



İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY'S  
CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
ARCHAEOLOGY IN TURKEY  
(1932-2000)

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## Research on the Cultures of East Anatolia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC

Aynur Özfirat

Little or nothing is known about our subject, the Northeast Anatolia region in 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The two most important reasons are that the remains from the cultures of the period are located on high plateaus that are difficult to access, and that the previous archaeological studies on the region focused mostly on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennia BC. To solve that problem, we have been conducting surveys since 1992 focusing, for now, on the area to the west of Van Lake<sup>1</sup>. We also studied the pottery -about 100 pieces- in the museums of the region, to familiarize ourselves with the material.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC finds of the northeast Anatolia that cover the Middle and Late Bronze Ages are parts of a culture spread over a wide area that may be roughly defined as extending from Georgia on the north, to East Anatolia on the south, and from the Caspian Sea on the east, to the west of the Urmia Lake. Unfortunately, in that wide area, not many centers have been systematically studied. The majority of the findings came from illegal excavations or from unstratified graves. There is a very limited amount of material that have been unearthed from mounds that offer opportunities for stratigraphic studies. These conditions apply to the entire northeast Anatolia. However, within the above-defined borders, it is evident that Nakhichevan has a special position. Both the architectural remains and the finds in Nakhichevan show that Nakhichevan region had an important role in the Middle and Late Bronze Age<sup>2</sup>.

As a result of our surface surveys, we have determined the following centers of that period<sup>3</sup>: Suluçem, Nurettin, Elmakaya, Çaygeldi, Gümüşpınar, Yılkalesi, Haydarkalesi and Sütey Yaylası (Haydarkalesi Yuvadamı, Cemaleddin and Eriklik necropolises). Besides the newly found centers, during our studies the previously found centers were examined again: Sariveli (Karpuz 1983: 79 etc.) and Eski Norgüh



Fig. 1: A view from the walls of Yılkalesi.

(Tarhan-Sevin 1976-77: 287 etc.) and already excavated Ani (Balkan-Sümer 1965: 103 etc.). Among these centers, Yılkalesi (fig. 1) Haydarkalesi, and Eski Norgüh are fortress type settlements surrounded with defense walls; Ani, Suluçem (fig. 2), Nurettin, Elmakaya, Çaygeldi (fig. 3) and Sütey Yaylası are wide necropolis areas; and Sariveli and Gümüşpınar are mounds. There is also a separate mound near to each necropolis in Nurettin and Çaygeldi.

To date, the pottery has provided the most important data about the mentioned cultures. A few exceptions aside, all of the pottery was wheel-made and has been classified into two main groups: the first group is monochrome and polychrome painted pottery and the other group is plain. The two groups do not differ in the shapes and types of ware. The common property of painted pottery is that the motifs are worked on the upper part of the body in the form of friezes. The monochrome painted motifs are always implemented with black color over a brick-brown wash (fig. 4). The polychrome painted ones reveal a higher level of craftsmanship in techniques and motifs.

One of the most significant differences is that the ornamented sections are glossed properly and cov-

<sup>1</sup> These studies were conducted with the permission of the Ministry of Culture General Directorate of Monuments and Museums, and in the scope of the following projects supported by the İstanbul University Research Fund: No. T-229/260696 "Northeast Anatolia Painted Ceramic Cultures in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC"; No. 624/150794 "Van Region 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC Cultures"; and No. 1092/010598 "East Anatolia - Transcaucasian Cultures".

<sup>2</sup> Başıyalıoğlu 1997: 29 etc.; Özfirat 1997: 47 etc.; Belli-Sevin 1999: 14 etc.

<sup>3</sup> For these centers see Özfirat 1994: 359 etc.; same author 1997: 79 etc.; same author 1999: 1 etc.



Fig. 2: Overall view of Suluçem No. 3 kurgan.

ered again with a heavy coat of light-cream colored wash. On the polychrome pottery, which have comparatively more complicated and varied types of motifs than the monochrome ones, the majority of the ornamentation is in two colors, most often brick and black and in fewer examples, brick and brown (Fig. 5). In addition there are rare examples that have only brick color or only brown. The motifs show considerable movement and many are geometric designs; also wild goat and water bird motifs are generally used. In the late period, naturalistic ornamentations, the more common being various animal motifs, are used. They are very simple considering the specifications of the ware, which must be relevant to their usage as votive offerings for the tombs.

If we evaluate our studies as a whole, the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC pottery that we have found during our research, as mentioned above, have spread from the Caucasian Mountains on the north, or in other words, from Southeast Georgia, to the Lake Van basin on the south, and from Mil and Mugan steppes on the east to the western shores of Urmia Lake. According to our research, a borderline can be drawn over Muş, Erzurum and Artvin, as the western border, which previously had

not been possible because of the lack of excavations and research. This line is also the western border of the East Anatolia high plateau.

Although the Middle Bronze Age pottery, in general, has common characteristics according to the type of ware and its technical specifications, at the same time it is highly evident that there are several differences with regard to the shapes and the ornamental styles. Starting from these differences, four



Fig. 3: Overall view of Çaygeldi Necropolis.

separate cultural zones have been proposed to date: Trialeti-Kirokavan, Tazekent (Karmir Berd), Sevan-Üzerklik with Kızıl Vank, and Van-Urmia<sup>4</sup>.

Northeast Anatolia also has materials from several sub-cultural zones according to the geographical

<sup>4</sup> Martirosyan 1964: 54 etc.; Kuşnareva 1993: 100 etc.; Çilingiroğlu 1986: 115; Edwards 1986: 57 etc.

location. A rough border can be drawn after evaluating the findings in the museums of the region together with the remnants we collected during our research and the pottery found in the excavations. The Northeast Anatolia cultural zone is divided as follows: Ani (Özfirat 1997: Fig. 35), Küçük Çatma (Martirosyan 1964: Fig III) and Sos Mound (Sagona et al. 1995: fig. 9/3, 8, 10-11, 13). The pottery found in these excavations has characteristics of Trialeti Culture.

The two examples of low-neck pottery found in one of the fortresses at Suluçem are very important, because they are the first findings in Northeast Anatolia whose context we could understand properly (Özfirat 1997: Fig. 36/4-5). One of them shows characteristics of Sevan-Üzerlik Culture, and the other of Tazekent Culture.

The pottery found in the excavations of Sarveli, Nurettin, Sütey Yaylası, Haydarkalesi, Elmakaya, Çaygeldi, Gümüspınar, Yılan-kalesi, Eski Norgüh and the excavations on the east of Lake Van - Karagündüz (Özfirat 1997: fig. 50-51), Van Castle (Tarhan 1994: fig. 29/1-3; Özfirat 1997: fig. 52), Dilkaya (Özfirat 1997: fig. 53/3) and Tilkitepe (Korfmann 1982: fig. 4B/18, 12/1-2) mounds - are typical for the Van-Urmia Culture.

The most significant characteristics of the Middle Bronze Age culture, appearing to have a different lifestyle than of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, were the painted pottery and the predominance of settling on the high plateaus. This characteristic distinctly differs from that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC the settlements, which were densely populated and particularly seen in the plains. However there were several ongoing characteristics such as the existence, along with the painted pottery, of pottery with black glosses, which were specific to the previous period and showed few changes in ornamentation. Also ongoing was the continuation of the kurgan type burial tradition, which could be observed in Georgia.

As in other countries where 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC cul-



Fig. 4: Monochrome painted pottery sherds from Elmakaya Necropolis.



Fig. 5: Polychrome painted pottery sherds from Sarveli.

ture spread, during our surface research we too found the traces of that period on the plateaus where rich pastures were present. In that period, almost nobody seems to have lived on the plains and on the mounds.

Many scientists share the idea that toward the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, the settled cultures came to an end and the population decreased<sup>5</sup>. In the whole area, it is evident that the layers of the mounds and the relevant architecture

were much poorer than the ones from the Early Transcaucasian Period. Eventually, in none of the mounds except Üzerliktepe, Kültepe II, Şahtahtı, Haftavantepe and Geoytepe, could the existence of a strong architecture belonging to that period be proved.

It is speculated that one of the factors contributing to the population decrease in the plains was particularly related to the development of the domestication of sheep and goats that made it possible for the majority to adopt a pastoral life and move to the plateaus. Indeed, the development of animal husbandry could have caused the plateau meadows to be used more commonly.

However, the big problem here is that the remains belong mostly to the large necropoleis. Sütey, Elmakaya and Çaygeldi are necropoleis occupying many square kilometers. Their economies seem to be based on animal husbandry, and even if we accept that those people were continuing a semi-nomadic life style, they should have had some places for winter settlements. Although we found settlements like Nurettin, Eski Norgüh, Yılan-kalesi, Haydarkalesi and Çaygeldi, they were not enough compared to the size of the necropolis areas. At this time there is a deep and extremely complicated discussion of that problem taking place and the most important factor is the still insufficient amount of data.

After examining the Transcaucasian and Northwestern Iran settlements belonging to pottery cultures of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, we cannot say that we have taken an important step in determining the

<sup>5</sup> Djaparidze 1969: 274; Burney-Lang 1971: 86; Edwards 1986: 73; Lordkipanidse 1991: 55, 69 etc.; Yakar 1992: 513 etc.; Kunareva 1993: 92 etc.; Simonyan 1995: 43 etc.

relative and absolute chronology of the Northeast Anatolia Middle Bronze Age culture of which they were a part. Right now, healthy stratigraphical data about the Middle and Late Bronze Ages do not exist. On the other hand, some conclusions can be obtained by focusing on those centers that can provide regular and healthy stratigraphical materials, such as Haftavantepe (Edwards 1981: 102), Dinkhatepe (Rubinson 1994: 200) and Horom (Badaljan et al. 1994: 10). In general, we can accept

an average starting date of around 2000 BC for the painted pottery and a range from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC (Çilingiroğlu 1990: 171 etc.).

For establishing the end of painted pottery, several dates falling into the Early Iron Age, when a different culture arose, would be helpful. Accordingly, a date around 14<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century BC can be accepted as the end of painted pottery cultures<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Çilingiroğlu 1987: 112; same author 1990: 171 etc.; Muscarella 1994: 139 etc.; Sevin 1996: 445 etc.

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