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Change and continuity in the long-distance exchange networks between western/central Anatolia, northern Levant and northern Mesopotamia, c.3200–1600 BCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates and offers explanations for the distribution of specific products (ivory and lapis lazuli artefacts, "Syrian" bottles) and technologies (metrology) that have often been invoked as tracers of long-distance trade contacts and/or political units in Anatolia, northern Levant and northern Mesopotamia during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Unlike former studies investigating third and second millennia exchange networks as separate entities, we examine comparatively and systematically a large corpus of published archaeological data by adopting a quantitative and spatial approach. Through this analysis, we propose that a significant degree of similarity in the shape, infrastructure and motivations behind the development and maintenance of these long-distance exchanges existed between the third and early second millennia BC.

1. Introduction

For more than half a century, long-distance and large-scale exchange networks in the ancient Near East have provided a stage for rival theoretical frameworks and academic narratives (cf. Algaze, 1993; Cohen, 1969, 1971; Cusick, 1998; Stein, 2008; Wallerstein, 1974). Different authors have interpreted evidence for the movement of products, raw materials and technologies in various contexts and periods variably as down-the-line exchange (Renfrew, 1975), profit-driven trade (Dalley, 2002; Larsen, 1976, 1987; Lamberg-Karlovski, 1972), gift exchange via diplomacy (Feldman, 2006, 13–14; Kuhrt, 1995), colonization (Gosden, 2004; Rowlands, 1998, 226; Stein, 2005, 150, 2008), raiding, or outright military conquest (Oded, 1992; Stein, 2005, 154). In this context, the Old Assyrian trade network established between Assur and central Anatolian polities in the early second millennium BC provides one of the most extensively documented contexts to understand the mechanisms and underlying motivations of pre-modern trade (see Barjamovic, 2008, 2011; Barjamovic et al., 2012; Dercksen, 2001, 2004; Larsen, 1976, 2015; Veenhof, 1972; Veenhof and Eidem, 2008). The arrival of Mesopotamian and Levantine traders in Anatolia, accompanied by complex administrative practices, writing, and organized religion, has often been interpreted as a pivotal moment in the history of ancient Turkey, a period when the area started integrating within the Near Eastern world after millennia of relative isolation. However, while it is undeniable that the so-called Old Assyrian Trade period (OAT, ca. 1970–1700 BCE) marks the intensification of interregional contacts, there is growing evidence that it represents only the mature stage of a process that began much earlier. In particular, the last decade has seen an increasing interest in this pre-OAT phase of the interregional exchange networks, documented by a range of Mesopotamian and Levantine-originated or inspired luxury products and technologies reaching central and western Anatolia during the third millennium BC (Efe, 2007; Genz, 2003; Jablonka, 2014; Massa, 2016, 218–238; Rahmstorf, 2006b, 2010; Şahoğlu, 2005; Tonussi, 2007; see also Ozguc, 1963, 1986b for early appraisals).

So far, however, the third and early second millennia exchange networks have been investigated largely as separate entities despite suggestions that they are intimately related (cf. Aubet, 2013, 267–363; Bachhuber, 2012; Barjamovic, 2011, 2; Larsen, 2015; Şahoğlu, 2005, 355; Tonussi, 2007, 26–29, 365–368). Among the reasons that have so far discouraged a comparative approach is the difficulty in co-assessing datasets of largely different nature. For the a-literate Early Bronze Age

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(EBA) Anatolia, archaeological evidence is the only available source of information.[1] On the other hand, the sketching of the complex picture of economic, political, and cultural exchanges between Anatolians and foreign merchants during the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) has so far relied almost entirely on textual analysis.[2] Indeed, with some notable exceptions, excavations targeting Anatolian MBA centres have focused on the investigation of their public sectors and particularly the retrieval of written archives, often with a disregard for the archaeological context of their findings. These broadly different analytical approaches to the same phenomenon also resulted in the creation of two largely separated academic networks, one mostly composed of archaeologists, the other by philologists, circles that have until recently experienced little scientific interaction (cf. however Atıcı et al., 2014; Kulakoglu and Barjamovic, 2017; Kulakoğlu and Kangal, 2010; Kulakoğlu and Michel, 2015).[3]

The main aim of this article is therefore to explore systematically the connection between the EBA and MBA interregional networks reaching Anatolia, trying for the first time in some analytical detail to combine a variety of archaeological evidence in order to understand changes and continuity in the shape and nature of exchange patterns between the third and the early second millennia BC. It will do so by looking in detail at a range of products (ivory and lapis lazuli artefacts, "Syrian" bottles) and technologies (metrology) as possible markers of exchange between western/central Anatolia and regions to the south-east (northern Mesopotamia and northern Levant). By using published data framed into a spatial approach, for each type of material culture we will (a) assess the manufacturing place of products, (b) define the mechanisms of circulation of commodities and technologies both spatially and diachronically, and (c) address to which extent the spatial distributions of these artefacts are related to one or more trade circuits. Although we are using a limited number of classes of artefacts, we argue that different patterns of exchange and cultural transmission can be diachronically traced not only locally, but also at an interregional scale. Therefore, our approach is broadly contextual and aims at investigating what different exchange patterns and economic strategies (e.g. gifts, trade, marriage alliances, tribute, market profit, reciprocity, etc.) are responsible for the allocation and distribution of materials in the Near East from the end of the fourth to the middle of the second millennia BC.

The dataset employed for the analysis has been published separately (Massa and Palmisano in press) and is publicly available online at the UCL Discovery repository.[4]

2. Geographical and chronological boundaries

The main geographical focus of this study is western and central Anatolia, northern Mesopotamia and the northern Levant. In addition to this core area, limited reference will be provided for adjacent areas as well, since mechanisms of large-scale exchange can be fully understood only when framed into a broader scale of analysis. For this reason, Lower Mesopotamia, the Southern Levant, and the Aegean basin will be included in the data presentation, analysis and discussion whenever deemed appropriate. While, given the fuzziness of both environmental and cultural boundaries in the real word, drawing the borders of these regions is to some extent an artificial exercise, it is one that needs to be taken in order to make data presentation, analysis, and discussion clearer. Fig. 1 shows our understanding of major geo-cultural regions that existed in the EBA and MBA Near East, areas to which we will refer in the course of the data presentation, analysis and discussion.

In the text, we will employ attested ancient toponyms for sites mostly known by these names in the literature (e.g. Ur, Uruk, Ebla, Kaneš), but we will instead employ modern names for those sites whose ancient name is unknown, uncertain or not as common (e.g. Acemhöyük, Tepe Gawra). With regard to this study's chronological boundaries, despite the realization that important episodes of exchange (e.g. obsidian at least since the Epipalaeolithic) and cultural/technological transmission (e.g. the spread of the "Neolithic package") already occurred in pre-EBA contexts (Baird et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2013; Horejs et al., 2015), we set the latest fourth millennium BC as the start of our investigation. This is because the available data suggest that the Anatolian EB I (ca 3200–2800 BCE) marks a significant intensification of pre-existing interactions, e.g. in the range and nature of detectable products, raw materials, technologies and cultural behaviours that crossed the Taurus/Anti-Taurus mountains (cf. Bachhuber, 2015; Massa, 2016). The lower chronological boundary is instead set at ca 1600 BCE, the formal end date of the MBA in central Anatolia and the approximate start of the Old Hittite kingdom. In order to highlight the continuity between EBA and pre-EBA periods witnessed by the exchange of certain products, we decided to also collect and discuss fourth millennium BC evidence whenever deemed appropriate.

At the present state of research, the Anatolian Early and Middle Bronze Ages chronology is still fraught with a series of problems, including the lack of updated comparisons of intra-site stratigraphies and secure ceramic assemblages across the whole area (see however Sarı (2011) for western Anatolia), and the general scarcity of well-excavated and extensively published sites. These major hindrances prevent an agreed-upon, Anatolia-wide relative, and full sequence, hampering direct comparison with adjacent regions. Additionally, provenance analyses on lapis lazuli and ivory are still in their infancy and have been applied only in a very limited number of contexts (e.g. Lafrenz, 2004; Law, 2014; Re et al., 2011), therefore severely limiting our ability to directly pinpoint the source of a specific product. Bearing in mind all these limitations, we suggest that they can be in part overcome and neutralized by integrating the awareness of their existence into the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results.

The present study will offer a synthesis of published data collected from 157 excavated sites with a known occupation between 3200 and 1600 BCE (for a detailed description of the dataset see Massa and Palmisano, in press), recording the on-site occurrence of the investigated types of material culture (ivory and lapis lazuli artefacts, Syrian Bottles, and balance pan weights), their temporal position within the local stratigraphy and within the regional chronological sequences. Whenever possible, we will make use to absolute calendric dates, in order to provide an easy way of directly compare contemporary processes in different areas.

3. Balance weights

3.1. General characteristics

Balance weights were used in various daily-life activities to measure quantities of goods with a standardized system composed of recognized units (with their multiples and fractions) that could be checked and agreed upon by both sellers and buyers (Hafford, 2005, 345–346, 2012, 21). Research over the past three decades has identified different weight systems with different basic standards in use between the third and 1st millennia BC throughout the Near East, including the Aegean (1 shekel = 6.71 g), the Anatolian (1 shekel = 11.7 g), the Levantine (1

[1] A possible exception is represented by several references to a kingdom called *kà-ni-šu* in the Ebla's archives (a possible reference to Kültepe/Kaneš), and (much later) Mesopotamian literary sources that mention military expeditions of Sargon and Naram-Sin in central Anatolia (cf. Bachhuber, 2012, 502–504 for a critical review).

[2] At present, Palmisano (2015) is the only systematic attempt to employ different classes of material culture to contextualize the OAT phenomenon within an archaeological framework. However, see Barjamovic (2011) and Palmisano and Altaweel (2015) for the employment of excavation and survey data in sketching the political geography of early second millennium BC central Anatolia.

[3] A series of biennial meetings known as "Kültepe International Meeting (KIM)" have been occurring since 2013 with the aim of promoting interdisciplinary collaboration among specialists (e.g. historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, palaeobotanists, geoarchaeologists, etc.) dealing with Kültepe and central Anatolia.

[4] https://doi.org/10.14324/000.ds.100275814.

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