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Trajectories of Complexity

Socio-economic Dynamics in Upper Mesopotamia
in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods

Edited by Marco Iamoni

2016

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Preface

Among the many research areas that compose the Archaeology of the Near East, the study of prehistory and protohistory has perhaps offered the most significant advances in the last decades. In particular, the investigations carried out of the ceramic Neolithic and the Chalcolithic (broadly speaking the 7th – 4th millennium BC) have provided new insights into some of the most important events characterising the two periods (e.g. the nature of urbanization in Mesopotamia), which have profoundly altered our understanding of the Near East. Furthermore, these advancements have been fundamental not only for general comprehension of these most remote times in the Near East itself but also – and perhaps above all – of the major traits characterising the emergence of later Near Eastern societies during historical periods.

Upper Mesopotamia in particular has emerged in recent years as a key area for such research: unlike its southern regional counterpart, where thick riverine deposits and the presence of high water tables hamper the investigation of the earliest occupation levels, Upper Mesopotamia offers long settlement sequences with relatively easily-reachable 7th-4th millennium occupation levels. Investigations of these sequences have permitted comprehensive studies scrutinising the paths followed by human communities in regional exploration, settlement experimentation, and eventually stable occupation on a regional scale. At the same time, they have freed the region from the predominance of the ‘Land of Sumer’ and led to the recognition of its complete independence and originality, especially as far as local urbanization processes are concerned.

Upper Mesopotamia is thus now a major source of new information and the ongoing investigations continue to yield results that deepen and enrich our knowledge of human occupation of the area. Despite the presence of many archaeological projects, its incredible archaeological potential is, however, still far from being fully exploited. One major obstacle derives from a general tendency towards strict categorization of the archaeological data into rigid chronological schemes: this has led to the study of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic as two almost completely separate bodies of data. With a few (though in some cases notable) exceptions, the dynamics of the Neolithic have been independently analysed from the perspective of the following Chalcolithic, and vice versa, thus producing different interpretative models and theories that, notwithstanding their accuracy for each specific period, have missed the opportunity to focus on the wider picture, or, to use Braudel’s terminology, the *longue durée* of archaeological phenomena.

In this way one significant aspect, the transition from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic (corresponding to what is known as the Halaf-Ubaid transition), with all its relative implications, such as the modification of the socio-economic nature of ancient communities, has received less attention. The workshop that Salam Al Quntar and the editor of the present volume organised at the 9th International Congress of Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Basel aimed to address precisely this issue. A number of colleagues with various areas of expertise agreed to participate in the workshop: to all of them goes Salam’s and my deepest gratitude

for their contributions, as well as for the friendly atmosphere that characterised the presentation of the papers and their discussion. The present proceedings are the result of that successful workshop and represent a first step towards a more detailed exploration of the factors at the basis of the fundamental changes that led to the formation of some of the most distinctive traits of Near Eastern societies.

The nine articles composing this volume of *Studia Chaburensia* range geographically from the Syria Jezirah and south eastern Turkey to Iraqi Kurdistan. They present some of the most recent results of archaeological projects conducted in those areas, with diverse bodies of data (relating to settlement patterns, material culture and economic sustenance strategies, among other topics) discussed using different methods and approaches. Altogether they provide a valuable overview of the most recent and methodologically up-to-date research activities conducted in the region. I am thus particularly grateful to the contributors who, after participating in the workshop, accepted to make a further effort and publish the results of their research in this volume: their patience in putting up with my repeated and pressing emails is a further motive for gratitude.

I wish to thank those who have supported this project and made this publication possible. First, the organisers of the 9th ICAANE, in particular Oscar Kaelin, for their help and hospitality in Basel. Hartmut Kühne kindly accepted to publish the workshop proceedings in his series. I extend my sincere thanks to those colleagues who have acted as single anonymous reviewers for each of the nine contributions in a peer-reviewing process. Michael Fröhlich provided the technical support for the preparation of the manuscripts. Daniele Morandi Bonacossi has helped me a lot in the final stages of this volume, especially with regard to its practical organization. Last, but absolutely not least, I am deeply indebted to Katia Gavagnin who helped me a lot, and followed the typesetting and final editing of each section of this volume: her work has been fundamental for its successful publication.

Marco Iamoni

Udine
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