

THE KURA-ARAXES CULTURE IN THE ERZURUM REGION: THE PROCESS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT

KURA-ARAS KÜLTÜRÜ'NÜN ERZURUM BÖLGESİ'NDEKİ GELİŞİM SÜRECİ

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Kura-Aras Kültürü, Erzurum Bölgesi, Karaz Kültürü, Sos Höyük

ABSTRACT

The Kura-Araxes Culture, which substantially signposted the Early Bronze Ages of the North Highland Zone of the Ancient Near East, still has many disguises, despite its one hundred years of research history. The main reasons for this are the scope of regional investigations (there are still many unknown sub-regions in the Kura-Araxian Geography) and the lack of cooperation between these projects. "Regionalism" is a distinguishing feature of this cultural complex, which continued for more than one thousand years and has distinctive pottery, architectural and settlement pattern traditions. To prevent the dynamics of the Kura-Araxes Culture from becoming ineffectual, and its chronological and geographical supremacy going largely unrecognised, we need more regional projects and their results. In this essay I propose to examine the role of the Erzurum region, which is central to the geography of the Kura-Araxes Culture, in the light of older and more recent archaeological investigations in this region. As the most recent research has demonstrated, the Erzurum Region has been placed at the heartland of the Kura-Araxes Culture, where it has emerged and developed. In spite of its rich archaeological potential, it is still not well known archaeologically. The unsatisfactory archaeological research which has been focused on the Erzurum and Pasinler plains should have presented striking results concerning regional archaeology and our subject the Kura-Araxes Culture. These regional investigations began with the sounding on Karaz Höyük at the beginning of 1940's and continued with only one seasonal excavation on Güzelova and Pular Höyük in the 1960's. They are very early and important projects in terms of regional archaeology, and the results of these early excavations have been re-evaluated within the scope of a project which was undertaken between 2000 and 2005, during which a sounding on Pular Höyük, and surveys on the Erzurum and Pasinler plains, were conducted. This field work presented striking results concerning the development process of the Kura-Araxes Culture. Surely the key project for the Erzurum Region has been the Sos excavation, which has proposed a regional chronology as well as responses to the main questions concerning the Kura-Araxes Culture. Apart from these there have been a series of archaeological projects. But none of them have been able to contribute any valuable understanding of the development of the Kura-Araxes Culture in the Erzurum Region. The main aim of this essay is to discuss in detail the place and role of the Erzurum Region in the development of the Kura-Araxes Culture, which is one of the greatest cultural phenomenon of Near Eastern Archaeology.

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ÖZET

Yakındoğu'nun dağlık kuzey kesiminin ETÇ sini büyük oranda karakterize eden Kura-Aras Kültürü yüzyılı aşan araştırma tarihçesine rağmen hala bünyesinde çok sayıda bilinmeyişi barındırmaktadır. Bunun en önemli nedeni bölgesel ölçekteki araştırmaların azlığı, dengesiz dağılımı ve politik sınırların neden olduğu koordinasyon eksikliğidir. Kendine özgü seramik, mimari ve yerleşim düzeni geleneklerine sahip bu kültürün bin yıldan fazla devam eden sürecinde "bölgesellik" en önemli ayırt edici özelliktir. Coğrafi ve kronolojik açıdan sahip olduğu büyüklükle hantallaşan bu kültürün dinamiklerini anlayabilmemiz için bölgesel bazı çalışmalar ve sonuçları oldukça önemlidir. Bu çalışmada kültürün coğrafi açıdan yayılım alanının merkezinde yer alan Erzurum Bölgesi eski ve yeni çalışmalar ışığında tekrar ele alınacaktır. Son dönem araştırmalarının işaret ettiği gibi kültürün ortaya çıkıp biçimlendiği anayurt toprakları içerisinde yer alan Erzurum Bölgesi, sahip olduğu zengin potansiyeline rağmen arkeolojik olarak yeterince iyi bilinmemektedir. Bölgede Erzurum ve Pasinler ovalarında yoğunlaşan araştırmalar bölge arkeolojisine ve konumuz olan Kura-Aras Kültürü'nün gelişim sürecine dair önemli veriler ortaya koyabilmiştir. 1940'ların başında Karaz sondajıyla bölgede başlayan, 1960'larda birer sezon olarak devam eden Güzelova ve Pulur Höyük kazıları bölge arkeolojisi ve kültürü için erken ama önemli çalışmalardır. Bu erken dönem kazılarının sonuçları 2000-2005 yılları arasında gerçekleştirilen bir projeye tekrar ele alınmıştır. Bu proje kapsamında bölgede küçük ölçekli yüzey araştırmaları ve Pulur Höyüğünde bir sondaj çalışması yapılmış ve bu arazi çalışmaları da çok çarpıcı sonuçlar ortaya koymuştur. Şüphesiz bölgedeki arkeolojik çalışmaların anahtar projesi, bölge arkeolojisini şekillendiren ve kültüre dair birçok soruya cevap veren Sos Höyük kazılarıdır. Bunlar dışında bölgede yapılmış başka arkeolojik projeler de söz konusudur. Bu çalışmada tüm bu veriler ışığında Yakındoğu Arkeolojisinin en büyük kültürel fenomenlerinden biri olan Kura-Aras Kültürünün gelişim sürecinde Erzurum Bölgesi'nin yeri ve rolü sorgulanacaktır.

INTRODUCTION

In the mountainous zone located north of the Taurus Mountains, one of the major indications of Early Bronze Age activity in the region is the Kura-Araxes Culture – a very popular subject in Near Eastern Archaeology. When we consider the geography across which this culture expanded, extending from the Caucasus Mountains to the Taurus Mountains, from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the Central Anatolia Plateau, and from the Upper Euphrates Valley to the Levant, it becomes clear that the Erzurum Region is positioned in the centre of this vast territory (Fig. 1). The location is also special in terms of its interregional road links. In this respect the Erzurum region might play a significant role in the understanding of the expansion of the Kura-Araxes Culture. Despite its central location, our knowledge about the development of the Kura-Araxes Culture in this specific region sadly has been meagre until the last two decades. The short-term sounding at Karaz Höyük conducted by H. Z. Koşay at the start of the 1940's¹ was the beginning of this archaeological adventure. In regional archaeology, the Kura-Araxes Culture, locally known as the Karaz Culture, has been the prominent feature for all of this time. Undoubtedly, Sos Höyük – located in the Araxes Basin – has been the crucial site in forming an archaeological and chronological framework, and at the same time providing the key to our understanding of the developmental process of the Kura-Araxes Culture in the Erzurum Region (Fig. 4). Thanks to the excavations at Sos Höyük, and other small-scale projects in the region, our knowledge of this process has been increased². No doubt we will be able to understand this process better when the final reports of Sos Höyük excavations are

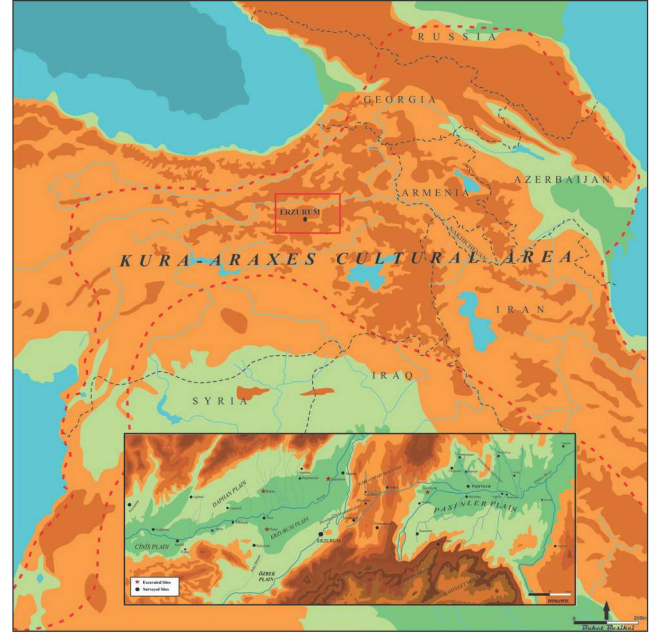


Fig. 1: The General Map of Near East Showing that Location of Kura-Araxes Cultural Region and Erzurum Region. / *Kura-Araxes Kültürü'nün Coğrafyasını ve Erzurum Bölgesini Gösterir Harita.*

published; however as yet only its preliminary reports are available.

In this chapter we will discuss and focus on the development process of the Kura-Araxes Culture in the Erzurum region. Although the results of Sos excavations are our principal starting point, the results (re-evaluated) of Koşay's earlier excavations in the Erzurum Plain will also be discussed in detail in this context³. The primary aim of this essay is to present a compact review concerning this process in the Erzurum region.

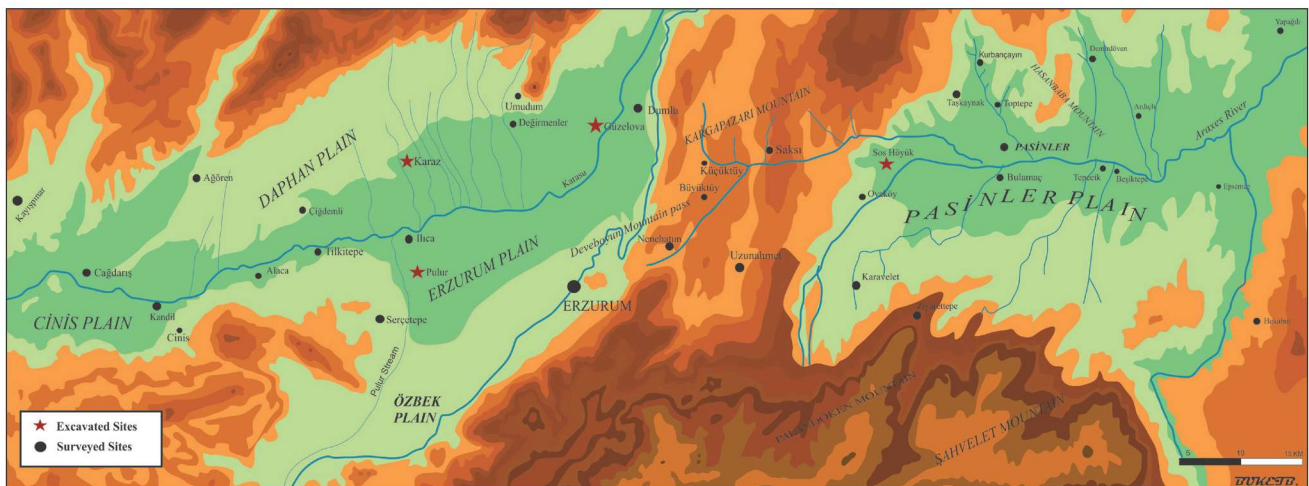


Fig. 2: The Map of Erzurum and Pasinler Plains Showing that Excavated and Surveyed Kura-Araxisian sites / *Kazısı ve Yüzey Araştırmaları Yapılmış Merkezleri Gösteren Erzurum ve Pasinler Ovalarının Haritaları.*

¹ Koşay 1943: 165-169.

² For a brief history of research in Erzurum Region see: Işıklı 2011: 15-41.

³ All materials from Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova excavations were evaluated in the light of recent evidence within context of a Project which was conducted by M. Işıklı and supported by Atatürk University. For details about the Project see Işıklı 2005: 1-20.

OUTLINES OF THE REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY: HIGH PLATEAUS, ECOLOGICAL NICHES AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Erzurum province is located in an area known as the “*Erzurum – Kars Plateau*” and has an average altitude between 2500 – 3000 metres, sharing geographical features with the South Caucasus (Transcaucasia). At the same time this sub-region is a separate cultural region in Eastern Anatolia known as the “*Erzurum – Kars Region*”. While the Palandöken mountain range forms the southern border of this sub-region, the western border is determined by the narrow gorge through which the Karasu River flows, located beyond the Aşkale district, to become one of the main branches of the Euphrates. On the other hand the eastern border of this sub-region becomes integrated with Transcaucasia, and its northern border extends over the Bayburt Plain within the Eastern Black Sea region⁴. The main topography of the Erzurum – Kars Region is the vast plateaus where the altitude varies between 2500 and 3000 metres. These high plains are traversed by deep, wide river valleys and depressions (Fig. 3).

These depressions, identified as “*ecological niches*”, extend in an east/west direction, forming favourable living zones within what might otherwise be hostile locations. They begin with the Aşkale Basin in the west and continue eastward through Erzurum, the Pasinler Plain, and the Kağızman and Iğdır depressions⁵. Our focus area, Erzurum and the Pasinler Plain, is the best known archaeologically among these ecologic niches, encompassing Karaz, Pular, Güzelova and Sos Höyük, which are our key excavation sites. In this area there are two separate drainage systems: the first, to the west, is the area known as the Euphrates Basin, where the streams of Aşkale and the Erzurum plain drain to the Euphrates via the Karasu River. After passing over the “*Deveboynu Geçidi*”, to the east there is a base mountain pass creating a second drainage system: the Araxes Basin. Along this basin lie the depressions of the Pasinler Plain, Selim Basin in Kars, Oltu-Göle and Ardahan. In the geological past, these depressions were formed from fresh water lakes, creating alluvial deposits which provided fertile conditions for agriculture and pasture⁶. These depressions also form natural arterial roads between Eastern Anatolia and Central Anatolia and the Caucasus⁷.



Fig. 3: The Landscape of Kura-Araxes Cultural Region in Eastern Anatolia: High and Vast Plateaus / *Kura-Araxes Kültürel Coğrafyasının Arazi Görünümü; Yüksek ve Geniş Platolar.*

⁴ Erinç 1953: 89.

⁵ Erinç 1953: 91.

⁶ Atalay 1978: 35.

⁷ About the ancient roads between Eastern Anatolia and Caucasus see Marro 2004: 91-120.

As mentioned above, the Erzurum, Pasinler and Bayburt plains are, archaeologically, the best known parts of the sub-region, with the six excavated sites, Karaz⁸, Pulur⁹, Güzelova¹⁰, Büyüktepe¹¹, Bulamaç¹² and Sos¹³ Höyüks, located here (Fig. 2). Various survey projects have also been conducted on these plains in the last twenty years, creating a bridge to understanding the changing settlement patterns, including the Kura-Araxes Period, in these plains¹⁴. Apart from these two plains, recent archaeological investigations performed on the Bayburt plain by the same team lead by A. Sagona presented remarkable and similar results to those of the Erzurum and Pasinler plains; however this similarity is valid only for ceramic groups¹⁵. Consequently, the results of these projects on the Bayburt Plain are not able to go beyond supporting the outcomes of the Erzurum and Pasinler plains.

As is known, the Kura-Araxian sites throughout Eastern Anatolia, which are medium sized mounds (average 150 metres in diameter), generally have sheltered locations in river valleys and plains¹⁶, which can also be observed in the Erzurum and Pasinler plains. Similarly, we can observe modern villages clustered in these depressions today, protected from flooding in spring time and high winds in winter time. Generally, during the surveys at Erzurum and Pasinler plains, mounds have been discovered within the modern villages, demonstrating to us that modern and prehistoric settlement patterns have not differed radically from each other¹⁷. These geographical and ecological conditions have presented similar subsistence strategies, including animal husbandry and limited farming, to human groups living in that region. This model can be described as “extensive husbandry supported with limited agricultural activities”¹⁸; the main substrategy of pastoralism is animal husbandry, the secondary activity is agriculture. Analysed results of archaeo-botanic and archaeo-zoologic evidence from Sos Höyük support this model¹⁹. In modern anthropology this model is very similar to sub-categories of pastoralism such as “*agro-pastoralist*” and “*transhumant*” types.

⁸ Koşay/Turfan 1959: 349-413.

⁹ Koşay/Vary 1964.

¹⁰ Koşay/Vary 1967.

¹¹ Sagona/Pemberton/Mc Phee 1993: 69-83.

¹² Güneri/Erkmen/Gönültaş/Korucu 2004: 207-214.

¹³ Sagona/Sagona 2000: 56-127.

¹⁴ Karaosmanoğlu/Işıklı/Can 2003: 345-356; Karaosmanoğlu/Işıklı/Can 2004: 301-310; Sagona 1999: 108-131; Ceylan 2008.

¹⁵ Sagona/Sagona 2004.

¹⁶ Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 187.

¹⁷ Karaosmanoğlu/Işıklı/Can 2003: 345.

¹⁸ For details about this model see Işıklı 2005: 33-40. Also for the modern samples concerning this model in Turkey see: Hadimli/Karakuzulu/Birinci 2010: 348-359.

¹⁹ Pirro 2009; Longford/Drinnen/Sagona 2009.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS OF THE KURA-ARAXES CULTURE IN THE ERZURUM REGION

In spite of its considerably long research history, and especially major contributions from people like C. Burney²⁰, A. Sagona²¹ and K. Kushnareva²², the Kura-Araxes Culture continues to be discussed intensely due to controversial views regarding terminology, origin, ethnicity and chronology. No doubt the vast geography contributes to these problems²³. Despite this complicated situation, archaeologists working on this cultural phenomenon are of one mind in that it reflects “regionalism” – the sharing of ideas and culture between groups in the region. This is no surprise when considering its vast expanding geography containing the such diversity. Thus, in Eastern Anatolia, regional features can be observed on Kura-Araxes pottery by its form and decoration.

As mentioned above, the Erzurum-Kars Region, especially the Erzurum district with its central location, might have played a substantial and effective role in the development and expansion of the Kura-Araxes Culture, and also its interregional relationships. Even though geographically the region is vast, all archaeological evidence concerning the development of the Kura-Araxes Culture in this region springs from the Erzurum and Pasinler plains where systematic projects have been conducted. Our knowledge concerning this culture, with the exception of these two plains, is extremely limited across the vast area including Kars, Ağrı, Iğdır, Ardahan and other districts of the Erzurum provinces. And so, when we refer to the Erzurum region, it should be understood that we mean only these two plains.

The excavations performed by Prof. A. Sagona at Sos Höyük²⁴ between 1994-2002, the excavation in 1964 at Karaz Höyük²⁵ performed by H. Z. Koşay, the excavation in 1964 at Pulur Höyük²⁶ carried out by H. Z. Koşay, the excavation in 1967 at Güzelova²⁷ performed by H. Z. Koşay and between 2000-2005 the re-evaluated Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova excavations project including Pulur Sounding²⁸ in 2002 performed by M. Işıklı, show us that the development of the Kura-Araxes Culture in the Erzurum region can be analyzed into three sub-phases (Fig. 4).

²⁰ Burney/Lang 1971.

²¹ Sagona 1984.

²² Kushnareva 1997.

²³ For more details about the problems of Kura-Araxes Culture see: Işıklı 2011: 41-63.

²⁴ Sagona 2000: 329-373; Sagona/Sagona 2000: 56-127; Sagona 2010: 42-52.

²⁵ Koşay/Turfan 1959: 349-413.

²⁶ Koşay/Vary 1964.

²⁷ Koşay/Vary 1967.

²⁸ Işıklı 2008a: 267-290.

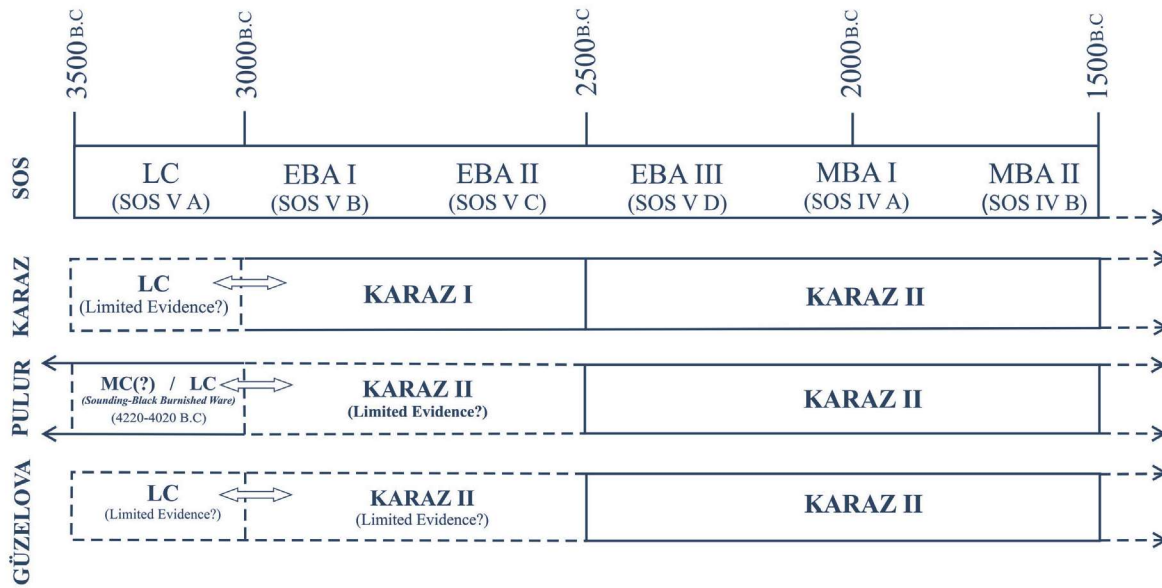


Fig. 4: The Chronology Chart Showing that the Stratigraphic Positions of Excavated Key Sites in Erzurum Area / *Erzurum Bölgesinden Kazısı Yapılmış Anahtar Yerleşimlerin Stratigrafik Durumlarını Gösteren Kronoloji Tablosu.*

FORMATION PHASE

Although research into the Kura-Araxes cultural phenomenon has extended back over one hundred years, the key arguments remain its origin and its expansion. Studies in recent years concerning this culture show that the Kura-Araxes Culture has a formation process corresponding chronologically to the Chalcolithic, especially the Late Chalcolithic periods of the South Caucasus and Northeastern Anatolia²⁹. And also, according to these current studies, the local Chalcolithic cultures in these regions contributed to the formation process of this cultural complex. When considering the radiocarbon results from Sos Höyük, the dating of this process for the Erzurum Region should be the second half of the fourth millennium B.C. (almost five hundred years between 3500 – 3000 BC)³⁰. For now, the most informative site in the region for this process is without doubt Sos Höyük. According to the stratigraphic sequence at Sos Höyük, this process corresponds to Sos VA level which has been dated to the Late Chalcolithic Period. In this period a local culture and its pottery traditions dominated on the site; also, the site had some relationships with the South Caucasus, as demonstrated by the presence of Sioni ware at Sos VA. At that period the site was surrounded with a monumental enclosure wall which is built with locally acquired field stones. The length of the wall is 2.5 metres, and its height has been preserved to over 1.75 metres³¹. The houses of this period, whether with stone foundations or not, have

rectangular or circular plans, plastered walls and floors, and also central hearths³² (Fig. 10). The people living at Sos VA exhibited evidence of a subsistence model which can be described as “extensive husbandry supported by agricultural activities”. Thus the zooarchaeological evidence from Sos Höyük indicated that this model points to a settled agro-pastoralist economy³³. Also the archaeo-botanical remains from Sos Höyük showed that the environment of Sos was rich in biological diversity³⁴.

As for ceramic evidence from this level, according to Sagona there were six separate sub-groups in late Chalcolithic pottery at Sos Höyük. Among these groups (mostly local pottery traditions) black burnished ware and the Proto Kura-Araxian type are remarkable for this formation period, and according to Sagona these two groups are significant figures in the formation process of the Kura-Araxes pottery tradition³⁵. The popular forms of the earliest groups are jar types with globular body and tall neck, and hemispherical bowls. And also the red-and-black colour scheme – generally black and well burnished exterior surfaces as in the case of black burnished ware, and relief and incised ornamentations (usually spirals) and knobs – is a distinctive component in groups of this formation process. Also in the repertoire of this earliest group are flat lids with loop handles, fixed circular hearths, portable hearths and andirons³⁶ (Fig. 5).

²⁹ Kiguradze/Sagona 2003: 38-94

³⁰ Kiguradze/Sagona 2003: 38-94; Işıklı 2005: 497-553; Palumbi 2008: 23-93; Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 163-168; Işıklı 2011: 256-274; Palumbi 2011: 205-228.

³¹ Sagona/Sagona 2000: 59, Fig. 27, 28.

³² Palumbi 2008: 64-73.

³³ Pirro 2009: 300-302.

³⁴ Longford/Drinnen/Sagona 2009: 121-136.

³⁵ Sagona/Sagona 2000: 62; Kiguradze/Sagona 2003: 38-94.

³⁶ Sagona/Zimansky 2009: Fig. 5.10; Palumbi 2008: Figs. 3.7 - 3.8.

LATE CHALCOLITHIC (SOS V A)

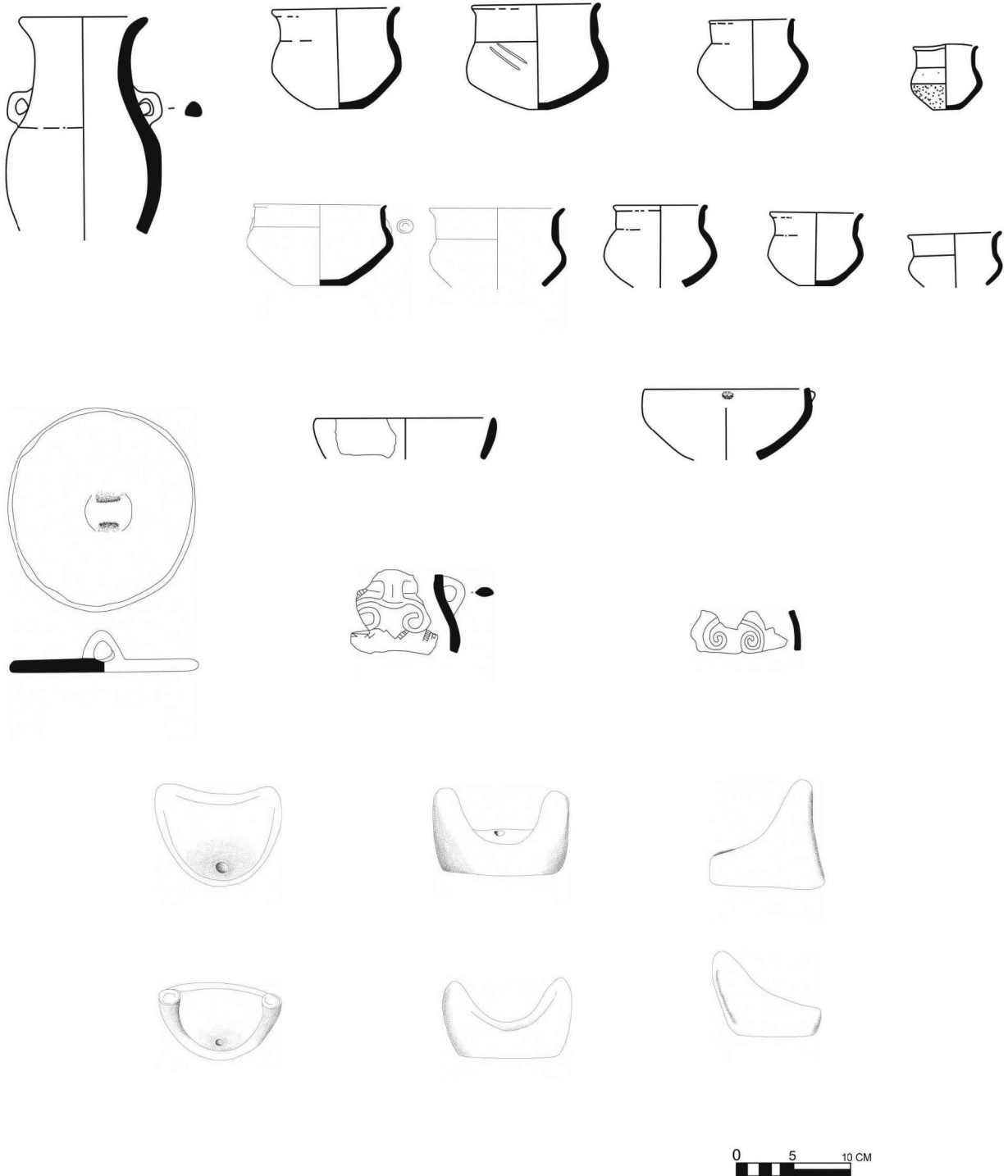


Fig. 5: The Samples of Sos VA Ceramics / *Sos Höyük VA Keramik Örnekleri* (Redrawn from figures in Sagona/Sagona 2000; Sagona 2000, Kiguradze/Sagona 2003).

Apart from Sos Höyük, some evidence concerning the formation process of Kura-Araxes in the Erzurum Region comes from Koşay's earlier excavations in the region. In the beginning of 2000's, a project concerning the re-evaluation of material from these three excavations was carried out by Işıklı, producing significant results about this matter. Unfortunately the earlier excavations produced mostly ceramic evidence, with no apparent stratigraphy, and no informative architectural remains that we have discovered. Among these three excavations, especially in the Karaz material, there are some samples which are very similar to Sos VA pottery.

Some samples, very similar to the jar type of Sos VA which has a globular body and long swollen neck, also displays relief decorations of thick loose coils (spirals). Apart from these jars, there are some large bowls and flat lids with loop handles with incised decorations in the group from the earliest deposit in Karaz (between 9.00 – 8.00 metres in B sounding area)³⁷. The samples of this earliest group are generally monochrome, slipped and burnished. Also a few samples have the red-and-black colour scheme which is one indicator of the early-Kura-Araxes pottery tradition³⁸ (Figs. 7a-b and 11).

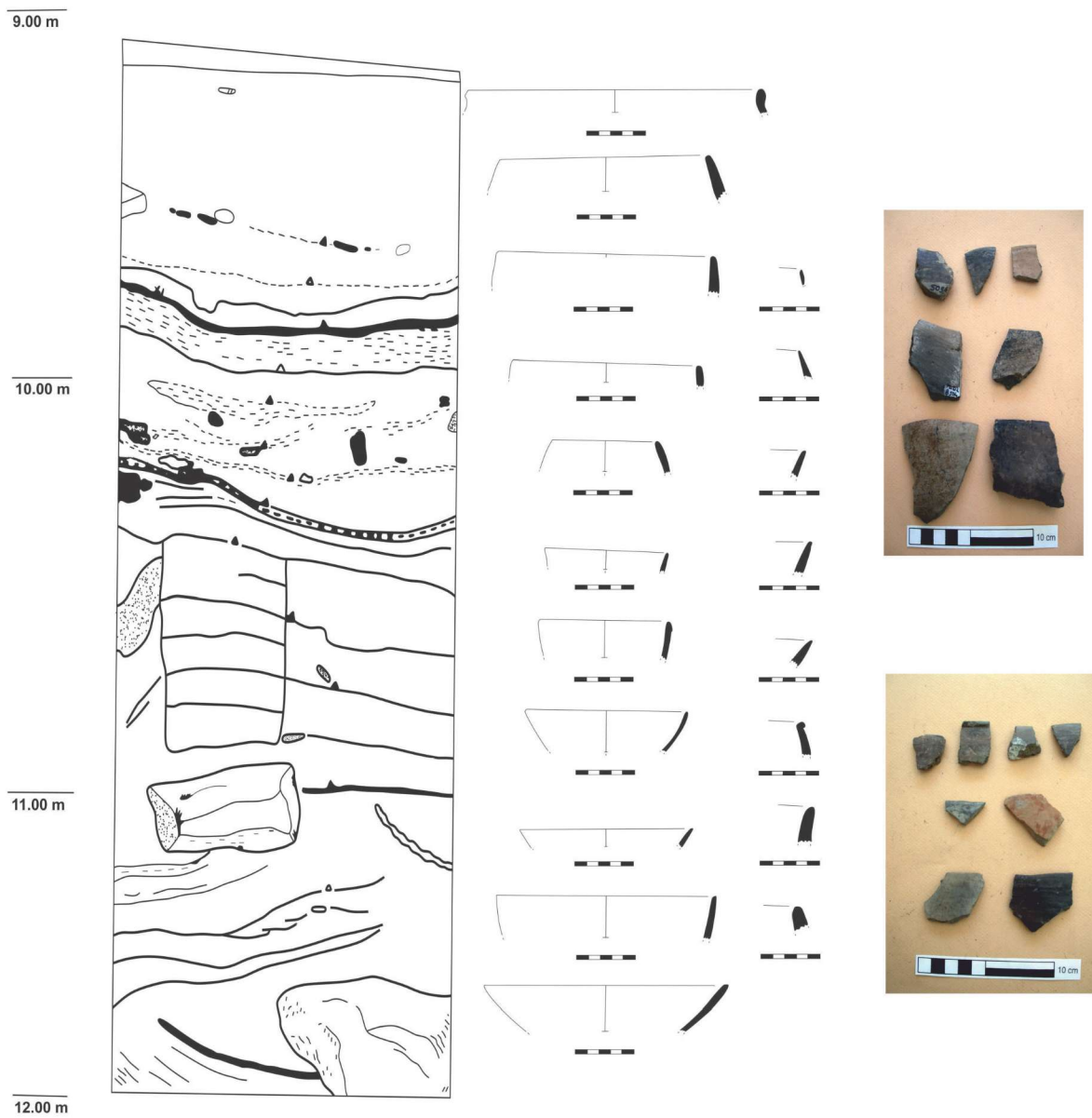


Fig. 6: The Chart Showing that Drawing Cross Section and Potteries of "Area B" in Pulur Sounding (Including Black Burnished Ware Fragments) / Pulur Sondajı B Alanının Kesit Çizimini ve Seramik Örneklerini gösteren Tablo (Siyah Açık Keramik Örnekleri ile Birlikte)

³⁷ Işıklı 2005: 410-443; Işıklı 2012: 76-87.

³⁸ Palumbi 2003; Işıklı 2005: 410-443; Işıklı 2012: 76-87.

Unfortunately, except for Karaz, the other two sites' material evidence concerning the earliest period of Kura-Araxes in the Erzurum region is very meagre. Nevertheless a current re-evaluation of the Pular pottery which is held in the Erzurum Museum provides conspicuous outcomes concerning the formative process of Ku-

ra-Araxes in Erzurum. A few vessels from Pular which are monochrome and burnished remind us of the earliest forms of Sos VA. Also a small andiron with well incised decoration from the lower layers of Güzelova is very similar typologically to the andirons of Sos VA³⁹ (Figs. 7a-b and 11).

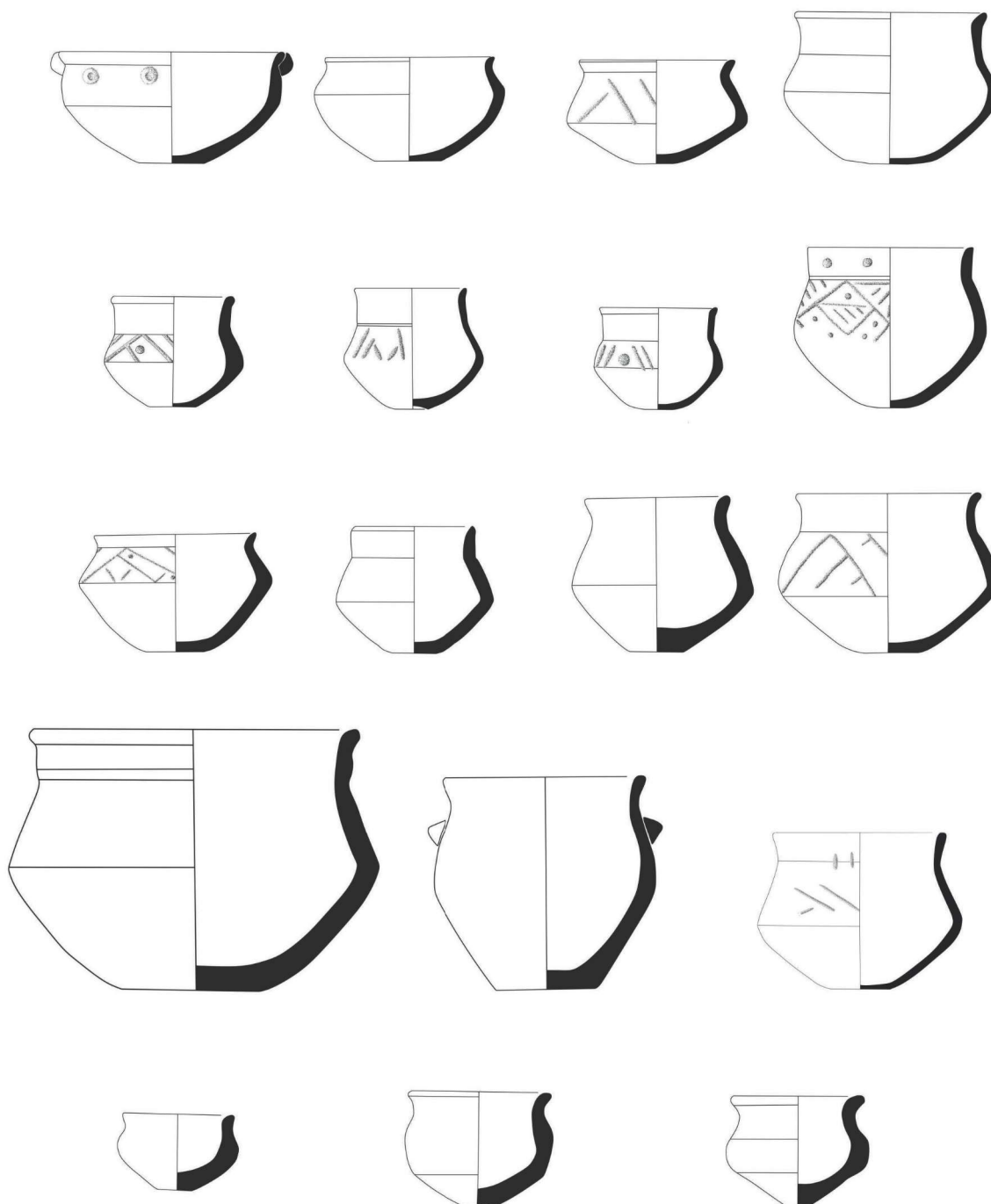


Fig. 7a: The Samples of Karaz I Group ceramics from Karaz, Pular and Güzelova – 1 /
Karaz, Pular ve Güzelova'dan Karaz I Grubu Seramik Örnekleri - 1

³⁹ Monochrome vessels numbered 424, 454 and 460 in Erzurum Museum from Pular and a small andiron with decoration from Güzelova (numbered 988 in museum). For more details see Işık-lı 2005: 450-495.

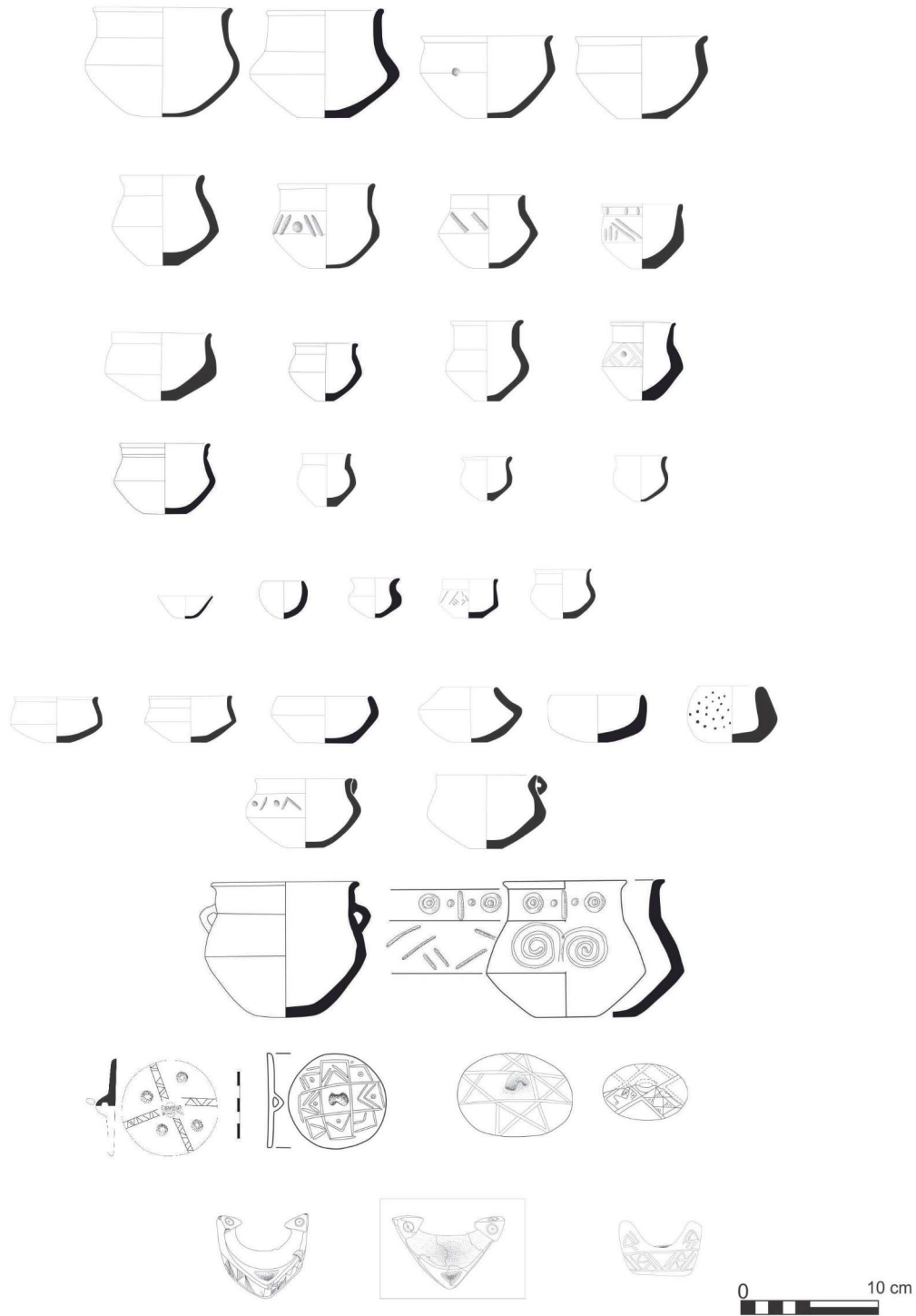


Fig. 7b: The Samples of Karaz I Group Ceramics from Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova – 2 /
Karaz, Pulur ve Güzelova'dan Karaz I Grubu Seramik Örnekleri - 2

In 2002 during a sounding project at Pulur some fragments of “black burnished ware”, which is one of the sub-groups of Sos VA pottery, have been encountered. This short-term and small scale sounding project was carried out on two separate areas on the mound. The workings on “operation area B” located on the northern foot slope of the mound revealed evidence concerning the earliest settled life in Erzurum and brings up for discussion the existence of a Middle Chalcolithic Period in

Erzurum⁴⁰. The fragments of black burnished ware have well-levigated paste and polished surfaces just like the samples which are well-known from Sos VA. They are mostly without form, with only very few samples being fragments of large and deep bowls⁴¹ (Fig. 6).

⁴⁰ Işıklı 2008a: 267-290; Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 163-168.

⁴¹ Işıklı 2008a: 272, Fig. 7, 12-21.

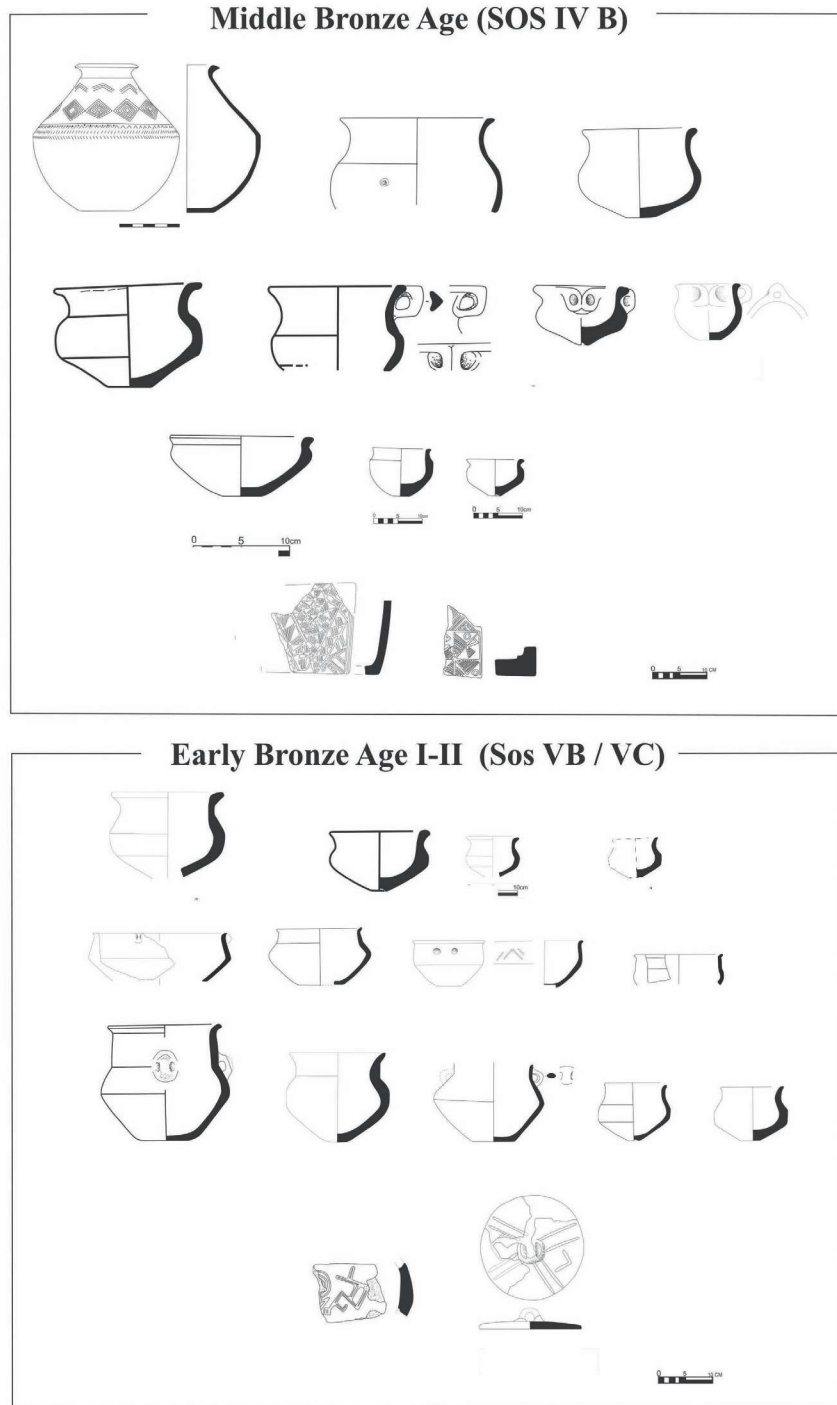


Fig. 8: The Ceramic Samples from Sos VB, VC, VD and IVA and IVB Periods / *Sos Höyük VB, VC, VD, IVA ve IVB Dönemlerine ait Seramik Örnekleri* (Redrawn from figures in Sagona/Sagona 2000; Sagona 2000, Kiguradze/Sagona 2003)

There are at least four architectural layers which can be observed on the section of operation area B. The radiocarbon sample which was taken from - 9.82 meters (Loc. 501) gives dates of 4242 – 4075 B.C. (OZG 367). For now these are the earliest dates for the Chalcolithic period in the Erzurum Region. At the same time these dates pull back the date of the appearance of black burnished ware in Erzurum to the fifth millennium B.C. Although we have no recognisable Kura-Araxes forms, can we ask the question is this the beginning of the formation period of the Kura-Araxes in the Erzurum region? If we accept

that the Kura-Araxes Culture could have been enriched from local cultures of the Erzurum-Kars Region and South Caucasus, this means that it may well be the Middle Chalcolithic Period – the beginning of the Vth Millennium BC – when the formation process begins here. Beyond doubt we need more systematic works at Pulur Höyük to be able to say more about this matter⁴² (Fig. 4).

⁴² Further, Prof. Mehmet Özdoğan pointed out that some samples from Area B remind of Late Neolithic samples from Western Transcaucasia. Personal conversation with Prof. Özdoğan.

TRADITIONAL PROCESS

The period following the formation period can be determined as the “Traditional Kura-Araxes Cultural Process”, during which the cultural complex started to distinguish itself with all its properties, as described here, becoming regionally efficient. The clearest evidence of this period comes from the levels VB and VC (EBA I and II) of Sos Höyük region-wide. According to the stratigraphic sequence and radiocarbon datings of Sos Höyük, this period should have been dated to the first half of 3rd millennium (3000 – 2500) BC (Fig. 4). The architectural tra-

dition of the period can be seen most sharply in relevant levels of Sos Höyük. Even though the architecture of Sos VB (EBA I) is not understood clearly because of there being only floor levels and a hearth, our knowledge has risen along with subsequent layers. In the architecture of these levels there are freestanding and single-roomed houses with stone bases. These houses with mud-bricks walls have a rectangular plan with rounded corners and usually also have a fixed circular central hearth which is decorated with central projections. Apart from hearths, standard fittings of benches and bins were typical in Kura-Araxian houses in the Erzurum area⁴³ (Fig. 10).

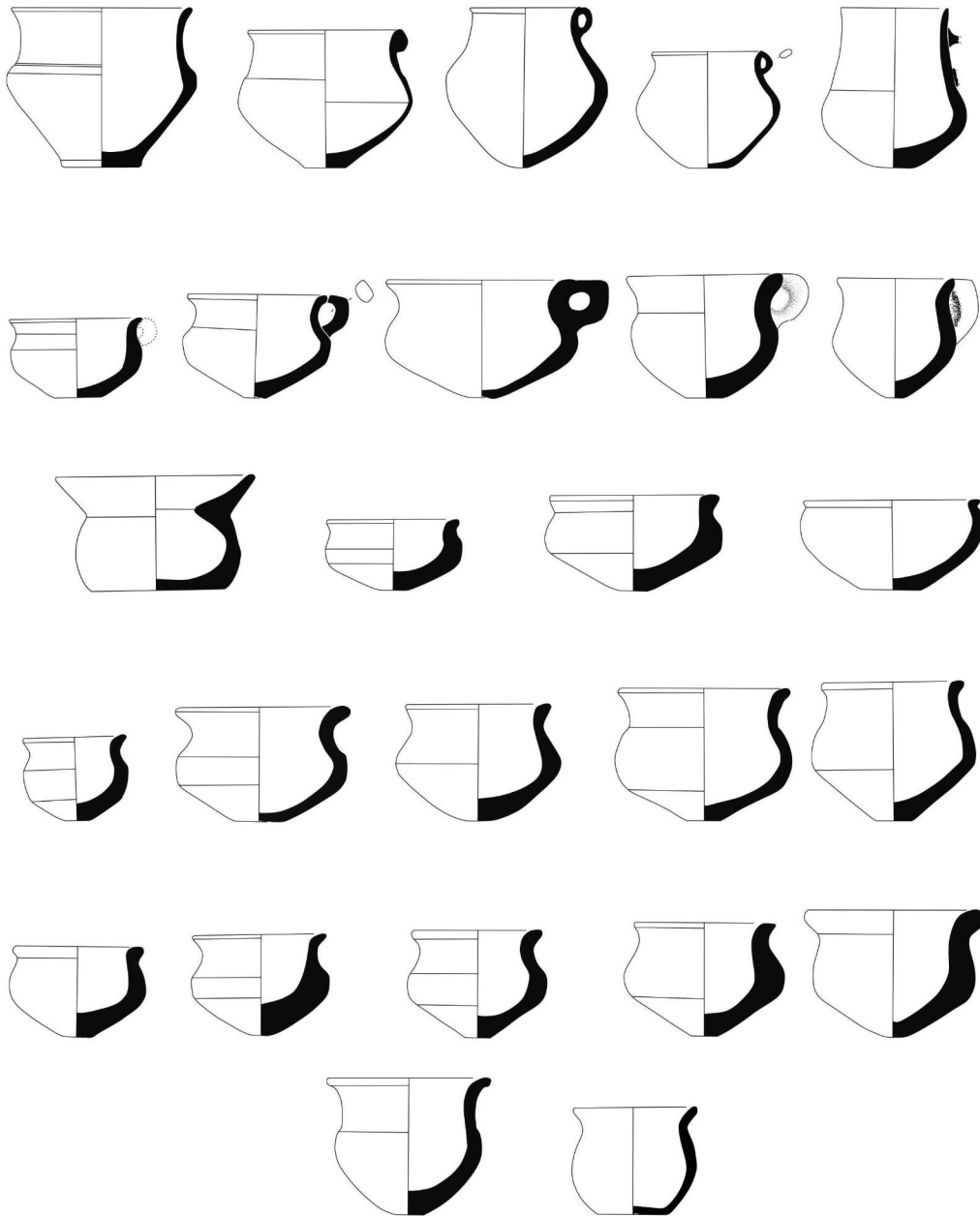


Fig. 9: The Samples of Karaz II Group Ceramics from Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova sites /
Karaz, Pulur ve Güzelova'dan Karaz II Grubu Seramik Örnekleri.

⁴³ Sagona/Sagona 2000: 63, Fig.1.39; Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 187-188.

As for the ceramic evidence of these levels belonging to the Traditional Period of Kura-Araxes Culture, according to Sagona the pottery of EBA I (Sos VB) is a developed follow-up of Late Chalcolithic (Sos VA) pottery. In the ceramic repertoire of this period, tall necked jars (especially with recessed neck), hemispherical and carinated bowls and flat lids with loop handles and/or central depressions are still in evidence, and keep improving. Thick loose-coil double spiral relief decoration was becoming popular in this period. Apart from this, vertical grooves and impressed circles (groove and dimple)⁴⁴ are also other common motifs in that period. At the same time, the best samples of groove and dimple motifs are seen in the pottery group from the earliest layers of Karaz. Along with EBA II (Sos VC) the forms and decorations of pottery become varied and enriched. As well as the shapes of the standard assemblage of Kura-Araxes pottery, tripartite profile vessels appear in the assemblage, and become a more popular form in the following period⁴⁵. Diversification and enhancement of decoration also attract our notice, and especially towards the end of the period the coils become tighter, and relief decorations more complex; groove-and-dimple techniques dress up the exterior surface of vessels, and trays appear which are completely intrinsic to the Erzurum Region⁴⁶. Actually, this diversification in decoration is very clear evidence for regionalism and the sharing of ideas between groups within the Kura-Araxes Culture (Fig. 8).

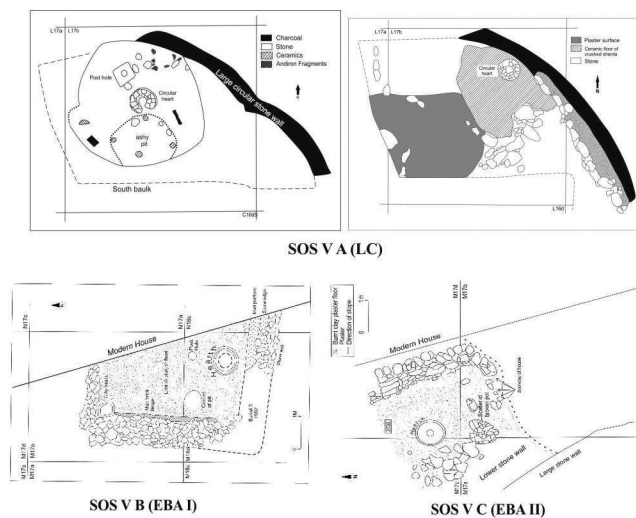


Fig. 10: The Drawings of Architectural Remains at Sos VA, VB and VC Periods / *Sos Höyük VA, VB ve VC Dönemlerine ait Mimari Kalıntıların Çizimleri*. (Redrawn from figures in Sagona/Sagona 2000; Sagona 2000, Kiguradze/Sagona 2003)

⁴⁴ Rothman 2003: 95-110.

⁴⁵ Sagona/Sagona 2000: 63, Fig. 14, 1-2; Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 188, Fig. 5.21.

⁴⁶ For more info about these trays with decoration see Işıklı 2013: 217-224.

The ceramic evidence of this traditional process is also found at Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova Höyük. Almost all of the above-mentioned elements concerning the ceramics of the traditional period are seen in ceramic assemblages from these three earlier excavations. This earlier group has been termed provisionally as “Karaz I” in the re-evaluated Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova material project which was carried out in the beginning of the 2000’s⁴⁷. Apart from tall jars with recessed neck, hemispherical and carinated bowls, flat lids with loop handles and/or central depressions, the fixed and portable hearths with horns, and trays with decorated front faces enrich this earlier group. The decorations of the earlier assemblages are mostly comprised of double spirals, varied geometric patterns and grooved and dimpled motifs, and the samples of this earlier group come mainly from Karaz Höyük. According to Koşay’s record these samples had been found between 9.00 – 8.00 metres in B sounding area⁴⁸. Unfortunately limited samples of this group are represented in the material of Pulur and Güzelova Höyük (Figs. 7a-b and 11).

When considering Sos and the other three earlier excavations’ material in the traditional period, apart from ceramic evidence, some objects such as obsidian, flint and bone tools, especially pins and drills, and ornaments have strengthened the cultural inventory of the period. During this period, it is not possible to mention mining and metallurgy, as evidence for these activities are limited.

LATE KURA-ARAXES CULTURAL PERIOD

Throughout the Erzurum Region the last phase of the development process of Kura-Araxes sites can be termed as “Late Kura-Araxes Cultural Period”. The acceptable and informative evidence of this last phase comes from the VD, IVA and IVB levels of Sos Höyük. When considering results of related levels at Sos Höyük, Sagona, who was the excavator of Sos Höyük, submitted that there was a cultural transformation and evolution around 2500 B.C. (namely beginning of EBA III) throughout the region⁴⁹. We should focus on materials from relevant levels of Sos Höyük when examining the archaeological traces of this transformation.

The architectural remains at the beginning of the late Kura-Araxes Cultural period, namely EBA III, are meagre. The architecture of that period is comprised of a range of bell-shaped pits with plastered inner surfaces, as well as graves. Sagona interpreted that these flimsy architectural remains were traces of mobile and unsettled groups (Early Kurgan peoples) who were starting to be effec-

⁴⁷ Işıklı 2005: 405-495; Işıklı 2007: 325-350; Işıklı 2012: 76-87.

⁴⁸ Koşay/Turfan 1959: 349-413.

⁴⁹ Sagona 2004: 475-538.



Fig. 11: The Samples of Potteries from Karaz, Pulur and Güzelova (Karaz I and II groups Co-Existed) /
Karaz, Pulur ve Güzelova'dan Seramik Örnekleri – (Karaz I ve II Grupları Bir Arada)

tive throughout the Southern Caucasus at that period⁵⁰. The two graves of this level are particularly remarkable. These graves, which are deep pits (shaft graves) and located outside of the site, look like typical Kura-Araxian graves by way of their characteristic features especially in terms of grave goods; however the vessels which were found in these graves pointed to cultural relationships

⁵⁰ Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 190.

with Early Trialeti and Martkopi cultural complexes in the South Caucasus. These cultural complexes were represented with new burial customs, monumental elite tombs (known as kurgans) and their rich assemblages included vessels and metal objects throughout Transcaucasus. All these new improvements symbolized radical political and social changes. The new burial customs and monumental graves have been seen as socio-political in relation to the emergence of organised societies by ar-

chaeologists working in the South Caucasus and adjacent regions. According to Sagona this “coexistence” created by South Caucasian groups such as Trialeti, Bedeni and Martkopi, as well as local groups, and demonstrated in the Sos Höyük’s graves, is the precursor to the cultural transformation (namely the Late Kura-Araxes Cultural Period) for the Erzurum Region⁵¹. These two graves, which are contemporary with the Early Kurgan Period in Transcaucasus, show that Northeastern Anatolia had cultural relationships with the Martkopi Cultural Complex. An overview of this relationship via the ceramic repertoire of this phase, along with Martkopi and Bedeni’s typical vessels with sharply biconical forms and lustrous black burnished surfaces – even though these samples are relatively few – shows that as a local ware group, black vessels with tripartite profile have been fairly widespread. These black vessels are generally plain and just have highly burnished surfaces⁵² (Figs. 8 and 10).

Along with the Middle Bronze Ages, striking changes in the architecture at Sos Höyük can be observed. Sos IV B, corresponding to the Middle Bronze Age, has two sub levels: IVA and IVB. In IVA, the earlier sub level, the slim architectural remains which, on the whole, might have belonged to mobile pastoral groups, are still dominant⁵³. As to IVB, contrary to a region-wide scarcity on those mounds which have been excavated, multi-roomed buildings are mentioned. Principally, these houses remind us of typical Kura-Araxian houses in the Erzurum Region in terms of common features. We should emphasise that apart from architecture, a similar situation prevails for graves and burial customs. It shows that some of the traditions of the older, namely Kura-Araxian traditions, have still been progressing. On the other hand, the transformation which had begun in the previous period, namely at Sos VD/EBA III, has been gathering momentum⁵⁴ (Figs. 8 and 10).

Most of the ceramic evidence concerning the Late Kura-Araxes Period of the Erzurum Region, except for Sos VD and IVA-B levels, comes from Karaz and Pular Höyüks and in particular to Güzelova⁵⁵. Güzelova Höyük is indisputably the key site of this period for the region. Güzelova Höyük, which was excavated in 1967 for only one season by H. Z Koşay, presented a striking group containing a large number of samples relating to the Late Kura-Araxes Cultural Period of Erzurum.

Although the ceramics from Güzelova, which are held in Erzurum Museum, present the highest in number from among the earlier excavations, these ceramics formed a homogeneous group. The vessels of Güzelova, which also remind us of “Martkopi effective ware” identified by Sagona, constituted 90% of all ceramics at Güzelova. These vessels have dark coloured and highly burnished exterior surfaces. Mostly, the interior surfaces are coarse and plain. Güzelova vases with mostly pointed bases have a tripartite profile. They generally have a handle on one side. Some handles are triangular shape, which is characteristic for this group. Apart from these vessels, the pots with inflated everted rim, trays with tighter geometric pattern in relief and decorated front faces are striking samples of the Güzelova group⁵⁶ (Fig. 9).

Also during this process there is a marked increase in the count of metal objects. The metal objects from Karaz, Pular and Güzelova sites mostly belong to this late period⁵⁷. But when compared to the neighbouring Caucasus, this increase looks considerably modest. As is known, at that time Transcaucasia was the significant metallurgy province of the Ancient Near East with kurgans including generous metal objects. But it should not be forgotten that the number of excavated sites in Erzurum region-wide is extremely few. On the other hand when we consider the number of metal objects in regional museums which have been obtained from illegal excavations, we can make a prediction regarding the potential of the region in this matter.

PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Because of its location among the high plateaus and mountains, archaeological research and discovery across the Erzurum Region has been difficult, even though it has been eighty years since the discovery of the Kura-Araxes culture here, and over one hundred years since research began into the culture’s history. Nevertheless the essential problems concerning the development process of this cultural complex are still unsolved. It’s given that the principal reason for this is that research and excavations throughout the region have been limited and disproportionate. As mentioned above, limited numbers of systematic projects have been centred only on the Erzurum and Pasinler plains. A range of research projects have been carried out within the eighty year period, which have helped us to illuminate the subject. To understand regional archaeology and the developing process of the Kura-Araxes Culture in the Erzurum Region, our key site is Sos Höyük, followed by excavations at Karaz, Pular and Güzelova höyüks.

⁵¹ Sagona 2004: 475-538; Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 190-191.

⁵² Sagona divided the pottery of this period into sub groups such as Georgia and Armenia groups. According to him the pottery of Erzurum was related more to Armenia group. Sagona 2000: 336.

⁵³ Sagona described the site as a “temporary camp” for that period. Sagona 2000: 65.

⁵⁴ Sagona/Zimansky 2009: 190-191.

⁵⁵ Koşay/Vary 1967.

⁵⁶ For details concerning re-evaluation of Güzelova potteries see Işıklı 2005: 478-496.

⁵⁷ Işıklı 2008b: 99-118.

The evidence from all these excavations shows that the Kura-Araxes Culture, subsisting for over a millennium in the Erzurum region, has three developing stages. The first phase is the “formative process” which shines light on the origins of the Kura-Araxes Culture. In this process, contemporary to the Late Chalcolithic Period of the region, it can be seen that the Kura-Araxes Cultural Complex evolved out of the local cultures of the South Caucasus and Northeastern Anatolia and their interregional connections and interactions. Notably these interregional connections should be analysed more in terms of form and decoration of pottery.

Undoubtedly, the other active leader and partner in these interregional connections and interactions, was the Upper Euphrates Valley. This region, namely the Elazığ-Malatya Region, which has close and strong relationships with the Mesopotamian World, also had an efficient and directive role in this formative process⁵⁸. Thus, the excavated key sites of the Upper Euphrates Valley, such as Norsuntepe⁵⁹, Tepecik⁶⁰, Pulur-SakyoI⁶¹, Korucutepe⁶² and Arslantepe⁶³, have presented supporting evidence concerning the interregional interactions and relationships⁶⁴. The region prospered and consolidated by courtesy of its special location on its south-north directional axis. Because of its highly favourable socio-economic conditions, this leading region was a kind of attraction centre for the Kura-Araxian mobile pastoral groups. According to current studies, these mobile pastoral groups, within the net of interregional connections and interactions performed across a vast region at that time, played an active role in building and expanding this cultural phenomenon. Thus the recent excavations at Arslantepe in Malatya have provided evidence which supports this theme⁶⁵. Consequently it is most likely that the formative period of the Kura-Araxes Culture, not only in the Erzurum Region, with its cultural geography, was a long and complex process shaped by large-scale interactions and interregional relationships. For now what we do not know is the contribution of each sub-cultural region to this formative period. To understand the dynamics and details of this period, we need more archaeological projects on a region-by-region basis.

⁵⁸ Palumbi 2008: 309-328.

⁵⁹ Hauptmann 2000: 419-438.

⁶⁰ Esin 1982: 71-93.

⁶¹ Koşay 1976.

⁶² van Loon 1978: 3-45.

⁶³ Frangipane 2001: 1-24.

⁶⁴ In 1970's some Turkish Archaeologists such as Ufuk Esin and Güven Arsebük suggested that locally named “Karaz Ware” of Upper Euphrates Basin might have been derived from “Black Burnished Ware” dated to Late Neolithic Period of the region. Afterwards Marcella Frangipane has proposed some links between two regions. Also see Sagona in this volume.

⁶⁵ Frangipane/Palumbi 2007: 233-255.

In the second stage, namely the “traditional period”, the cultural complex existed in the region with all these characteristic features. But the distinctive feature of the period is the ever-increasing tendency of the culture towards “regionalism”. After the expansion process across an extensive area, this development should not be surprising. At present the essential problem concerning this process is to identify the borders and internal dynamics of each cultural sub-region in the vast geography of the Kura-Araxes Culture. This situation is valid for the Erzurum Region which is where the homeland of the culture has been centred. Undoubtedly the solution to this problem lies in an increase of regional systematic investigations.

The last phase of the cultural complex continued to exist with diverse alterations and regionalisation for almost 1500 years in the Erzurum Region – Late Kura-Araxes Period, during which time regionalism was the dominant feature. Principally the pottery of the Kura-Araxes Culture has regional features at that period. Apart from regionalism, the other characteristic feature of the period was “co-existence”. This feature can be observed principally in the Upper Euphrates. Thus in this region Kura-Araxian groups, which are thought to have been peaceful and compatible communities, were able to integrate successfully with local and other cultures. We can observe this situation in the Erzurum Region but not as clearly in the Elazığ-Malatya Region. As a matter of fact, in the late Kura-Araxes Period alongside the Kura-Araxes ceramics, which become considerably localized, we find the South Caucasian ware can be unearthed at the same site.

The scenario constructed above is provisional, with three stages relating to the development process of the Kura-Araxes Culture in Erzurum, and can be modified by each discovery. It should be emphasized again that this construction has been built with the help of evidence from only a few excavated sites in two plains in Erzurum. In the vast Erzurum-Kars Plateau beyond these two plains, there is a very large area about which we have no knowledge. As seen above, these lands played host to both the formative and expansion process of the Kura-Araxes Culture, and this matter mostly remains in darkness. Also, the imbalance in the distribution of research in terms of the geographic-wide region is one of the essential problems which stand out in our understanding of all the dynamics of this huge and complex process. Consequently new projects beginning in the untouched regions will enable us to gather the pieces of this great puzzle together, and make our understanding of the overall picture much clearer.

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