

Different types of multiethnic societies and different patterns of development and change in the prehistoric Near East

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After briefly examining the forms of cultural contact in pre- and protohistoric societies in relation to the problem of the varying perception of territories and their “borders” as well as of “membership” in those societies, and after a brief reconsideration of the concept of culture and ethnicity in such archaic contexts, this paper then examines three examples of multiethnic societies in the Near East, and specifically in Upper Mesopotamia and Southeast Anatolia, in the fifth, fourth, and at the beginning of the third millennia before the common era (BCE), respectively. These examples are dealt with as emblematic cases of different models of society, types of interaction with alien groups, levels of integration, and development dynamics. Each of these cases is examined with respect to its socioeconomic context, the archeological evidence of “multiethnicity,” the types of interaction between different components, the degree of cultural integration achieved, and the effects on the dynamics of change and the development of the societies examined. By analyzing and comparing these examples, the paper aims to show how interethnic contact impacted differently on different societies according to their types, the reasons and purposes of the interaction, and the degree of integration achieved.

intercultural contact | economic integration | cultural integration | Upper Mesopotamia | East Anatolia

Intercultural contacts and community interactions not only are well-attested in archaeology, but also have often been the main focus of interest by scholars. One of the main reasons why these phenomena have acquired such importance in archaeological research is that the dynamics of cultural transmission have indeed been one of the main drivers of processes of change (1).

Different schools of anthropology have variously explained cultural contacts by emphasizing either population movements or interaction spheres and hybridization, technological transfer, or exchange and trade. In particular, theories stressing trade-oriented “expansion” and cultural permeation have dominated the debate in recent decades, and relations between differently complex societies have been considered as prime movers for the development of pivotal phenomena, such as the emergence of state and urban societies (2–7). The world-system model has been applied to early societies, being based on the theoretical assumption that unequal and unbalanced trade relations between different ethnic groups necessarily result in the acquisition of the dominant group model by all of the communities involved in the relationship. This approach does not sufficiently account for the variety and complexity of the dynamics of contacts and mingling among prehistoric communities, which depend on the different social and economic structures and needs of the populations involved.

Examining and interpreting the dynamics and effects of cultural contacts in archaeology involve several questions, such as the investigation of the directions of the cultural transmission and the understanding of the creation of meaning and attribution of value to “imported” features in the context of a new society (8).

Also equally important is the question of the geographical boundaries of the cultural/ethnic entities coming into contact. These boundaries were, in my opinion, attenuated and flexible in prestate and early-state societies, when political territories and borders had not yet been precisely established (9, 10). In these societies, the individual and group identities may have been more related to their social and cultural affinities (belonging to tribes, villages, kinship groups, clans, etc.) than to territories with precisely defined borders. Even though there must have certainly existed important relations with the land where a community lived and produced its subsistence—which was probably also perceived as one of the features of their identity—I suggest that the “borders” of these territories were not exactly designed before some kind of political, and economic, centralization arose, bringing about needs to precisely define the limits of the territory from which the central authorities had the right to extract surpluses and labor. Only then the identity of groups probably began to be related to precisely delimited “political spaces”—cities, regions, institution spheres.

The flexibility of boundaries in prestate societies was probably one of the main conditions for the constant and widespread movements of individuals and groups, which are well-attested in several pre- and protohistoric societies in various regions of the Near East. The very wide circulation of objects and materials and the appearance of culturally hybrid features may have been the result of a variety of forms and ways of contact, ranging from repeated or occasional events—meetings, feasting, etc.—to permanent shifts of some people into new regions, such as those brought about by village “fission” mechanisms, large-scale exogamic marriage rules, or other forms of group detachment from their original motherland. Phenomena of these kinds are very evident in the Mesopotamian environment in the seventh to sixth and fifth millennia before the common era (BCE): They can be inferred from the wide dissemination of some “culturally identifying” objects (painted vessels with well-defined styles and iconographies and other types of symbolically significant exhibited pottery, figurines, and items rich in symbolic meaning), which crossed several and sometimes distant territories, not as the result of “trade,” in the seventh to fifth

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millennia BCE (10–13). Different in nature were the contacts attested by the presence of “colonial” settlements and alien group intrusions in various sites of Upper Mesopotamia and along the Middle Euphrates in the fourth millennium BCE (3, 5, 14–16).

Many of these phenomena led to the creation of hybrid or “multicultural” societies.

But the question one has to ask when trying to recognize the possible different groups coming into contact is how we can define them: Were they different ethnic groups? What does the word “ethnic” mean? And what perception did these groups have of themselves and of their diversity?

The relation between ethnicity and culture in the study of societies of archaeological interest is one of the most complex issues, particularly when the analysis has to depend exclusively on sources of material culture, as is the case with prehistoric societies. But, in recent times, some authors have correctly shown that such a difference is of subtle or negligible importance, if not nonexistent (17–19). Ethnic identity, as Herring has pointed out, is a “construction”: “Societies create customs, traditions, and myths to bolster and legitimize a sense of belonging” (ref. 19, p. 132). This statement means that “a shared cultural background can create the perception of an ethnic identity” and also implies that this identity is “a flexible construction” that can change over time. Looking at the C. Renfrew statements about ethnicity (20), he uses a multifactor definition including shared culture (community of customs and beliefs), religion, common descent, shared history (that means shared memory and myths), a shared language and name, and a shared territory (ref. 20, p. 130). (I would consider all these factors as part of a “culture.”) But the most important factor in this same concept is self-awareness: as he states, “Ethnicity is what a people believe it to be”.

Ethnicity is therefore the construction of a common identity based on the perception of common origin, history, traditions, beliefs, customs, institutions, and possibly language. (A historically variable aspect is, in my opinion, the shared “territory.”) In other word, it overlaps with culture; and, as culture, ethnicity may have a certain degree of dynamism over time. The main difference I see in the use of the two concepts is that, when we use the term “ethnicity,” we do explicit reference to the awareness of the sense of belonging of a group.

The main problem is therefore not so much to recognize the difference between “ethnicities” and “cultures” in archaeology, but rather to identify, on the basis of available data, the “cultural identities” and their archaeological correlates. Thus, recognizing possible coexisting ethnic groups in one and

the same society and/or region means recognizing self-perceived different group identities and their material expressions.

Another important aspect is to distinguish, in the cases of cultural mingling, when and how long the self-awareness of the differences was maintained: In other words, when does a “multiethnic” (or multicultural) society perceive itself as such? Were the differences that we observe in the material culture consciously exhibited expressions of a group identity? The first thing to establish is whether a group, while manifesting cultural features of different origins, symbolically tends to emphasize or minimize them. The differences may be annulled as the result of a powerful process of integration, whose outcome can be either the hybridization of the two cultures or the supremacy of one over the other, with the effect of doing away with the original multicultural situation. The community self-perception can therefore change over time by incorporating original multiple identities into one.

The third crucial aspect of the problem we are addressing here is the role played by the various forms of interaction and cultural integration in the social change that possibly occurred in the communities involved.

We are now going to examine some examples of prehistoric Near Eastern societies that we can consider as being wholly or partly multiethnic, each characterized by different patterns of interaction and degrees of integration. We will try to highlight the peculiarities and the differences, as well as the different impacts these various modes of interaction had on the processes of social and cultural change.

Some Cases of Possible Multiethnic Societies in the Prehistory of the Near East: A Comparison

The cases we will be examining here refer to different periods and areas of the Near East and to different categories of “diversity” of the groups that came into contact. Each of these cases is emblematic, in its own way, of different modalities, motivations, and effects of contact, and thus offer the opportunity to analyze the social and cultural impact of different forms of contact and perhaps ethnic mixing.

Multiethnic Societies in Fifth Millennium Northern Mesopotamia? The Ubaid Impact on Halaf Societies.

The first case I would like to consider here concerns the societies living in Upper Mesopotamia in the fifth millennium BCE. Here, the archaeological data available reveal societies that had been profoundly changed from those that had occupied the same area in the previous millennium (the so-called “Halaf” communities), showing

new features that closely recall another culture (“Ubaid”) in Southern Mesopotamia. Northern and Southern Mesopotamia had been characterized by deeply different types of societies in the sixth millennium BCE, albeit linked to each other by repeated and continuous relations and contacts over more than two millennia (21). The novelties observed in fifth millennium societies are recognizable in various aspects of the material culture—new types of domestic architecture, village arrangements, public buildings, pottery, and other daily life objects—that indicate that the transformation also affected the communities’ social, economic, and organizational structure. This change was so all-encompassing that the final effect of the process was the “disappearance” of the culture and way of life of the Halaf communities that had occupied those areas for more than one millennium.

How and why did this far-reaching change take place? How long did this process last? What does the disappearance of the Halaf culture mean? Is there any evidence of a mixing of different cultural groups, and what was the nature of the hybridization process?

To thoroughly understand the dimension of this phenomenon, one must start by examining the main features characterizing the Halaf societies and comparing them with the characteristics of the new society. The sixth millennium communities occupying Upper Mesopotamia and its neighborhoods were small or very small communities spread over a very vast territory incorporating different environments, from the wide steppe of Jezira to the mountainous regions of Eastern Anatolia (Fig. 1). The villages consisted of scattered round houses with secondary small structures dispersed in the open areas between the main buildings (Fig. 2A). It is very difficult, judging from the ground plans of the few extensively excavated Halaf villages, to recognize individual family spaces because the domestic activities seem to have been carried out in the open spaces, probably largely shared, or in structures showing no clear connection with individual houses. No clear definition of the “family areas” is therefore recognizable in the Halaf settlements, and a socio-economic structure based on larger groups (kinship groups or clans), probably coinciding with the villages, seems to have characterized these communities (ref. 21 and ref. 22, pp. 27–35).

This picture is well in keeping with the settlement patterns and the subsistence economy of these societies. The Halaf villages were usually grouped into small neighboring settlements, which often seem not to have been occupied simultaneously, with the population shifting from one to another in the course of time, sometimes reflecting

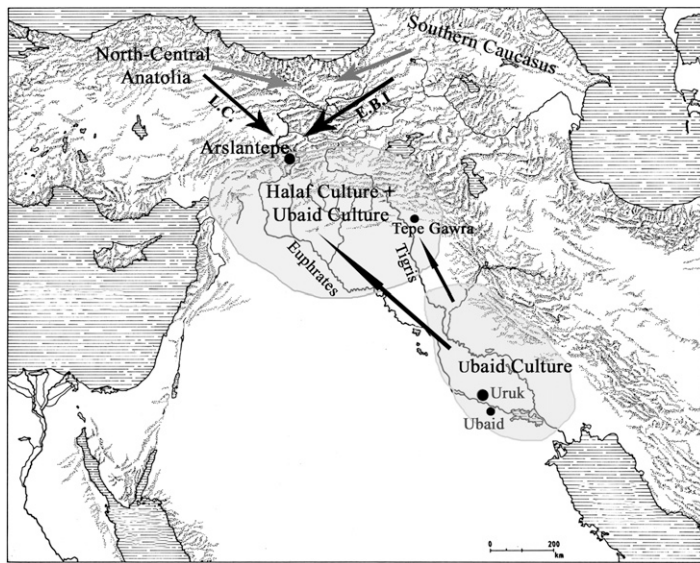


Fig. 1. Map of the Near East with the main cultural areas and sites mentioned in the text.

an integrated modular system of occupation or suggesting more general community segmentation processes (23, 24). The archaeological data recovered in the Halaf sites, as in the previous Neolithic communities of the Jezira, reveal the integration of various activities (agriculture, animal rearing, hunting), probably conducted by groups or sectors of the population on a seasonal basis, in a kind of community specialization that may have required the products to be redistributed and circulated widely in a sort of regional integrated system. The existence of such a system is supported by the presence in various settlements of large multicell buildings used as communal storehouses (25, 26). No religious or ceremonial buildings have been found in these villages, and no evidence of a hierarchically structured society is recognizable, either in the settlements or in burial customs. All of the evidence therefore suggests that the seventh and sixth millennia communities of Upper Mesopotamia were markedly egalitarian.

The change observed in Northern Mesopotamia and beyond in the fifth millennium BCE is striking and accompanied by the introduction of several new elements of material culture of southern origin, as well as by totally new types of settlement and social organization.

One of the best-known sites where the change has been documented fairly well is Tepe Gawra, a site extensively excavated in past times in eastern Upper Mesopotamia (27, 28), where new architectural models and new types of pottery and other artifacts, all reminiscent of southern types, emerged together with a wholly new society. The houses were no longer round but were large rectangular multiroomed “tripartite” houses of a

Mesopotamian type—although with some local peculiarities—and, as in Southern Mesopotamia, they were probably related to large families (Fig. 2 B–D). The perimeter of the house space was well-defined, and the open areas now marked a symbolic separation between the households, instead of being a “unifying” space for common activities. The “family” seems to have been the basic social and economic unit.

We may hypothesize that the subsistence economy also changed toward a less varied and more agriculturally oriented production system, as suggested by the more stable sedentary population and the slightly larger sites (although their size is not comparable with those of the contemporary southern settlements).

The society seems to have ceased being totally egalitarian. A temple area with tripartite buildings similar to the Southern Mesopotamian temples even in the decoration of the walls with pillars and recessed niches dominated the settlement in the late Ubaid phase at Tepe Gawra, in level XIII (Fig. 2 E and F) whereas one special house (the so-called “white room”) stood out on account of its larger dimensions, carefully plastered walls, concentration of infant burials, and the numerous seals and sealings found in its area in the level XII village (Fig. 2D). An emergent hierarchy therefore seems to have appeared in this site, probably linked to the management of worship, temple activities, and redistribution, as was also the case in Lower Mesopotamia.

A certain emergent elite at least partly controlling the circulation of staple products is suggested by the fact that redistribution practices, indicated by the rich assemblages of seals and sealings—a tool previously used in

the Neolithic communal storehouses in this same region (25)—were concentrated in temples and some houses. The changed function of sealing practices is very significant: They ceased to be used for regulating forms of collective redistribution in egalitarian contexts and rather became an instrument of control over the circulation of goods in prestige and somehow unequal circuits (29, 30). Indeed, the sealing of the containers kept in the houses suggests unequal economic relations between the families. [The seal was applied by the individual who withdrew the goods (29); therefore, the sealings in the Ubaid houses very probably indicate redistribution (compensations, or rewards for work?) to members of other families.]

The growth of unequal relations in northern societies was something completely alien to the local Halaf socioeconomic system, whose reproduction seems to have been guaranteed for a long time by the perfect working of some leveling devices, such as, perhaps, the fission of communities to maintain the small dimension of villages, or the collective storage and redistribution practices, which had been very effective to maintain egalitarian relationships for almost two millennia. It is possible, or even probable, that the Halaf societies went into crisis at the very end of the sixth millennium BCE, due to their remarkable demographic and geographical expansion, which may have met social and environmental constraints. The possible adoption of new sociopolitical models from Southern Mesopotamia may have therefore been an answer to this crisis.

But, how might they have been introduced? And how did the physical contact and interaction between the two cultures take place?

There is some evidence to suggest that the powerful interference from Southern Mesopotamian cultures in the life of northern communities was largely due to the movements northwards of some people, perhaps in small groups, for some reasons settling in new areas, or even sites, formerly occupied by the Halaf groups, with whom the southern communities had traditionally had capillary and continuous relations for a long time. This long interaction may have facilitated the contact and the mutual acceptance of the two groups.

But, how did the two societies mingle and assimilate each other to the point that the old local culture seems to have disappeared?

The evidence of population movements and mixing. Interesting archaeological evidence of a possible physical movement of people from the South is again recognizable at Gawra: In one of the earliest fifth millennium levels (level XV), two tripartite buildings have been unearthed that show the same layout as the houses found in the Hamrin valley, further south (31) (Fig. 2 B and C). Considering that

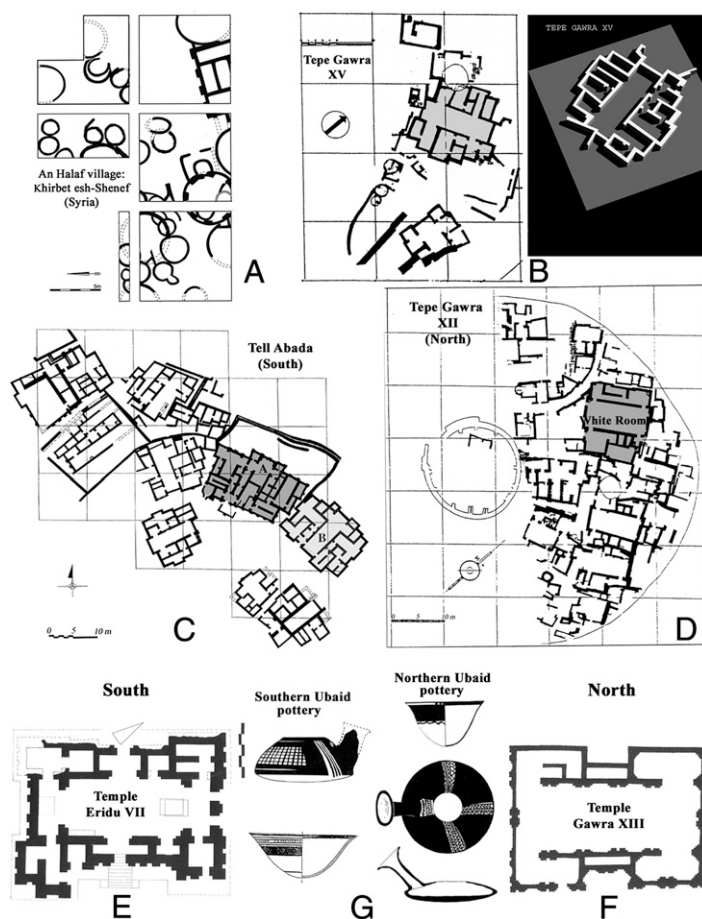


Fig. 2. Halaf and Ubaid villages and architecture (A–F); pottery examples from Northern and Southern Mesopotamia (G).

the “house” is a social construct reflecting the profound nature of the family structure, needs, and activity, and is not therefore possible to be imitated, the similarity is so striking and this house layout so lacking in local roots that one might hypothesize that the presence of these two houses is an indication of the possible arrival of foreign groups who settled at the site.

The pottery also shows a fairly radical change: It was still, although less frequently, painted, but in the new Ubaid style (Fig. 2G). And the presence in some sites of eastern Jezira of sherds with Halaf decoration and Ubaid manufacture techniques side by side with sherds of Halaf ware decorated in the Ubaid style, may suggest a long period of cohabitation of people belonging to the two groups and imitating each other.

Other sites on the western and northern borders of Upper Mesopotamia—T. Kosak Shamali, Tell el Abr, Kenan Tepe, Domuztepe (32–35)—although less extensively investigated, have also revealed a fifth millennium occupation dating back to the beginning of the period, thus proving the contemporary introduction of the new Ubaid-related cultural elements in the whole of the northern

region. In all these sites, as well as at the later Degirmentepe in the Upper Euphrates valley (36), the new cultural traits seem to have been, to some extent, reworked and adapted to local traditions, thereby revealing, more clearly than in the eastern sites, the hybrid nature of the new culture and the possible varied modes and effects of the contact and interaction with the southern components (37).

Various northern elements have also been readapted to the needs of the new society, and new features emerged. The use of seals and sealing practices, introduced in the North in nonhierarchical contexts, was adopted by the new emerging high status families, who, recognizing its potential as an effective means of control, transferred it to a new social environment, thereby changing its social and economic function from “equality maintainer” to “inequality promoter.” An important local achievement was also the development of the earliest mass-produced bowls—the so-called “coba bowls”—which gave rise to a special production for feeding increasing numbers of people in both ceremonial and daily life practices, probably in exchange for their labor. Mass-produced bowls and the use of sealing

practices were therefore both a development of northern traits in the new hybrid society to answer the needs brought about by the emerging forms of social, and embryonically economic inequality. Only afterward were sealing practices also adopted in Southern Mesopotamia and Susiana at the very end of the fifth millennium BCE whereas soon afterward the mass production of bowls—although with various manufacturing techniques—spread over a very wide area and became one of the most distinctive feature of Late Chalcolithic societies in the whole Greater Mesopotamia and beyond. The mingling and hybridization of the two cultures in Upper Mesopotamia therefore seems to have produced innovations that also spread north-south, opposite to the way previously taken by the main direction of cultural transmission.

A highly integrated multicultural society in fifth millennium Upper Mesopotamia: Its causes and developmental potential. The intercultural interaction achieved a high degree of integration in Upper Mesopotamia and Southeast Anatolia, in which the new southern-inspired sociopolitical models adopted in the course of the fifth millennium BCE totally prevailed on the local one, radically transforming it. This predominance was probably due to the local communities’ structural weakness and systemic crisis when encountering the southern groups, and, on the other hand, to the capacity of the latter to impose their model of social relationships, which may have been perceived as successful and capable to offer efficacious solutions to the problems suffered by the Halaf society.

The disappearance, at least as we may see it, of the indigenous Halaf culture, its subsistence modes, and organization system seems to have been the result not only of an emulation of foreign cultural components, but of having adopted the structural and social relational models of the southern neighbors, with whom they must have come into systemic contact. This phenomenon caused a profound and radical change in the society as a whole, even in areas, such as the more peripheral regions of Cilicia and ‘Amuq, where the adoption of formal elements had been less thorough and extensive. The long process of interaction and integration brought about far-reaching development with a high capacity for expansion and created new types of socioeconomic relations full of consequences and potential for the future.

Multiethnic Connections in Early Centralized Societies: The Case of Arslantepe in Eastern Anatolia Between the Fourth and Third Millennia BCE. The case dealt with here radically differs from the previous example but is equally meaningful and emblematic. It reveals the wide-ranging

relations that nascent state formations established with other communities to incorporate them into the economic circuits that they themselves governed, thereby broadening their range of action. Centralized economic and political systems frequently tended to expand in various geographic and historical contexts, as somehow intrinsically “necessary” for their reproduction. Particularly in their formative phases, such systems were mainly based on the accumulation of staple goods and labor, which, together with redistribution practices, constituted the basis of their way of operating. The first forms of central government must therefore have tended to expand to take in the territories and/or the productive components from which they derived their resources and their social base, while at the same time attracting the populations gravitating around them, by offering them guaranteed outlets for their products and easier conditions for trade and mutual relations.

The Uruk period (fourth millennium BCE) in the broader Mesopotamian world was a time in which these forms of centralized political, economic, and administrative systems underwent primary development, sometimes accompanied by a remarkable process of urbanization (38–42). In connection with these developments, there is a great deal of archaeological evidence of the expansion of interregional relations on a large scale, encompassing a very wide area, running from the Persian Gulf to the mountains of Eastern Anatolia and beyond. But this expansion was not only the result of the drive to expand the developed South toward a less urbanized North, as some have suggested (3, 4, 42), but it was the result of the general trend in every center to interact very closely with other populations, who were somehow interfering in their sphere of action.

One very clear and well-documented example of the complexity and variety of these relations is the case of Arslantepe, in the Malatya plain, in the Anatolian Upper Euphrates. This site was a regional center lying on the borderline between different cultural worlds and geographic environments and, in the latter half of the fourth millennium, established wide-ranging relations with culturally different components. This center developed a powerful early “palatial” centralized system in this period, similar, in its basic functioning, to the contemporary Mesopotamian systems, with which it shared a number of general structural features, although with a great deal of highly original traits of its own (43, 44). But at the same time, there is a good archaeological evidence indicating that Arslantepe also established wide-ranging relations with the Anatolian

mountain peoples, probably specialized pastoralists (45).

It was with these latter groups that complex dynamics of interethnic relations were established.

Incorporating pastoral components into an economic system governed by central elites: Arslantepe at the end of the fourth millennium. At the end of the fourth millennium BCE [Late Chalcolithic (LC) 5] (ref. 14, pp. 5–13), the centralization process at Arslantepe led to the construction of a monumental complex of public and elite buildings (Fig. 3A) in which a highly developed and sophisticated administrative system was used to control economic transactions, essentially based on the accumulation and redistribution of food to large sections of the population (29). This radical transformation of the public area from the temple architecture of the previous period into a fully fledged multifunctional palatial complex, which also comprised the residences of the elite, was an extraordinary and somehow precocious achievement in the process of state formation (44).

What is most important for our purposes here is the fact that many of the changes observable in the archeological materials at Arslantepe in LC5 relate to different cultural environments, thereby suggesting that the external relations of the site expanded widely in various directions. (i) Pottery production radically changed, borrowing models, tastes, and partially repertoire and manufacturing techniques from the Late Uruk culture of the Mesopotamian world, while at the same time preserving certain aspects of the local tradition, which set apart Arslantepe from the southern centers (Fig. 3D). (ii) As in all Mesopotamian-related regions, the mass production of bowls used for the redistribution of food developed enormously both in number and technology, but, unlike Mesopotamia, the Arslantepe potters used only the wheel to produce items that, once again, while resembling the southern so-called flower pots, possess distinctive features of their own. (iii) A profound change occurred in livestock rearing, with an extraordinary increase in sheep and goats, particularly sheep, which accounted for almost 80% of the domesticated species whereas pigs disappeared almost completely (Fig. 3B). This change shows the dominance of specialized pastoralism probably linked to the use of byproducts (dairy products and wool), even though the finding of substantial quantities of bones disposed of as food waste shows that these animals were also widely used for their meat (46, 47). (iv) There was the appearance in the pottery repertoire of a class of hand-made red-black ware of a type that was completely alien to the local traditions and very closely resembled the contemporary pottery of north-central

Anatolia (Fig. 3C) (48, 49). (v) These changes were accompanied with a significant development of metallurgy, with the production of weapons and highly sophisticated objects using copper-arsenic “alloys” obtained from polymetallic ores, which are abundantly found in the mountains of Northern and North-eastern Anatolia and Southern Caucasus (Fig. 3E) (50, 51).

The first two changes are to be ascribed to the intensified relations established with the Mesopotamian world, of which Arslantepe seems to have been a partner interacting on an equal footing. This privileged relationship certainly led the local elites to emulate their southern neighbors, probably considered to be very powerful, without, however, undergoing any kind of cultural, and certainly not political, submission, and without any evidence of ethnic cohabitation and mixing.

The other three new features were related to each other and all together suggest a different type of interaction with the communities of the northern mountainous regions. These communities must have been transhumant pastoralist populations moving along the mountain range to the north of Arslantepe, perhaps coming down on a seasonal basis to the Euphrates Valley, where they could certainly find outlets for their products and interesting opportunities to relate to the emerging early-state centers. These centers must have interacted with them from a position of strength, steering relations to their own benefit and incorporating the pastoralist groups into the centralized economic system.

Specialized sheep pastoralism was certainly also a distinctive feature of the whole urbanized Uruk world (52). But the fact that, on the one hand, Arslantepe was not an urban context, and, on the other, the extraordinary increase in sheep rearing on the site was accompanied by the emergence of Red-Black ware, alien to the local tradition and much more similar to north-central Anatolian examples, suggests that the development of sheep rearing on the site was due to the involvement of external pastoralist groups coming from the north, who were incorporated as a specialized productive component into the economic system governed by the Arslantepe elites. The great development of metallurgy at the end of the fourth millennium and the close similarity between the metal objects found in the palace and those produced by the pastoralist communities, which would subsequently settle on the site after the collapse of the centralized system at the beginning of the third millennium BCE (Fig. 3F), may moreover suggest that the pastoral groups frequenting the palace, coming from zones rich in metal ores, also brought metals and their technologies.

The fairly sudden appearance of a Central Anatolian-like red-black ware and its very



Fig. 3. Arslantepe. (A) The palatial complex. (B) Animal breeding patterns. (C–E) Materials from the Late Chalcolithic (palace period). (F and G) Materials from the Early Bronze I (post-palace period).

different manufacture technology at the end of LC4, and its regular, although minor, use in the palace buildings, almost exclusively in the form of table vessels (for eating and

drinking) and high-stemmed bowls (for ceremonial use), suggest that other groups producing this pottery frequented the public area on a regular basis. The cooccurrence of this

ware and the wheel-made light-colored pottery in the Uruk tradition, both emblems of different worlds and with a powerful symbolic-identity value, reveals the desire of the

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different groups operating in the palace to keep their identity visible, evidencing a certain degree of self-awareness and suggesting a multiethnic composition of the population present in the Malatya plain at the end of the fourth millennium BCE. Integrating different productive components of diverse origins and cultures into a centrally governed economic system did not therefore wipe out the identity, features, and recognizability of the groups concerned, which, on the contrary, seem to have emphasized their diversity also in practices performed inside the buildings in the palace complex. Moreover, the great variety of the iconographies and styles shown by the seal designs used in the palace, which is unique in Near Eastern glyptic assemblages (53), suggests that these varied motifs and styles probably identified various components that, through them, represented themselves and their different identity in the administrative environment.

Cohabiting and competing populations in the absence of political and economic centralization: Arslantepe in the early third millennium BCE. Around 3,000 BCE, the centralized and early-state system at Arslantepe went into crisis and collapsed. The palace complex was destroyed by a violent fire, never to be rebuilt. The hierarchical Mesopotamian-type society, the administrative system, and its officials disappeared definitively.

Seasonal occupations of pastoralists linked to the Transcaucasian world of the so-called Kura-Araxes cultures, initially limited in size and unsubstantial, and subsequently increasingly large, set up on the ruins of the palace. These groups gradually took possession of the site, which at a certain point seems to have become their landmark in the territory and the residence of their chiefs. On a sequence of occupations made by broad open spaces with fences for the livestock and a few rare huts, new settlements were established with an outstanding area on the top of the mound. This area consisted of one large hut (a chief hut?) separated from the rest of the settlement by a timber palisade and an imposing, probably public or communal mud-brick building, comprising a large reception hall and two store rooms full of vessels, hence keeping foodstuffs (54).

The few scattered huts in these settlements were built using timber and mud poles whereas the pottery was once again hand-made red-black ware, but with a repertoire that differed from the black ware from the previous palace period. Although the shapes were simple, they now met the full range of domestic requirements, with food pots and jars of various dimensions, besides bowls and cups. It moreover resembled models of Northeastern Anatolian and South Caucasian origin, and no longer Central Anatolian, although the manufacture technique and the

aesthetic design of the surfaces' colors seem very similar to the previous period.

The various itinerant pastoralist groups may well have traveled along the mountain chains of Northern Anatolia and the Caucasus in various directions, from West to East and vice versa, and may have met in the Upper Euphrates valley, attracted by the early state center of Arslantepe and the network of relations that the Euphrates populations established with the Mesopotamian world (Fig. 1). One may assume that, whereas in the fourth millennium the westernmost groups were the prevailing component in the Upper Euphrates valley and were kept under control and incorporated into the centralized economic system, in the third millennium, communities mostly linked to the northeastern groups expanded westwards and southwards directly occupying the valley and its main site, and filling the power vacuum left by the collapse of the early-state system.

At Arslantepe, these seasonal pastoral occupations were supplanted slightly afterward, around 2,800 BCE, by a new rural village with mud brick houses and pottery belonging to the post Uruk tradition harking back to the previous palace productions. The evidence indicates an alternation of the two cultures on the site.

The recent discovery of certain items of wheel-made light-colored pottery in the Uruk tradition significantly exhibited, side by side with the more common red-black ware, only in the public/communal building and the chief area of the pastoralist phase, suggests the possible interaction between the two components, at least on the occasion of some communal events. If these data are taken together with the similar association of hand-made red-black and wheel-made light wares in the funerary gifts of a 2,900 BCE chief's tomb at Arslantepe (Fig. 3G) (55), all of the evidence indicates that, at the beginning of the third millennium, the Malatya plain was probably temporarily occupied by two different components—a sedentary community linked to the post-Uruk developments of the Upper Euphrates valley and a pastoral itinerant community linked to the cultures of Northeastern Anatolia and South Caucasus. These groups competed for the control over the site, and probably for the domination of the region, for more than two centuries, negotiating, interacting, and clashing, with either side alternately succeeding and taking possession of the mound. In this case, too, the identity of the two groups must have been clearly perceived and displayed, but the otherness of one group over the other must have been much more acutely felt than in the palace period. And, despite all of the evidence of interaction between them, no evidence has been found to suggest any form of inclusion

or cultural mixing, but, on the contrary, relations between the two groups were marked by episodes of evident conflict.

Discussion

The cases of cultural mixing and the formation of multicultural societies examined here are obviously not the only ones in the prehistoric Near East. But they have been selected because they are emblematic of different models of interaction and development. They indeed belonged to different sociopolitical and economic contexts, showed types of possible interethnic contacts with differing causes and purposes, gave rise to different degrees of mixing and integration by the communities coming into contact, and had divergent capacities to drive change. (i) The first case described—namely, the meeting between groups of southern Ubaid culture and local Halaf communities in Upper Mesopotamia—was that of a model of interaction between an organizationally “dominant” foreign community and a local community in crisis. The effect was a radical hybridization of the two cultures, with the substantial acquisition of the main features of the alien model and the virtual disappearance of the local culture and way of life. The result was a structural change, developing toward a new society, from egalitarian to hierarchical, from being based on a diffused government to an increasingly centralized system. (ii) The second case—namely, the relationship between the early-state center of Arslantepe and the itinerant pastoralist groups from the mountains—was one of inclusion of different ethnic and cultural components with a specific economic vocation into a centralized political and economic system, integrating them into the central economy, and making them an essential part of its *modus operandi*. In this case, it was the local component that was the “strongest,” but the integration process in economic and organizational terms did not lead to the loss of the identity of any of the related groups. The symbols of their diverse identities continued to be exhibited, and the “foreign” groups, while probably perceiving the importance and usefulness of their relations with and belonging to the powerful political center, also seem to have retained a high level of self-awareness. Here again, the relationship brought about development and was an important element in the growth of the centralized system at Arslantepe. The lack of cultural integration was, however, a source of weakness, which ultimately undermined the solidity of this nascent early-state organization. (iii) The third case may be considered to be a development of the second one to a certain extent: For it derives from the crisis and the breakup of the centralized system that had led different communities to interact on a regular basis and, at least

partially, to coexist, without ever integrating them into a single cultural system. These culturally and economically diverse communities (nomadic versus sedentary, pastoralist versus farmers), with a powerful perception of the otherness of the other, continued to interact and partially coexist on the same lands, but, in the absence of the unifying element of political and economic centralization, they ultimately entered into competition and often conflicted with one another, giving rise to instability. A long period of alternation between cooperation and competition and in the appropriation of the site by one or the other community, led to a deep crisis, which ultimately created a fracture in the history of

Arslantepe, subsequently giving rise, around 2,700 BCE, to the slow rebirth of a completely new era.

One might conclude from these cases that it was only full integration between interacting ethnic/cultural components that led to lasting development, albeit by sacrificing certain cultural traditions, whereas the lack of integration, even in diverse sociopolitical contexts and models of interaction, was a source of instability and conflict.

Materials and Methods

Not being able to “repeat the experiment,” the only way to verify the soundness of the hypotheses advanced in sciences studying past societies is to ensure that the assumptions on which the historical frame-

work is based are mutually coherent, consistent, and not contradictory.

This analysis has tried to focus on the relationship between the data on the organizational, social, political, and economic aspects of the societies examined and the aspects of material culture indicating possible intrusive elements, trying to investigate the nature of the latter and their place in the process of social change.

As for the acquisition of data in the field, the application of detailed stratigraphic excavation methods has been crucial, together with extensive excavation strategies, whose combination has allowed us to distinguish between successive microstratigraphic events, carry out a functional analysis of buildings and settlements, and recognize the possible different cultural and economic components interacting in a site, thereby studying their complex dynamics of competition and integration.

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