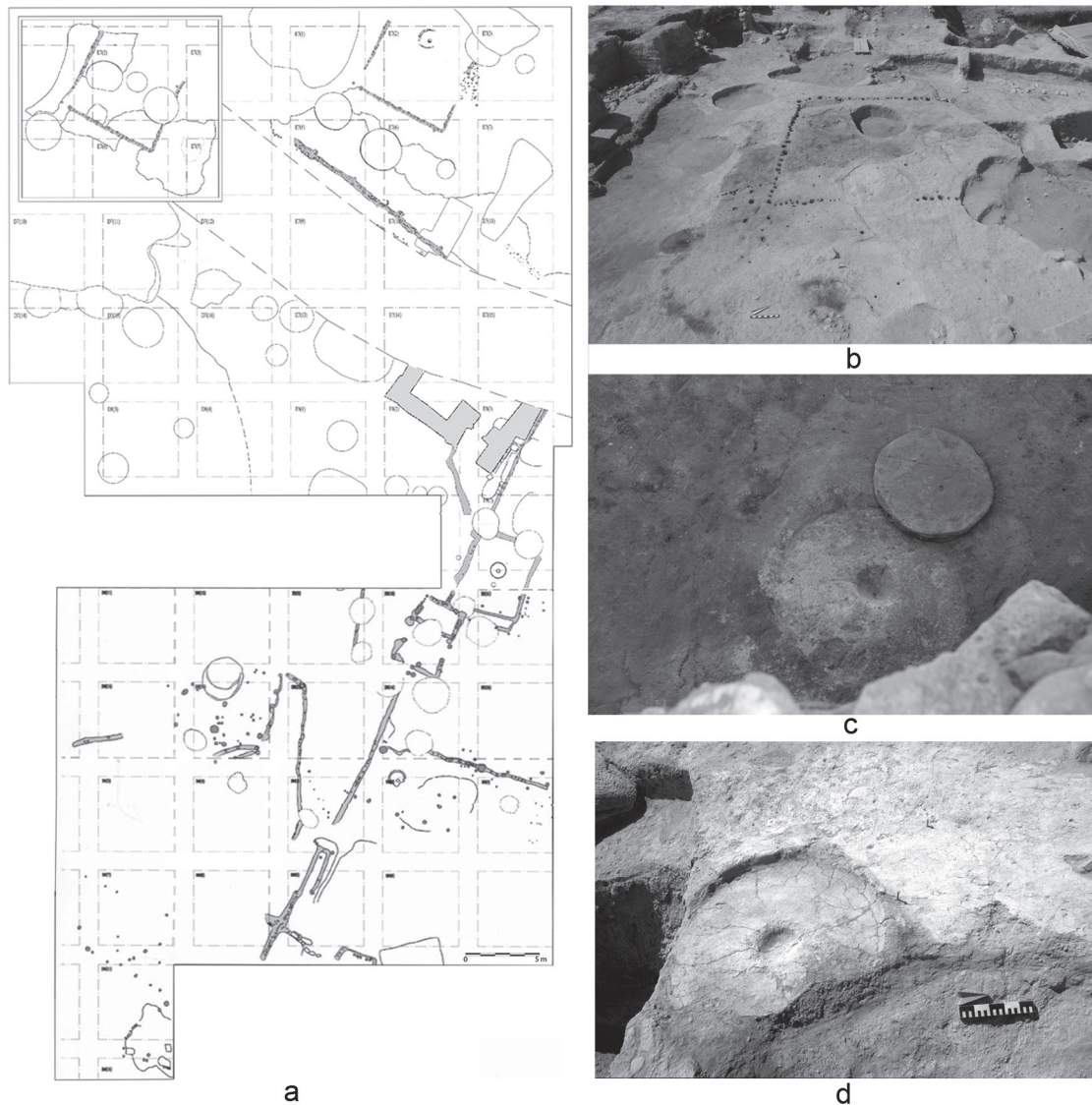


Fig. 5: a) Arslantepe phase VIB1, the occupation with wattle and daub architecture; b) large hut on the top of the mound; c-d) circular fireplaces from phase VIB1 (Archivio Missione Archeologica in Anatolia Orientale).

The questions that have already attracted the attention of several scholars are the following: who were the pastoral communities that occupied Arslantepe at the end of the 4th millennium and where did they come from? Phase VIB1 at Arslantepe has been traditionally interpreted as the remains of the occupation of foreign (Kura-Araxes) nomadic/pastoral communities that had migrated into the Upper Euphrates region. However, ceramic studies have provided certain insights that support a different interpretation; one that is not only viable, but respects the complexity of the cultural assemblage of these pastoral communities.

There is a radical break in the ceramic production at Arslantepe VIB1 from the 4th millennium traditions (phase VIA). In phase VIB1, ceramics were hand-made and Red-Black Burnished Ware accounted for the largest part of the assemblage (between 70% and 90% depending on the contexts) (Palumbi 2008a). These quantitative changes went hand in hand with changes in morphological repertoires; Red-Black Burnished Ware from phase VIB1 featured an original mix of different cultural traditions. On the one hand, double-handled jars with cylindrical necks and ovoid bodies, circular lids and their ubiquitous handles recall typical Kura-Araxes morphological and functional traditions (Fig. 6 a-g, o). On the other, there is a clear continuity between the RBBW from Arslantepe VIB1 and the RBBW tradition of the 4th millennium and clear links to a ceramic horizon which differs dramatically from Kura-Araxes. Indeed, most of the open shapes in phase VIB1 at Arslantepe are hemispherical bowls with black interior surfaces and red exterior surfaces (Fig. 6 h-m, q). This red-black alternate pattern is the same as

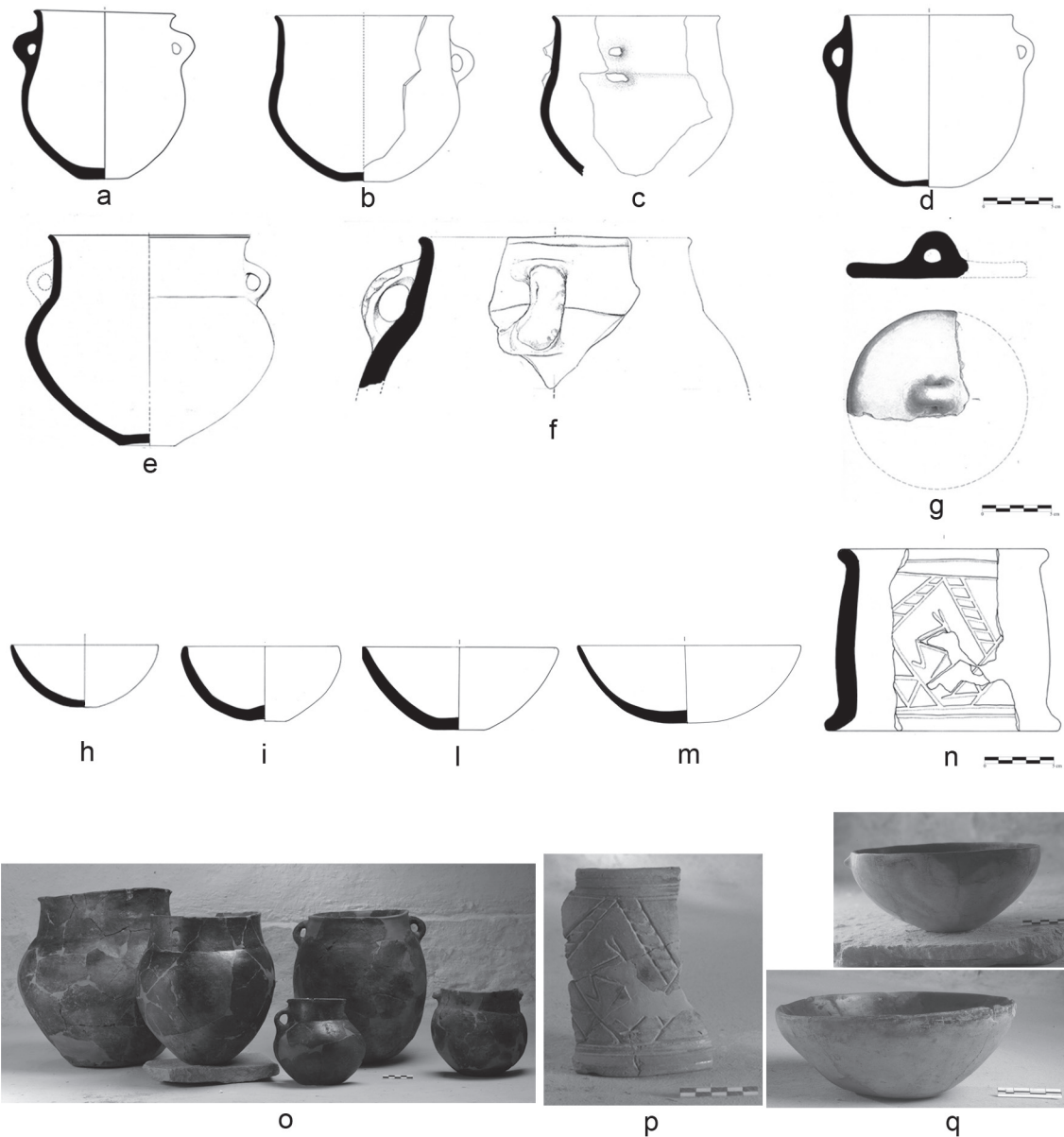


Fig. 6: Red-Black and Monochrome burnished wares from Arslantepe VIB1; a-g,o) Kura-Araxes related shapes; h-m, q) black-topped bowls; n-p) cylindrical potstand (Archivio Missione Archeologica in Anatolia Orientale).

that already in use in the Upper Euphrates during the 4th millennium (phase VIA) and which, as already mentioned, was different from the fixed Kura-Araxes red-black pattern.

Furthermore, in terms of typology, these hemispherical bowls – often characterised by a black band on the exterior rim – are identical to those produced in the same period in a large area of Central Anatolia (**Fig. 7a**), where they are commonly termed as ‘black-topped bowls’ (Sarı 2007). The only difference with the central Anatolian ‘black-topped bowls’ is that those from Arslantepe were often equipped with drill-holes, small handles and pierced lugs (**Fig. 8 a-i**) that seem to indicate that these small containers needed to be transported or suspended, possibly due to the mobile life-style of the people that occupied Arslantepe.

At Tepecik also, the pottery from levels 1 and 2 features the same mix of Kura-Araxes repertoires (double-handled jars and fragments of circular lids) and of red-black hemispherical bowls (with black interior surfaces) (**Fig. 7b**) analogous to the Central Anatolian black-topped bowls and that, like at Arslantepe, are equipped with drill-holes (**Fig. 8 l-n**)¹.

¹ Data from Tepecik are from the ceramic collection stored at the University of Istanbul.



Fig. 7: a) Black-topped bowls from Kültepe in Central Anatolia (Collection of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara); b) black-topped bowls from Tepecik (Istanbul University Collection).

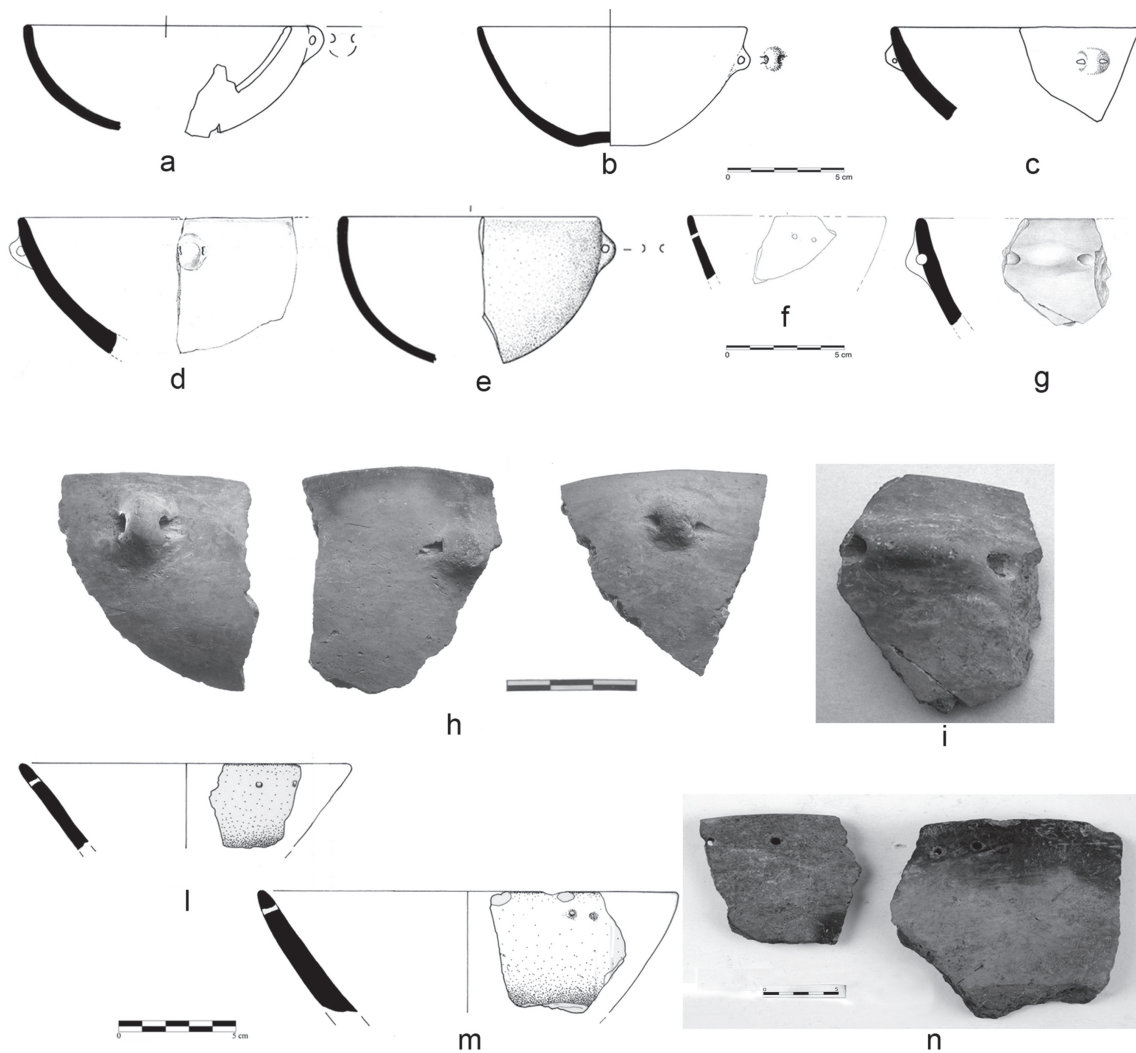


Fig. 8: a-i) “Equipped” black-topped bowls from Arslantepe (Archivio Missione Archeologica in Anatolia Orientale); l-n) “equipped” black-topped bowls from Tepecik (Istanbul University Collection).

Finally, another element of novelty in the ceramic production from Arslantepe VIB1 are cylindrical pot stands with incised or grooved decoration (**Fig. 6 n, p**). These cylindrical shapes have no comparatives either in the central Anatolian or in the Kura-Araxes repertoires, and have thus to be considered a local feature, that in fact will represent a typical element of the ceramic inventories of the Malatya region throughout the Early Bronze Age (Frangipane *et al.* 2005).

Summarising all these data, Arslantepe and Tepecik show strikingly similar occupational and cultural (ceramic) developments during the second half of the 4th and the very beginning of the 3rd millennium that can be summarised as follows:

1. Occupation dating to the Late-Uruk period (LC 5, *c.* 3400-3100 BC), characterised by:
 - a. Coexistence of Uruk ceramics and of Red-Black Burnished Ware with alternate pattern linked to Central Anatolian traditions,
 - b. Specialised pastoralism (Arslantepe VIA, no data available for Tepecik);
2. Violent destruction of the Late Uruk occupation (*c.* 3100 BC);
3. Reoccupation with light architecture (EB I, *c.* 3100-2900 BC), characterised by:
 - a) Red-Black Burnished Ware with alternate pattern mixing Kura-Araxes and Central Anatolian traditions,
 - b) Specialised pastoralism (Arslantepe VIB1, no data available for Tepecik).

Considering these striking analogies, how should we interpret what seems to be a symbiotic relation that occurred in the Upper Euphrates Valley between the occupations of the Late Uruk period and the following appearance on these same sites of pastoral or mobile communities characterised by a ceramic culture combining local, Kura-Araxes and Central Anatolian traditions?

A different hypothesis for the Kura-Araxes expansion in the Upper Euphrates

There are several reasons to believe that the groups that occupied Arslantepe and Tepecik at the very beginning of the 3rd millennium were not foreign Kura-Araxes communities that had migrated to the Upper Euphrates Valley as a result of the vacuum left by the demise of the Uruk phenomenon. There are meaningful continuities linking these groups to the 4th millennium cultural and economic traditions of the Upper Euphrates Valley.

In terms of economy and subsistence strategies, specialised husbandry focusing on caprines – identical to those already practiced at Arslantepe VIA in the context of the fourth-millennium centralised economy – contrasts with the non-specialised and diversified husbandry practiced by the Kura-Araxes communities of Eastern Anatolia and of the Southern Caucasus in the same period. In terms of material culture, the circular fireplaces with central depression in the huts from phase VIB1 at Arslantepe closely remind one of the domestic traditions of the 4th millennium of the Upper Euphrates Valley, and certainly these fire-places were different from the clover-leaf or horse-shoe shaped fire-installations that were in use in the contemporary Kura-Araxes contexts.

Finally, the ceramic repertoire of these pastoral communities (at both Arslantepe and Tepecik) cannot be considered as typically 'Kura-Araxes' because it is composed of a mixture of three different traditions with roots in different geographic and cultural regions.

1. Red-Black Burnished Ware with the alternate red-black pattern typical of the Upper Euphrates Valley and Central Anatolia;
2. Cylindrical pot stands representing a typical feature of the Upper Euphrates Valley;
3. Black-topped bowls that were also typical of Central Anatolia;
4. Handled jars and lids recalling the Kura-Araxes traditions developing in this same period in Eastern Anatolia and in the Southern Caucasus.

The combination of these features suggests that the people that occupied Arslantepe and Tepecik immediately after the destruction of the Late-Uruk occupations might have been local rather than foreign Kura-Araxes communities. Furthermore, these pastoral groups could have been the direct descendants, in both social and economic terms, of the same specialised pastoral communities that sprung up following the emergence of a centralised economy in the Upper Euphrates during the 4th millennium.

In the early 3rd millennium, after the collapse of the centralised institutions and the crisis of the local groups of power, these pastoral communities could have started to interact more openly, both politically and culturally, with neighbouring regions and populations. The hybridised ceramic repertoire of these groups, by mixing local, Kura-Araxes and Central Anatolian traditions, may have reflected or expressed new practices of mobility carried out by these pastoral groups; with a larger geographical range than that of the 4th millennium, when these movements might have been under the territorial and political control of local centralised institutions. The fact that these pastoral groups were the first to introduce new Kura-Araxes elements in the Upper Euphrates would seem to suggest that their movements may have stretched as far as the eastern Anatolian highlands thus activating – for the first time – stable interactions with the Kura-Araxes world.

Several underlying factors may have encouraged the specialised pastoralists of the Upper Euphrates to adopt elements from the Kura-Araxes culture. After the collapse of the institutions of power, the beginning of the 3rd millennium saw a phase of political reorganisation of local communities. From this perspective, the adoption of new Kura-Araxes traits – strongly affirmed in the ritual representation of the ‘Royal Tomb’ of Arslantepe that dates to the very end of phase VIB1 (Frangipane *et al.* 2001; Palumbi 2008a: 108-155) – could have represented a process of reorientation towards the Kura-Araxes spheres for these communities, possibly an attempt to build new political alliances by means of the construction of new cultural identities.

Just why the Kura-Araxes socio-cultural system was so appealing for these pastoral communities and why Kura-Araxes cultural traits were chosen instead of those of the neighbouring cultures of Syria or Northern Mesopotamia is yet to be fully investigated. Affinities in social structure and organisation (the Kura-Araxes communities were probably kin-based and household centred); the system of meanings attached to the Kura-Araxes cultural model (as the expression of a non-centralised and equalitarian model) that was so different from the model represented by the Uruk culture (that was stratified and centralised) (Greenberg, Palumbi 2014); and finally, the growing role that Kura-Araxes communities may have played in an integrated regional system managing strategic natural resources (metals, obsidian and pastures): all of these factors may go some way in explaining these choices.

Yet one could argue that commonalities between the ceramic repertoire of these pastoral communities and the Anatolian tradition of the black ‘black-topped bowls’ may suggest that the communities’ interaction with, and visits to the Central Anatolian plateau, continued into the 3rd millennium. Indeed, the latter hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the geographical distribution of ‘equipped’ black-topped bowls (**Fig. 9a**) that were so typical of the ceramic repertoire of the early 3rd millennium occupations at Arslantepe and Tepecik. The distribution of these ‘equipped’ bowls stretches from the Upper Euphrates to the regions of Sivas, Kayseri and Elbistan, and follows a westward direction (Palumbi 2012), thus connecting sites located at different altitudes and geographical locations; from the plains and valleys located at 900-1200 metres asl (those of Malatya, Altinova and Elbistan) to high altitude sites located as far as 1700 metres asl (**Fig. 9b**).

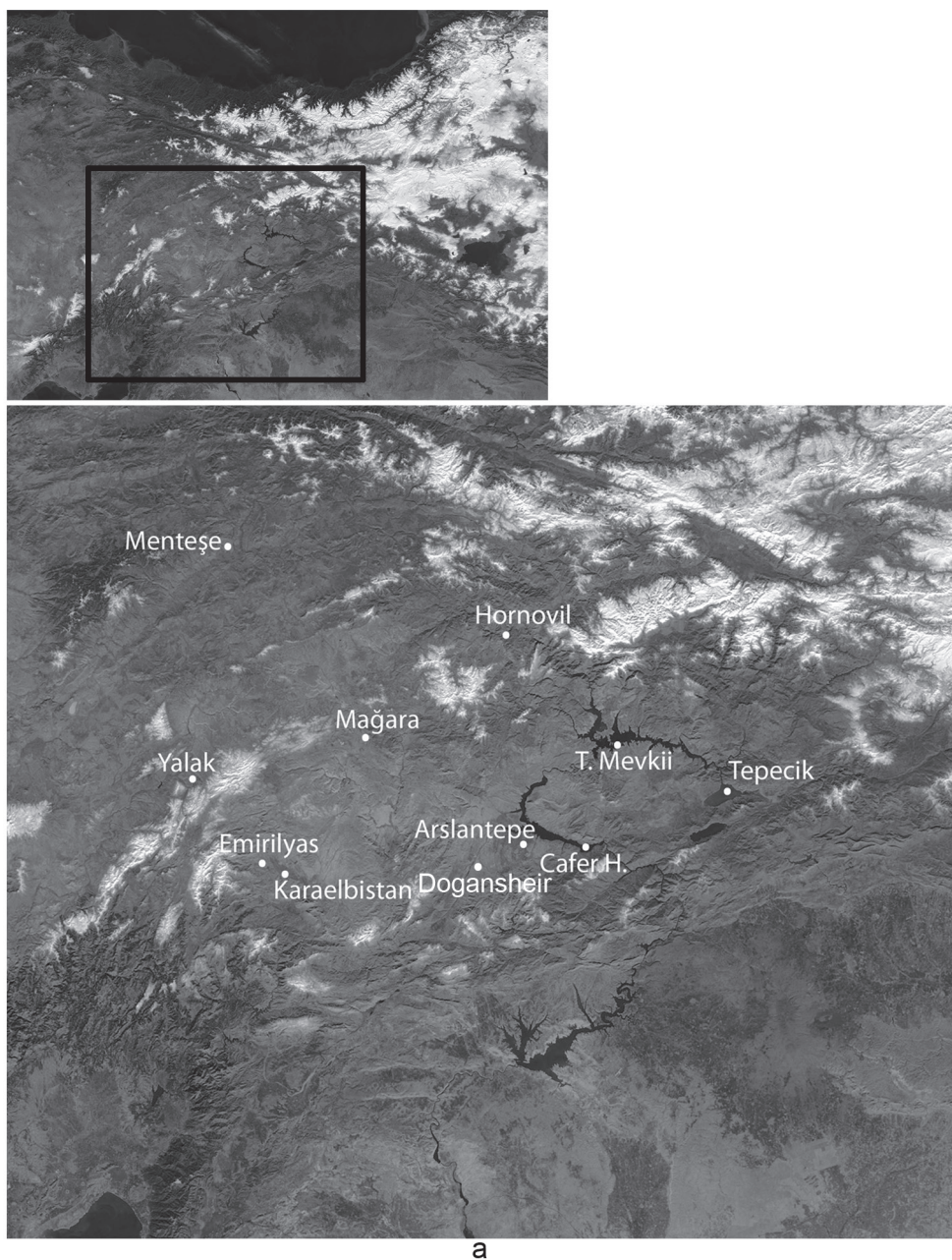
The distribution of these ‘equipped’ bowls not only confirms the existence of paths of communication connecting the Upper Euphrates to the neighbouring western regions, but also that this communication was ‘vertical’; and as such can be tentatively recognised as movement linked to the practice of transhumance.

Conclusions

Clearly, the picture proposed in this paper needs further data to be substantiated. However, I think that the available evidence is sufficient for us to begin to think of the Kura-Araxes ‘expansion’ as a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to mono-factorial explanations. The traditional unidirectional and migrationist perspective risks overlooking the complexity and multiplicity of factors at play and needs to be revised. The expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture did not take place in isolation from events in the regions surrounding Eastern Anatolia, the Southern Caucasus and North-Western Iran. It did not take place outside of history, and was not without its own history. This expansion was the outcome of relational processes resulting from synchronic and diachronic dialectics between different cultures and societies, as well as from present and past historical conditions.

Rather than an expansion pushed by human movements originating from the Kura-Araxes ‘core’ regions that intruded into the Upper Euphrates by means of exogenous carriers, the Kura-Araxes culture could have arrived in the Upper Euphrates because it was pulled by indigenous vectors. These vectors may have been local pastoral groups who had lived in the Upper Euphrates region since the 4th millennium: societies that had formed under the influence of models of centralisation that in their turn had been borrowed from Southern Mesopotamia.

This is why the impact of the Uruk model over the social and economic organisation of the communities of the Upper Euphrates in the 4th millennium was a structural prerequisite for the Kura-Araxes expansion in this same region in the early 3rd millennium. What took place in the Upper Euphrates valley between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd millennium was one of the earliest steps of the Kura-Araxes culture outside of its traditional boundaries and was the result of the synergy between Uruk and Kura-Araxes phenomena.



Site	Region	Altitude	Source/References
Yalāk	Kayseri	1709 AMSL	BIAA Collection
Mentese	Sivas	1545 AMSL	Ökse 1993: Abb. 1a: 12-13
Mağara	Sivas	1687 AMSL	Ökse 1993: Abb. 1a: 12-13
Emirilyas	Elbistan	1281 AMSL	BIAA Collection
Karaelbistan	Elbistan	1127 AMSL	BIAA Collection
Hornovil	Sivas	1433 AMSL	Russell 1980: fig. 8
Arslantepe	Malatya	890 AMSL	Palumbi 2012
Cafer Hoyuk	Malatya	740 AMSL	Özdoğan 1977:pl. 70, 8
Taşkun Mevkii	Elaziğ	900 AMSL	Sagona 1994: figs. 27, 30, 33, 34
Tepecik	Elaziğ	820 AMSL	Istanbul University Collection
Dogansheir	Malatya	1220 AMSL	Malatya Museum

Fig. 9: Distribution of the “equipped” black-topped bowls in the Upper Euphrates and in Central Anatolia.

Push or Pull Factors?

The flow of Kura-Araxes cultural traits that, some decades later, would reach Western Syria, the Mediterranean Coast and the Levant, and developed into what is commonly termed the Khirbet Kerak horizon, requires a different explanation to that proposed in this paper. These regions were not involved in the Uruk expansion, neither in terms of the establishment of centralised economies in the 4th millennium, nor of the development of specialised pastoralism.

If one seeks a deeper understanding of the dynamics of expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture, in terms of its rhythms, directions, modalities and actors, an explanation – regardless of the chronologies, geographies, histories and societies that were involved – probably does not exist. It is only by means of a multiplicity of explanations, regionally and historically contextualised, that we can find the interpretative keys for this complex, long lasting and geographically extended phenomenon.

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