

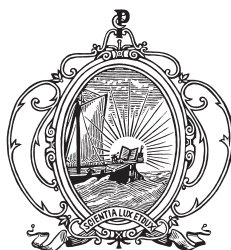
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CONTEXT AND CONNECTION

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ATILLA BATMAZ, GIORGI BEDIANASHVILI,
ALEKSANDRA MICHALEWICZ and ABBY ROBINSON



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SOME PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE CHRONOLOGY OF LATE NEOLITHIC–EARLY METAL AGE CULTURES OF CAUCASIA

Giorgi Leon KAVTARADZE

ABSTRACT

Considered here is the chronological gap, or *fault line*, between the Near East and its northern neighbours. The imports of Near Eastern origin found in Caucasia and some characteristic signs of Transcaucasian cultures fixed in reliable archaeological contexts in ancient settlements of the Near East provide important opportunities to create a common Caucasian chronological framework. This scheme can support the formation of relative and absolute chronology for the northern periphery of the ancient world during the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Age. New chronological definitions determined for the regions located north of the *fault line*, mostly dated by the results of relatively new scientific methods, allow us to reconsider the character of relations of these regions with the societies and cultures of the Near East within already existing systems, such as historical chronologies of the Near East.

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the first and second ‘radiocarbon revolutions’, the Near East has been separated from its northern periphery (including southeastern Europe—that is, the Balkans—and Caucasia), causing a chronological *fault line* between these two regions. New, reliable synchronisation schemes are needed in order to overcome deep differences between the technological and historical data. In addition, the intensification of research concerning relative chronology on both sides of the *fault line* is needed to fill the gap.

The northern periphery also forms an intermediary location between regions of the early civilisations of the Near East in the south and regions of the southern Russian steppes located further north again, the latter dated exclusively by the use of chronometric methods. Bridging these zones, the northern periphery provides an important opportunity to create a single, integrated chronological system spanning the archaeological cultures from eastern Europe to the Near East.

The relative dating of Caucasian artefacts and their contexts, and ultimately cultures in the northern periphery, in many cases becomes possible by taking into account similar Caucasian archaeological material found in well-dated layers of Near Eastern sites. We should also consider imports of Near Eastern origin found in Caucasia. The chronological correlation of archaeological materials from Caucasia and the Near East with chronometric data has crucial value in the development of a common framework for the Caucasian chronological system that incorporates both relative and absolute chronology during the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Ages.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The first and second ‘radiocarbon revolutions’—that is, the use of radiocarbon (C^{14}) dates at first, and the use of calibrated radiocarbon (^{14}C) dates afterwards, when it became apparent that the dendrochronological data could be used to calibrate radiocarbon dates—caused the separation of the northern periphery, dated by the use of radiocarbon technique, from those areas of the Near East dated mainly by the written, historical sources. There was a large discrepancy between the new dates and the traditional, relative chronology based mainly on the synchronisation of archaeological material. The dates of the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Ages of southeastern Europe were raised earlier than previously imaginable. As a result, many of the innovations that were once considered to have been borrowed from the ancient civilisations of the Near East, in fact, proved to be more ancient in Europe. There appeared an urgent need to abandon the traditional model of the development of European societies based on the northward diffusion of ideas and to admit the existence of a chronological hiatus.

C. Renfrew was the first who tried to fill this chronological gap, extending the chronological constructions of Anatolia—as a part of the historical chronology of the Near East—into the Aegean and southeastern Europe by synchronising archaeological materials on both sides of the *fault line*.¹ At that time, the problem was to justify the use of radiocarbon dating for prehistoric cultures of the Aegean and the rest of Europe. The solution, once and forever, changed the understanding of European prehistory and made it older than Troy or even the oldest Egyptian pyramids. More than 40 years later, studies on the synchronisation of cultural layers from Near Eastern sites with archaeological materials of the northern periphery are still not complete and, as was emphasised by J. Muhly, have now reached a level of staggering complexity.²

Chronology in the Balkans and Caucasia

The dating of the Caucasian and Balkan artefacts and the complexes containing them in many cases becomes possible by consideration of similar materials from well-dated layers of Near Eastern sites. Conclusions so obtained, together with data of chronometrical studies, are a crucial factor for the formation of relative and absolute chronologies of the northern periphery of the ancient world. New chronological measurements taken in the regions located north of the *fault line* allow a reconsideration of the nature of the relationship between these regions and the societies and cultures of the Near East. Nevertheless, a lot apparently remains to be done before the matching of relatively new scientific results with already existing systems, such as historical chronologies of the Near East, is complete.

In Caucasia and the Balkans, aside from ^{14}C dates, we can apply both basic methods of synchronisation (that is, the presence of undoubted imports and cross-cultural dating) to the local archaeological material and to the Near Eastern chronological constructions based largely on the comparative stratigraphy of key sites in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia. This cross dating of archaeological materials was and is still the most effective technique, even after the radiocarbon revolutions.

¹ Renfrew 1970, pp. 280–311; 1973, pp. 104–105, figs 20–21.

² Muhly 2004.

If, according to specialists working in the Balkans, there are no real imports from regions with historical chronologies based on reliable archaeological contexts and written sources,³ in Caucasia the situation is somewhat different. Undoubted imports of Near Eastern origin have been found there. Secondly, some characteristic signs of Transcaucasian cultures have occurred in sound archaeological contexts in the Near East. Contacts between Caucasia and the Near East were mainly conducted through eastern Anatolia and western Iran. Though they are located adjacent to each other, there are sharp topographical, environmental and cultural differences between these latter two regions.

The above-mentioned *fault line* existing on the Caucasus and the Balkans during the Early Metal Age has largely been filled through the efforts of H. Parzinger and K. Leschakov,⁴ but in their publications the authors focus mainly on the archaeological material on both sides of the northwestern flank of this chronological gulf. Similar work should be undertaken to overcome the divergence between the two sides of the *fault line* to the northeast, which separates Caucasia from eastern Anatolia, western Iran and the Near East as a whole. As already stressed above, the dating of the Caucasian cultures is, in many cases, possible through the consideration of materials from well-dated Near Eastern strata. It goes without saying that in the Near East, there is a high probability of getting more precise, absolute dates by finding correlations between the stratigraphy of multi-layered settlements and the data of historical chronologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The conclusions that can be obtained by linking archaeological materials and chronometric analyses are decisive for the formation of relative and absolute chronologies of Caucasian cultures in the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Age. Below are some indications of chronological connections between Transcaucasian and Near Eastern archaeological materials.

CHRONOLOGICAL SYNCHRONISATION BETWEEN THE TRANSCAUCASUS AND THE NEAR EAST

Halaf and Ubaid Influences

The most important early society of the Transcaucasus is the Early Farming culture, the so-called Shulaveri-Shomu Tepe group. The absolute chronology of Shulaveri-Shomu Tepe culture is based on radiocarbon dates that range mainly from the early sixth to the early fifth millennium BC. There were some indications of cultural closeness between this culture and the Near Eastern cultures of the seventh–sixth millennia. Calibrated ¹⁴C dates have partially solved the discrepancy between these Near Eastern parallels and the uncalibrated ¹⁴C dates of the Shulaveri-Shomu Tepe culture, which were largely placed in the fifth millennium.⁵ For the final stage of the Shulaveri-Shomu Tepe culture, we can use chronological data from Kül Tepe I of Nakhichevan, which belongs to the final stage of the same Early Farming culture of the Transcaucasus, but to its southern branch. The fact that a pot typical of the Halaf culture was found in the early layers of Kül Tepe I is generally considered a clear indication of the connection between the Transcaucasian population and the Near East.

³ Leschakov 1997.

⁴ Parzinger 1993; see also Leschakov 1997.

⁵ See, for example, Kavtaradze 2004, pp. 540–541. New radiocarbon dates obtained recently during the excavations on the hill of Arukhlo (ancient Nakhiduri) have confirmed the measurements received earlier for the layers of Shulaveri-Shomutepe culture, mainly belonging to the sixth millennium BC (*cf.* Kavtaradze 1983, pp. 39–46).

Alikemektepesi in the steppe of Mughan (Azerbaijan) is another important site from a chronological point of view, because, in its lower levels, material comparable to Kül Tepe I was discovered, and in the upper levels, there was pottery of the North Ubaid type. These facts have a special importance for defining the broader Transcaucasus chronology, because in the upper levels of Alikemektepesi, aside from pottery of the North Ubaid type, sherds with combed surfaces and burnished interiors were found. This type is like the pottery of the Sioni-Tsopi complex of Georgia, which belongs to the post-Shulaveri-Shomu Tepe period, but is quite unknown in Kül Tepe I. Therefore, the archaeological material of the Sioni-Tsopi group can be synchronous with the North Ubaid period.⁶ At the same time, in Abdalaziztepe (Azerbaijan), the layers of Ilanlitepe-Alikemektepe type coincided with the material characteristic of sites of the Leylatepe group (Agdam district of the Azerbaijan Republic).⁷ Pottery of the North Ubaid type was found at the Armenian site of Teghut, as well.⁸

It should be noted that a whole range of southern Transcaucasian sites, some recently excavated, reveal signs of Ubaid culture. In the second horizon of Areni-1 Cave, in the Vayots Dzor region of southern Armenia, the pottery displays the co-existence of local cultural traditions with the sites of the Leylatepe–Teghut–Berikldeebi group, on the one hand, and with Tilkitepe I (in eastern Anatolia, near Lake Van), on the other. Some designs on the painted pottery of Areni are similar to the material of the Terminal Ubaid type known at Menteshstepe.⁹ In Nerkin Godedzor (Vorotan River canyon in Syunik, Armenia), a large quantity of painted pottery related to the North Ubaid culture has been recovered. Further to the north, in the Lesser Caucasus and Ararat Plain regions, local communities, according to some specialists, were developing at a totally different and autonomous pace (the Sioni-Tsopi culture).¹⁰

Uruk Influences

If it was once generally accepted that the wave of migrants from Mesopotamia to Caucasia were representatives of Ubaid culture, today this wave is considered to have belonged mainly to a later, Uruk period, when Mesopotamian culture spread west and northeast.¹¹ In the mid-1970s, some Russian archaeologists (for example, R. Munchaev and M. Andreeva) noticed pottery similar to the early Maikop period among Mesopotamian artefacts of the fourth millennium. They proposed that the formation of the Maikop culture of north-western Caucasia was a result of the infiltration of Near Eastern/Mesopotamian groups into the Ciscaucasus.¹² Nowadays, some archaeologists are connecting the migration of the Uruk colonists not only to the emergence of the Maikop culture, but also to the primary development of the Transcaucasian Chalcolithic culture, which thereafter spread into the Ciscaucasus.¹³

⁶ See, for example, Kavtaradze 1983, p. 58.

⁷ Aliev and Narimanov 2001.

⁸ Munchaev 1975, p. 120.

⁹ See Zardaryan and Gasparian 2012, p. 48. Several radiocarbon dates place Period III of Menteshstepe within the second half of the fifth millennium (Lyonnet, Guliyev *et al.* 2012, p. 91).

¹⁰ For example, Chataigner *et al.* 2010, p. 391.

¹¹ Narimanov 1991, p. 32; Aliev and Narimanov 2001, p. 75; *cf.* Almamedov, 2008, pp. 17, 19–20.

¹² See Munchaev 1975, pp. 328–334, 375–377; see also Andreeva 1976, p. 56.

¹³ For example, Museyibli 2008, p. 22.

Yet if Uruk colonies, as a rule, are distinguishable from the indigenous settlements around them by a complex of material culture—pottery and other artefacts, architecture and graves—in Caucasia we have a quite different situation. More and more sites belonging to the so-called Chaff-Faced Ware culture are detected every year in the southern and central Transcaucasus and, therefore, to speak about only some outposts of Uruk colonists is becoming quite irrelevant.¹⁴ The chaff-faced and chaff-tempered clay vessels with combed surfaces of this period could easily be accommodated into the Amuq E/F and Tepe Gawra XII–IX repertoires, but the incursion of ‘pre-Uruk’ Mesopotamian colonists into Caucasia, in the opinion of A. Sagona, is an unlikely scenario.¹⁵

Recently, C. Lyonnet and C. Marro placed Caucasia within the so-called pre-Uruk expansion phenomenon, the nature of which is still to be understood,¹⁶ and which now needs to be shifted earlier (to the very beginnings of the Uruk period) and farther north (into Caucasia). The name of this period, ‘pre-Uruk’, was quite logically created to distinguish it from the Late Uruk expansion towards the Upper Euphrates area, because the latter, as has recently become clear, cannot be used to explain Mesopotamian-Caucasian connections for purely chronological reasons. This Late Uruk expansion is, in reality, a much later phenomenon than the above-mentioned Mesopotamian ties with Caucasian archaeological material.

Although after the emergence of the Uruk-type community, cultural impulses coming from the more advanced south reached the north with growing intensity, there was no longer the same degree of uniformity as before.¹⁷ From the point of view of A. Sagona, the reason that large-scale economic transactions generated in the Late Uruk period by the ‘Uruk civilisation’ did not penetrate into Caucasia to the same extent as those of earlier periods was the existence by that time of an extensive Kura-Araxes ‘cultural province’ there.¹⁸

At the same time, the evidence of some Transcaucasian sites with imports or imitations of Ubaid pottery are quite impossible to reconcile, from the chronological point of view, with the era of expansion of Uruk culture outside of its Mesopotamian homeland. We need to take into account the discovery of advanced Kura-Araxes pottery in the layers of late Middle and Late Uruk colonies along the Upper Euphrates. These finds have implications for the chronological discrepancy, too. It is quite impossible that the “settlement of Uruk colonists” in Caucasia assigned to pre-Kura-Araxes times took place in the Late Uruk period (see below). It seems that the centre of gravity of the post-Ubaid Chaff-Faced Ware *oikoumene* lay somewhere between the Upper Euphrates, the Kura River and the Lake Urmia basin.¹⁹

Though for a long time, nearly all important cultural innovations in Caucasia are attributed to impulses coming from the Near East, I argued already, in 1981, that the age of Teghut (in the Ararat valley, Armenia) and other sites of the Teghut cultural tradition had bearing on the origin of the Gawra XIA cultural complex, which exhibited some traits typical of Teghut.²⁰ It is a well-known fact that, in Tepe Gawra, the transformation from Ubaid to Uruk is very clear. It was observed long ago that ceramic change (or ‘degeneration’) in the Ubaid and Uruk periods of Mesopotamia could be correlated with the development of

¹⁴ Almamedov 2008, pp. 21–22.

¹⁵ Sagona 2011, pp. 689, 691.

¹⁶ Lyonnet 2010, p. 358; Marro 2000; see also Kohl 2007b, p. 167.

¹⁷ According to C. Marro and A. Özfirat, the Leylatepe ceramic assemblage appears completely isolated within the local Late Chalcolithic culture and contains slightly later Middle Uruk pottery of Gawra X–VIII type (Marro and Özfirat 2003, p. 397).

¹⁸ Sagona 2011, p. 693.

¹⁹ Marro 2010, pp. 35–55; Marro 2012, pp. 29–31; Abedi, Omrani and Karimifar 2015, p. 333.

²⁰ Kavtaradze 1981.

complex societies in the region. Between the Ubaid and Uruk levels, obvious and sudden change in shapes and fabric—‘decidedly inferior’, crude forms and irregular profiles—is apparent. Almost all distinctive late Ubaid forms disappear. In Strata XIA, a slow wheel (*tournette*) is used less often than in XII. Painting ceases and no other ornamentation takes its place until painted pottery regains popularity in the latest Uruk/early Jamdat Nasr levels.²¹ I still maintain that the admixture of a new population was the main reason for such a change in the culture. In my opinion, the archaeological material of Tepe Gawra XIA reveals some hereditary ties, though perhaps not direct, with the material typical of Teghut.²²

Though the culture of the Uruk civilisation was distributed over a wide area, from the Levant to central Iran, by local traders and colonists, which caused the emergence of new colonies with local economies, the problem of its origin is still controversial. We should also take into account that it was initially connected to newcomers in Upper Mesopotamia.²³ According to the traditional viewpoint expressed by A. J. Tobler and the Braidwoods, among others, the Gawra XIA cultural complex belonged to the newcomers to northern Mesopotamia and the Amuq valley.²⁴ Later, among archaeologists, a concept became popular according to which the formation of the Uruk civilisation is seen as the outcome of a gradual transition towards increasingly complex social organisation. The change is demonstrated by the shift from domestically produced painted pottery made on a slow wheel, to a mass-produced, unpainted pottery manufactured by craftsmen using a fast wheel.

But Transcaucasian archaeological data contradict a purely technological explanation for the derivation of Uruk pottery and its subsequent distribution from Mesopotamia to Caucasia. It is now clear that the later stage of Middle Uruk and the Late Uruk period are contemporary with Kura-Araxes culture in its advanced stage. Hence, it is impossible to date to the Late (or even Middle) Uruk period the archaeological material comparable with Uruk culture found in the Caucasian so-called Chalcolithic sites of the pre-Kura-Araxes time. Therefore, there can only be one conclusion: the aforementioned parallels with the pre-Kura-Araxes period relate mainly to the Early Uruk or, more appropriately, to the pre-Uruk/Ubaid period, if we accept that the shaping of Mesopotamian Uruk culture included cultural influxes of Caucasian origin.

The Early Bronze, Kura-Araxes Culture

The determination of the chronological position of the next, Kura-Araxes culture is of special importance in establishing a common chronological system not only for Caucasia in the Early Bronze Age, but for the ancient world generally. The dates obtained for the archaeological material of Kura-Araxes origin detected in Near Eastern contexts, when correlated with historical sources of Mesopotamia and Egypt, indicate the need to considerably push back the accepted dating of the Transcaucasian Kura-Araxes culture, as the latter is earlier there—being ‘native’ to the Transcaucasus—than at the Near Eastern sites, where it is ‘intrusive’ (see below); therefore, this can be done even without using the calibrated ¹⁴C dates.

It has long been known that the term ‘Kura-Araxes culture’ is not comprehensive; it does not have a strict territorial meaning, but instead a more symbolic one, representing the area where this culture was first discovered. It encompasses a much larger area than the land

²¹ Falconer 1981, pp. 54, 59–60.

²² Kavtaradze 1981, pls 3–4; 1983, p. 56 n. 144, n. 146; 1999, p. 73; 2004, pp. 542–543.

²³ Hutchinson 1935, pp. 211–222.

²⁴ Braidwood and Braidwood 1960, p. 513; see also Tobler 1950, pp. 24–26.

between the two rivers (the Kura and Araxes) in the Transcaucasus. The Transcaucasian population, the bearers of the Kura-Araxes cultural traditions, was extensively dispersed across the Near East. However, the Transcaucasus is generally accepted as the core area of the initial formation of the Kura-Araxes culture. A new stage in the study of this culture was the publication of A. Sagona's book, *The Caucasian Region in the Early Bronze Age*.²⁵

Since the end of the 1970s, I have proposed a higher absolute date for the Early Metal Age cultures of Georgia and, in general, the Transcaucasus, on the basis of calibrated radiocarbon and relative dates obtained from well-defined Near Eastern contexts.²⁶ In question were the Transcaucasian origins of the Kura-Araxes culture and its later spread to the Near East. At that time such conclusions were mainly based on the data of west Iranian archaeological sites (in particular, Geoy Tepe, Yanik Tepe, Godin Tepe, and so on). In this region, some sites are dominated by pottery that is typical of the Shida Kartli highlands in Georgia, and others by pottery characteristic of the Ararat Plain in Armenia.²⁷

This phenomenon has a parallel in eastern Anatolia. In Arslantepe, Kurban Höyük, Samsat, Jebel Aruda, and Hassek, sherds of the Red and Black Burnished Ware typical of the Kura-Araxes culture were found in Chalcolithic contexts, and are not related to the final stage of that era.²⁸ Therefore, the Late Uruk date for the appearance of the Kura-Araxes culture in the Near East is (quite independently from the data of west Iranian sites) obtained from east Anatolian Kura-Araxes contexts. The intrusive character of the Kura-Araxes culture in this area is quite clear.²⁹

Although the Red and Black Burnished Ware has been considered a central Anatolian contribution in Late Chalcolithic Arslantepe,³⁰ there are some obvious signs that Kura-Araxes ceramics were already clearly detectable among the materials of Arslantepe VII. Even G. Palumbi admits that some traits—swollen-necked jars, and a few sherds with characteristic black exteriors and light brown–reddish brown interiors—could have resulted from some interactions between Arslantepe VII and the northeastern Anatolian region in the middle of the fourth millennium.³¹ A. Sagona also stresses that certain pottery forms such as biconical jars, or traits like silvery, mirror-like burnishing, may have emanated not from central Anatolia but from the Transcaucasus.³² These isolated, early findings of such pottery are very valuable from a chronological point of view, providing a *terminus ante quem* for the earlier materials of the eastern Anatolian/Transcaucasian Kura-Araxes culture.³³

In the opinion of T. Kiguradze and A. Sagona, the idea of vessels with lustrous red and black surfaces may, in fact, have been of east Anatolian origin.³⁴ But the question is, what do we mean by the term 'Eastern Anatolia'? In my opinion, this region, allegedly involved in the origins of the above-mentioned pottery, should be attributed not to eastern Anatolia, but to the northeastern part of it; that is, to the so-called Turkish Transcaucasus or the

²⁵ Sagona 1984.

²⁶ Kavtaradze 1981, 1983, 1987, 1992.

²⁷ For example, Rothman 2015, p. 9192; cf. Summers 2014, p. 163.

²⁸ Kavtaradze 1999, pp. 78–79; Helwing 2002.

²⁹ See Kavtaradze 2004, pp. 544–546.

³⁰ Frangipane 2014, pp. 170–171; Çalışkan Akgül 2012, p. 103; Schoop 2011, p. 164. As was noticed by M. S. Rothman, colour did seem to be an important factor for the ancient inhabitants of Arslantepe; some of the fruit stands used there were typically buff in color, but some were intentionally blackened on the outside (Rothman 2014, pp. 48–49).

³¹ Palumbi 2008b, p. 49.

³² Sagona 2011, p. 692.

³³ According to G. Palumbi, the Red and Black Burnished Ware of the Kura-Araxes culture may have originated in the Erzurum area as a result of its relations with central Anatolia (Palumbi 2003, p. 104).

³⁴ Kiguradze and Sagona 2003, p. 93.

southwestern part of the Transcaucasus. In this regard, excavations in Sos Höyük have considerably expanded our knowledge of the nature and the area of distribution of this culture in northeastern Anatolia.³⁵

The fourth millennium in the Transcaucasus seems to have been a period of cultural interplay and hybridity.³⁶ The pale brown pottery with tall necks and sandy paste, the hallmark of the earliest phase of Kura-Araxes culture found in the debris of the settlement and pits on the saddle of Chobareti in southern Georgia, is dated to 3300–3000 BC on the basis of 11 radiocarbon readings.³⁷ At the same time, the burials of the site with the Red and Black Burnished Ware, which have no absolute dates as yet, are considered to belong to a later date, due to their stratigraphic context.³⁸

The concept that the black and red firing was introduced into the Transcaucasus from eastern Anatolia is brought into question by the data of recent investigations at the southern Transcaucasian sites at Ovçular Tepesi in Nakhchevan³⁹ and Areni-1 Cave in Armenia.⁴⁰ In these locations, within the deposits of the Late Chalcolithic horizon, is pottery with black external surfaces and light (red, pink or orange) interiors. According to the archaeologists investigating both sites, this evidence extends the date for the first appearance of the Red and Black Burnished Ware of the Kura-Araxes culture by several hundred years before the previously accepted earliest date. This new perspective demonstrates that the earliest manifestation of the Kura-Araxes phenomenon should be pushed back at least to the last quarter of the fifth millennium BC.

An opposing view has been expressed by G. Palumbi and C. Chataigner. They stressed first that the appearance of Late Chalcolithic Kura-Araxes ceramics from Ovçular Tepesi is an isolated case, not useful for determining wide-ranging chronology, and second, that the findings at Areni-1 Cave are still too controversial to take into account.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

In general, it can be said that there has been a persistent need to adjust the chronological construction of Transcaucasian cultures during the Late Neolithic and Early Metal Age towards higher dates, a need that has been pressing for some 20 years.⁴² New data have been accumulating during the last decade regarding the absolute and relative chronology of Near Eastern and Transcaucasian cultures and for the chronological relationship of archaeological materials of both these regions. First, we now have a much wider set of dates obtained through the ¹⁴C technique. Second, there is new, firmer evidence concerning the chronological overlap between the Kura-Araxes and Uruk cultures. The data is persuasive and poses problems regarding the relationship between these cultures and questions as to the

³⁵ Sagona 2000.

³⁶ Kakhiani *et al.* 2013, p. 28; *cf.* Sagona 2014b.

³⁷ Kakhiani *et al.* 2013, pp. 20–26, 49; *cf.* Sagona 2014b.

³⁸ Kakhiani *et al.* 2013, pp. 11, 21–26, 48, 49. It should be noted that one characteristic feature is inherent in the later material of this culture: the occasional, unexpected ‘revival’ of pottery with the appearance of an earlier type (Kavtaradze 1983, pp. 60–81).

³⁹ Marro *et al.* 2009, pp. 54–55, 59; 2011, pp. 66, 69, 77, 79–80; Marro *et al.* 2014, pp. 131–154; Ashurov 2014, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Wilkinson *et al.* 2012; Areshian *et al.* 2012, pp. 127–128; Kakhiani *et al.* 2013, p. 28.

⁴¹ Palumbi and Chataigner 2014, p. 250.

⁴² See, for example, Edens 1995, p. 56; Trifonov 2001, pp. 71–82; Kohl 2002, pp. 160–151; Kohl 2006, p. 17; Palumbi 2008a, pp. 13–14; Potts 2012, p. 676; Sagona 2014a, pp. 26–27. See also M. Andreeva’s criticism of my book, published in 1983 (1987, pp. 273–283) and my reply (2000, pp. 5–33).

character of cultural and social developments between the complex societies of the Near East, its northern frontier and the neighbouring regions.

All of these aspects have the potential to date the initial infiltration of the Transcaucasian population into the Malatya-Elâziğ area of eastern Anatolia to the Late Uruk period. But the fact is that in the older layers of Arslantepe VII, which belong to the Northern Middle Uruk period,⁴³ sherds of Red and Black ware were found. They were hand made with a high technological level of burnished surface treatments, supposedly of the Kura-Araxes type (see above). This ware appears gradually at Arslantepe, coinciding with chaff-faced buff or red-slipped wares that are generally linked to the north Syrian-Mesopotamian region. In the opinion of M. Frangipane, these finds clearly indicate that the local population was in contact with Kura-Araxes communities at the end of period VII at Arslantepe.⁴⁴ Considering this evidence, it is possible that the Kura-Araxes traditions had already filtered into the area during the Middle Uruk period. Significantly in this regard, the Red and Black Burnished pottery of the Kura-Araxes culture is a sign *not* of an earlier type, but of a developed stage of this culture.⁴⁵

If we take into account the date of the Middle Uruk period, in the first half to the middle of the fourth millennium, then pushing back the traditional low date of the Transcaucasian Kura-Araxes culture is necessary. As we already know, the dating of the first obvious signs of the Kura-Araxes culture found *in situ* in the layers of local cultures of the Near East represented the *terminus ante quem* for similar and any earlier archaeological artefacts of the Kura-Araxes culture in the Transcaucasian region.

As the date of late Arslantepe VII should also be considered the *terminus ante quem* for the developed Kura-Araxes culture (characterised by high quality Red and Black Burnished Ware) that existed somewhere northeast of the Malatya-Elâziğ area, there is a high probability that the initial date of the Kura-Araxes culture of the Transcaucasus should be shifted to the Middle Uruk period, in the first half of the fourth millennium. Thus we can assume that not only is it possible to trace the bearers of the Kura-Araxes culture and the Uruk colonists to the northern periphery of the Near East in the second half of the fourth millennium, but to find them there even earlier, in the first half of that millennium. This revision of the starting date of the Transcaucasian Kura-Araxes culture places it earlier than I proposed in my previous publications.⁴⁶

Recent discoveries from Areni-1 cave and Ovçular Tepe (see above), may place the bar even higher; that the origin of the distinctive Kura-Araxes cultural assemblage lies in the Late Chalcolithic of the late fifth to early fourth millennia.⁴⁷ In the opinion of the members of the excavating team, Areni-1 can be positioned in the putative hiatus between the Late Chalcolithic Sioni and the fully developed Kura-Araxes culture.⁴⁸

Much later than in Anatolia or Iran, but related to the Kura-Araxes culture of the east Anatolian-Transcaucasian tradition (with its Red and Black Burnished Ware), is the so-called Khirbet-Kerak culture that is well represented in Palestine and the Amuq regions (Phase H-I; 2900–2400/2400–2250 BC). The lower limit of the Khirbet Kerak culture is dated to the end of Period II of the Early Bronze Age of Palestine (2900–2600 BC). But in the Amuq area, Kura-Araxes pottery already begins to appear in Amuq G levels (3300–2900 BC).⁴⁹

⁴³ Frangipane 2000, p. 441.

⁴⁴ Frangipane 2000, pp. 443–444.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Kavtaradze 2006, pp. 114–117.

⁴⁶ Kavtaradze 1999, 2004.

⁴⁷ Wilkinson, Gasparian *et al.* 2012, p. 20; Areshian, Gasparyan *et al.* 2012, pp. 127–128.

⁴⁸ Wilkinson, Gasparian *et al.* 2012, p. 30; *cf.* Kohl 2007a, pp. 69–70.

⁴⁹ Kavtaradze 2006, pp. 107–125.

The next period of cultural development in Caucasia—the era of burial mounds (kurgans) that belonged mainly to the third millennium—currently presents a puzzle. Recently excavated kurgans at Soyuq Bulaq in western Azerbaijan and at Kavtiskhevi village in central Georgia are dated to the beginning of the fourth millennium. It seems that this type of burial construction in the Transcaucasus started nearly 1500 years earlier than was traditionally accepted. These kurgans belong to the so-called Berikldeebi-Leylatepe culture, which is considered to be associated with the ‘Uruk tradition’ (discussed above). Archaeologists came to the conclusion that the practice of kurgan burials was already well established in the Transcaucasus during the Late Chalcolithic; the pottery from the burials shows affiliation with Late Chalcolithic 2–3 ceramics of northern Mesopotamia.⁵⁰ In their opinion, the Leylatepe cultural groups thereafter migrated to the north, in the mid-fourth millennium, and played an important part in the rise of the Maikop culture of the Ciscaucasus.⁵¹

However, this very complex and controversial issue—the origin and spread of the kurgan burial tradition—requires a full and comprehensive study of archaeological data of the vast areas of the Eurasian steppes. In these regions, they are the typical burial practice and are dictated by the environment. It is difficult to imagine how they could have their origin in any other place, and they require a much broader scope of investigation than we have at our disposal today. Such research will need to take a substantial step beyond previous studies and, simultaneously, to assess the accumulation of new archaeological data not only in the Near East and Caucasia, but in the wider Circumpontic area as well.

Overall, new chronological definitions generated for the regions located north of *fault lines* in Caucasia and the Balkans permit us to reconsider the character of relations of these regions with the Near East, its societies and cultures.

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⁵⁰ Lyonnet *et al.* 2008, pp. 27–44; see also Museyibli 2008, p. 22.

⁵¹ Museyibli 2008, p. 22.

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Giorgi Leon KAVTARADZE
Institute of History and Ethnology, Georgia
Email: gakvtaradze@gmail.com