

## Feasts as a social dynamic in Prehistoric Western Asia - three case studies from Syria and Anatolia

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### Abstract

Commensal feasting is a social practice that allows the constant negotiation and manipulation of social relations as well as a reconfirmation of power structures. Feasting is therefore regarded as an important tool in the creation of inequality and in the emergence of social complexity. The identification of feasting events in the archaeological record has become possible and provides valuable hints at the social organisation of the societies involved. This article aims at identifying feasting residues from three sites in Syria and Anatolia, chosen in order to provide a diachronic perspective from the 6th to the 4th millennium BC, and to link these observations to our current knowledge on the emergence of complex societies.

### Résumé

Le festin est une pratique sociale qui permet aussi bien de négocier et de manipuler ce qui relève du domaine des relations sociales que de confirmer les structures de pouvoir. Aussi le festin peut-il être considéré comme un moyen important pour créer des inégalités et pour favoriser l'émergence de sociétés complexes. La reconnaissance par l'archéologie de ces manifestations festives est devenue possible et permet de jeter un certain éclairage sur l'organisation des sociétés concernées. Cet article vise à identifier les résidus de festin provenant de trois sites localisés en Syrie et en Anatolie, retenus parce qu'ils offrent des perspectives diachroniques sur la période allant du 6e au 4e millénaire avant J.-C., et parce qu'ils permettent d'ajouter ces informations à ce que nous connaissons actuellement

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# FEASTS AS A SOCIAL DYNAMIC IN PREHISTORIC WESTERN ASIA – THREE CASE STUDIES FROM SYRIA AND ANATOLIA

B. HELWING

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**Abstract :** *Commensal feasting is a social practice that allows the constant negotiation and manipulation of social relations as well as a reconfirmation of power structures. Feasting is therefore regarded as an important tool in the creation of inequality and in the emergence of social complexity. The identification of feasting events in the archaeological record has become possible and provides valuable hints at the social organisation of the societies involved. This article aims at identifying feasting residues from three sites in Syria and Anatolia, chosen in order to provide a diachronic perspective from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, and to link these observations to our current knowledge on the emergence of complex societies.*

**Résumé :** *Le festin est une pratique sociale qui permet aussi bien de négocier et de manipuler ce qui relève du domaine des relations sociales que de confirmer les structures de pouvoir. Aussi le festin peut-il être considéré comme un moyen important pour créer des inégalités et pour favoriser l'émergence de sociétés complexes. La reconnaissance par l'archéologie de ces manifestations festives est devenue possible et permet de jeter un certain éclairage sur l'organisation des sociétés concernées. Cet article vise à identifier les résidus de festin provenant de trois sites localisés en Syrie et en Anatolie, retenus parce qu'ils offrent des perspectives diachroniques sur la période allant du 6<sup>e</sup> au 4<sup>e</sup> millénaire avant J.-C., et parce qu'ils permettent d'ajouter ces informations à ce que nous connaissons actuellement de l'émergence des sociétés complexes.*

**Key-Words :** *Feasting, Early complex societies, Sabi Abyad, Değirmentepe, Arslantepe.*

**Mots Clefs :** *Festins, Sociétés complexes anciennes, Sabi Abyad, Değirmentepe, Arslantepe.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of early complex societies in Greater Mesopotamia during the Chalcolithic period of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC is a process long recognized and acknowledged by archaeologists. As one of the earliest of such phenomena recorded worldwide, this development has received special attention, and the Mesopotamian case has frequently been used as a case study exemplary for the rest of the Old World<sup>1</sup>.

This centralization process culminates in the Uruk culture of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC with its large cities, sacred “temple” precincts and monumental buildings. Contemporary pictorial evidence of high status officials and religious specialists point at the existence of elites, while commoners engaged in the various primary production sectors are equally depicted. Long distance trade must have provided the emerging elites with prestigious items and an elaborate administration allowed to keep control over the flow of labor and goods. Finally, the invention of writing towards the end of this period, which marks Mesopotamia’s transition to history, came like a natu-

1. FLINMAN and MARCUS, 1998.

ral result of the continuous elaboration of record-keeping devices<sup>2</sup>.

The emergence of complex societies in Mesopotamia has first been observed in Southern Mesopotamia, especially in Uruk itself, but also in Western Iran with the urban centers Susa and Choga Mish, and has therefore been thought to be restricted exclusively to the South. However, recent research along the Upper Euphrates Valley and in the Taurus-Zagros foothills revealed comparable developments, e.g. in Arslantepe<sup>3</sup> and many other sites<sup>4</sup>. Originally thought to be a secondary process set off by contact with the Uruk centers that had been established along the Middle Euphrates<sup>5</sup>, it has become evident by now that strong local dynamics are at work behind the emergence of elites in the Northern centers. The focus of the following study will hence be placed not on Mesopotamia proper but on its fringes, on the mountainous areas and the foothills of Southeastern Anatolia and Northern Syria. There, an original process of centralization can be observed, and the currently available archaeological data allow a more detailed analysis than any of the southern centers.

## EXISTING MODELS FOR THE EMERGENCE FOR COMPLEX SOCIETIES

Philosophical and sociological writing especially in the German tradition after Hegel have always emphasized the role of the individual in the process of social and historical change. Among the most powerful is Marxist cultural theory that describes the utopia of an ideal society as “an association of free individuals”<sup>6</sup>. Cultural materialism re-entered archaeology in a version that is largely stripped of individual agency via the texts of V.G. Childe<sup>7</sup>, and still most models for the understanding of the historical processes behind the rise of early complex societies are constructed from a systemic economic perspective<sup>8</sup>. All these models take it for granted that the central institutions are obliged to care for their subject’s

welfare. In this respect they do not differ much from models of early chiefdoms<sup>9</sup>.

Besides these rather systemic approaches, anthropology was largely influenced by the sociologist Max Weber, whose concept of a *Handlungstheorie* provides the classificatory background for an “understanding sociology” that focussed on the individual social actor and its interaction with other individuals or small groups<sup>10</sup>. This concept is at the roots of Pierre Bourdieu’s “theory of practice” that explains historical change through his model of individuals interacting with the realities of their environment<sup>11</sup>.

Among the first to integrate individual decisions into a strictly anthropological model was R. Carneiro who sees a combination of economic abundance as a prerequisite and aggressive military expansion combined with clever alliance building as a central mechanism in early political centralization<sup>12</sup>.

Since, more agency-based models have been developed that provide a toolbox of terminology to describe mechanisms of prestige accumulation and the role of individual aggrandizers<sup>13</sup> in the transformation of society<sup>14</sup> and that acknowledge the role of individuals within complex communities<sup>15</sup>. Those models are based on the idea of a dynamic interaction between ambitious personalities and cultural institutions.

## THE RISE OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES IN MESOPOTAMIA

In Mesopotamia proper, both economic and religious models and, as a special case, a combination of the two, the well-known specifically Mesopotamian concept of a “Sumerian temple economy” combining religious and economical motives<sup>16</sup> have been adopted to describe early complexity. The temple economy model overemphasizes the exclusiveness of central authority and can be regarded as outdated<sup>17</sup>, so

2. SCHMANDT-BESSERAT, 1992.

3. FRANGIPANE, 1997.

4. For an overview on the status of research, see OATES and OATES, 1991, 1993, 1994; ALGAZE, 1993; HELWING, 1999, 2000; STEIN, 1999, and especially the contributions assembled in two conference volumes ROTHMAN (ed.), 2001; POSTGATE and CAMPBELL (eds), 2002.

5. SÜRENHAGEN, 1978; STROMMINGER, 1980; BOESE, 1995.

6. See, e.g., MARX, 2000.

7. CHILDE 1948 (1936), 1950 and esp. 1952.

8. POLÁNYI, 1957; JOHNSON, 1975, 1976; ROBERTSON, 1995.

9. SERVICE, 1975.

10. WEBER, 1985.

11. BOURDIEU, 1972.

12. CARNEIRO, 1987, 1992.

13. Again, compare Weber’s recognition of “charismatic leadership” as one of the prerequisites of political authority (WEBER, 1985).

14. HAYDEN, 1998; STEIN, 1998; FLANNERY, 1999a, b.

15. ADAMS, 2001.

16. DIAKONOFF, 1974; FALKENSTEIN, 1954; KRAMER, 1963; MOORTGAT, 1945.

17. FOSTER, 1981.

that today economic concepts prevail. The archaic texts from the Late Uruk Eanna precinct in Uruk have provided the base for the reconstruction of a *redistributive* economy, administered and controlled by central institutions<sup>18</sup>. Obviously, such a centrally controlled redistributive economy would provide an elite with a firm power base. Alternatively, the emergence of a staple wealth system, equally controlled by the elites, is seen at the heart of the process<sup>19</sup>.

These models offer useful descriptions of the transformations of society from both religious and economic points of view, but it remains difficult to identify the means and ways by which the emerging elites achieved and legitimized those transformations. The lack of textual evidence precludes the reconstruction of society such as it is available for the later periods. How could a society as hierarchical and centralized as the Near Eastern states, well known from later periods, have been created? Is there a stringent logic to its development, and which ideology would have been employed to enhance its broad acceptance? The existence of religious and/or political elites in 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> millennium Mesopotamia can be deduced from pictorial evidence<sup>20</sup>, but the mechanisms of their coming-of-power remain to be better understood. Naturally, their rise is closely intertwined with the control of resources and manpower as it is assumed by the economic models. Such a system precludes large parts of the population from access to these resources and thus creates social inequalities, a phenomenon that certainly needs to be made plausible. Consequently, one prerequisite for the broad acceptance of the social inequalities created by this system is the effective legitimization of the elites.

Agency-based models of the emergence of social complexity center on the idea of a dynamic interaction between ambitious personalities and cultural institutions. One particular social practice that provides an ideal stage for the maintenance and the transformation of meaningful human relationships on the one side, and that is open for manipulation on behalf of certain individuals on the other side, are feasts<sup>21</sup>. Feasts are set apart from everyday experiences and hence allow the creation of meaning and the construction and

de-construction of values as well as an acting-out of social transactions, literally inviting the manipulation of social systems. Feasts can be regarded as an integrative element of cultural behavior that allows both individual agency and an enhancement of social cohesion. Systematic archeological research on the dynamics of feasting has only just begun but has already established a differentiated vocabulary and classifications. Definitions of feasting vary widely, but agree on stressing the aspect of feasts being un-usual, non-normal events that carry a high load of emotional experience. They are often – but not always – correlated with ritual activities<sup>22</sup>. In practice, feasts can be highly normative on the one side and at the same time allow a recombination of familiar values into a new system, therefore providing ample space for the creation of new orders.

## DEFINITION OF FEASTS

Any communal event that takes place on a special occasion and that centers on the sharing of special food can be defined as a feast<sup>23</sup>. Almost all feasts include a ritual aspect<sup>24</sup>. Feasts are held at different occasions and for a variety of purposes and therefore, there are different approaches towards their classification<sup>25</sup>. Within its general definition, the spectrum of feasting reaches from a simple meal offered to a visitor to communal or even regional gatherings. Practically every aspect of human life that requires a ritual – birth, initiation, marriage, war, death and many others – can be accompanied by a feast. Additionally, feasts can be held to reinforce links between individuals or groups at the occasion of social encounters. From an economic perspective one can distinguish no-return feasts, equal-return feasts and greater return feasts<sup>26</sup>, as well as work feasts, a special category that describes a collective work event that allows the mobilization of labor force beyond the individual household level to the advantage of the host<sup>27</sup>. Another special category of greater-return feasts are merit feasts that allow the accumulation of spiritual advantages for individual parties<sup>28</sup>.

18. POSTGATE, 1972, 1992; NISSEN, 1988, 1989, 1999; ENGLUND, 1994, 1998; POLLOCK, 1999.

19. FRANGIPANI, 1996.

20. SCHMANDT-BESSERAT, 1993.

21. DIETLER and HAYDEN, 2001. Cultic feasts have been described as characteristics of the Babylonian civilizations, HALDAR, 1957-1971; POSTGATE, 1992: 123-124; FOREST, 1996, but their inherent potential for transforming meanings has not been acknowledged until very recently SCHMANDT-BESSERAT, 2001.

22. DIETLER and HAYDEN, 2001; HAYDEN, 2001.

23. HAYDEN, 2001: 28.

24. DIETLER, 2001: 67.

25. DIETLER, 2001: 76-90; HAYDEN, 2001: 28-30; PERODIE, 2001: 190-191.

26. PERODIE, 2001.

27. DIETLER and HERBICH, 2001.

28. NEU, 2000.

A distinction of feasts from rituals is necessary in order not to weaken the power inherent in both terms, although in practice, feasts and rituals overlap widely. Rituals are recurrent events linked to spiritual life that may – but not necessarily must – include feasting<sup>29</sup>. Feasts are events of collective experience held at both profane and spiritually triggered occasions. In the later case, feasts may form an integral part of the ritual. In the former case, feasts function as a framework for the negotiation of social relations. Both feasts and rituals offer a framework for collective emotional experiences that allow through their communicative and performative structure the constitution of meaning<sup>30</sup>. Within the prescribed framework of the individual feast and enhanced by the influence of unusual states of mind, a level of higher excitement and greater sensitivity can be reached that provides space and reason for unusual behavior that would be impossible (or at least inhibited) under normal circumstances. A collective feasting experience can help to dissolve social tensions and to enhance group coercion. Personal relations can change and may persist after the feast, albeit usually at a lower level than during the feast proper, or the group would return to the previous state. Feasts are therefore one out of several possible means to facilitate both the maintenance of the social body and the individual negotiation of social relationships. They not only allow the establishing of mutual obligations and the formation of alliances and cooperation, the enhancement of status and social inequalities, and thus the creation of political and economic power through willful manipulation, but provide a means to make such changes plausible.

From an archeological point of view, three major aspects of feasting may be transmitted in the archeological record and can hence be analyzed in order to understand feasting behavior<sup>31</sup>. Those are (1) the commensal consumption of special food, drink and narcotics, (2) the spatial distinction of the feasting stage, (3) status symbols involved in the negotiation of social relationships. All three aspects can be detected in the archeological record since their remains show a systematic

deviation from the site's standard. However, not all three aspects may be represented at every single feasting stage :

(1) communal consumption of lavish amounts of special food, beverages, and possibly narcotics, can be detected in the archaeological record through the remains of food preparation, consumption, and disposal facilities. Large kitchen areas that would allow the preparation of unusually large amounts of food, special cooking vessels that differ in size from normal vessels, serving vessels in numbers way above the average household amount or specially decorated serving plates, accumulations of wasted food or garbage pits containing unusual animal bone assemblages, residues of narcotics and artifacts related to their consumption can be expected among the material remains.

(2) ritual feasting can take place at locations that are distinct from normal, domestic locations. This can possibly be an open communal space, such as the village plaza, or it can be an area with restricted access, a sacred precinct or platform, or a special building such as a shrine or a temple. It can be expected that these special buildings or spaces can be distinguished from domestic buildings through their attributes, elaboration, or size, and maybe through a spatial separation.

(3) display and enhancement of status require the use of prestigious items for display, exchange, and possibly also for public destruction, thus a ritualized exchange of goods that forms part of many rituals and feasts. The presence or absence of these items, as well as records concerning their exchange, can therefore provide us with vital evidence about the social groups involved in the feast.

A careful analysis of well documented and large enough archaeological contexts under the three aspects described may thus allow to tackle residues of feasting, and, at a further look, to at least tentatively classify the category of feast transmitted in the archaeological record.

## FEASTS IN THE NEAR EAST

Lavish ritual feasting, organized according to a ritual calendar, holds a central place in the historical Near Eastern universe, as we know from written sources that provide us with detailed information<sup>32</sup>. Consumption is one of its focal points,

29. TURNER, 1967.

30. The potential of emotionally loaded experiences for the creation of new views on the world has been the subject of countless anthropological studies, beginning with Marcel Mauss' classic study on the ritual (MAUSS, 1968), Evans-Pritchard's investigations of witchcraft (1937) and Victor Turners analysis of symbolic behaviour within rituals (TURNER, 1967, 1989). The performative power of rituals and the adaptation of such frameworks into modern society that has largely disposed of the spiritual aspects of the ritual has been discussed by Turner (1995). For a most comprehensive discussion of ritual, see Rappaport (1999).

31. HAYDEN, 2001 : 40-41, tab. 42.41.

32. PALLIS, 1926 is among the first who uses ethnographic comparisons for a reconstruction of the Babylonian new year's feast. The potential reversal of existing orders during feasts has been described e.g. by Anton Moortgat (1949).

based on the spiritual concept that humans have been created to cater food and drink for the gods<sup>33</sup>. Commensal consumption is therefore, among others, one of the main characteristics of almost every feast, and it has already been suggested that the reception houses of Habuba Kabira south should be interpreted as stage for communal meals<sup>34</sup>. Pictorial evidence from the third millennium BC unveils elaborate banquets as a central motive<sup>35</sup>, where both food<sup>36</sup> and alcoholic beverages<sup>37</sup> are provided in abundance. Music and dancing<sup>38</sup>, performances and sportive competitions<sup>39</sup> accompany the banquets. A ritualized exchange of goods is also attested from texts of historical periods<sup>40</sup>. It goes without saying that these elaborate feasts must have had forerunners in prehistory. It can further be assumed that these prehistoric feasts may have played a crucial role in the establishing and legitimization of the emerging elites. To date, however, only little attention has been paid to these earlier feasts. An exploration of the evidence for feasting during the Chalcolithic period, the time of crucial transformations of society, therefore promises to shade some new light on the Ancient Near East.

The following paper intends to present a case study to explore the possibilities for the identification of feasting remains in the archeological record of the Chalcolithic period in Greater Mesopotamia, from the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, using the criteria listed above. On the premises lies the assumption that feasting may have been one important tool in the recurrent negotiation of social relations during that period and may have helped to legitimize the emergence of elites. The temporal frame, from the late Neolithic to the beginning of Mesopotamian city-states, has been chosen in order to allow a diachronic perspective on the period crucial for the emergence of complex societies.

### *Case study 1 : Sabi Abyad level 6 burnt village*

Sabi Abyad is a fairly large settlement mound surrounded by smaller mounds, located on the eastern terrace of the Balikh River. Excavations carried out since 1986 on the

southeastern part of the main mound have revealed a stratigraphic sequence with eleven building layers that covers most of the Pottery Neolithic period, topped by an Assyrian fortress<sup>41</sup>. Out of this long sequence, the “burnt village” of level 6, uncovered at large scale<sup>42</sup>, provides best evidence for *in situ* find material dating to the earliest stages of a transitional period between the Pre-Halaf era and the early Halaf, ca. 6 000 cal. BC<sup>43</sup>. Numerous seal impressions from level 6 are among the earliest known to date.

The burnt village of level 6 has been exposed over an area of approximately 800 square meters<sup>44</sup>. The terrain on which the buildings were erected was highly uneven, so that the buildings seem to have been built on strongly sloping surfaces consisting of eroded earlier levels. Some buildings were terraced into earlier levels. Out of the twelve buildings (numbered I-XII) that were partly or completely uncovered, eight are rectangular (I-V, X-XII) and four (VI-IX) are round. There is strong evidence for the use of second storeys and roofs as living space, indicated also by the remains of a stair in room 5 of building I leading to the roof, excavated in 1996.

The burnt village has been subject to several thematic articles<sup>45</sup> and one large interim report that presents most of the find material in detail<sup>46</sup>. A meticulous spatial and functional analysis of the burnt village provides a firm base for further interpretation<sup>47</sup>.

Despite this exhaustive information corpus, a detailed analysis of the burnt village is hampered by three factors :

Only the rectangular building II and the four circular structures VI-IX are completely exposed. The other buildings remain partly beyond the excavation limits.

The lack of information on rooftop and/or second storey activities.

33. LAMBERT, 1993 : 198.

34. VALLET, 1996 : 58, note 72.

35. SELZ, 1983 ; COLLON, 1992 ; VANSTIPHOUT, 1992 ; SCHMANDT-BESSERAT, 2001.

36. GLASSNER, 1987-1990.

37. RÖLLIG, 1970 ; RENFREW, 1995.

38. KILMER, 1995.

39. BLOCHER, 1992.

40. SELZ, 1995.

41. AKKERMANS, 1996 : with exhaustive bibliography.

42. Much work has been carried out after the completion of the 1996 report. The forthcoming publication will change some of the earlier views and will provide a much more complete plan of the level 6 settlement than is available at the moment of writing (O. Nieuwenhuys, pers. comm. : comp. also NIEUWENHUYSE O.P. and AKKERMANS P.M.M.G., Excavations at Late neolithic Tell Sabi Abyad (1996-2001). Paper presented at the Third International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Paris, April 15-19 2002).

43. See AKKERMANS, 1996 : XI.

44. The following analysis is based entirely on the evidence available in published form.

45. AKKERMANS and VERHOEVEN, 1995 ; AKKERMANS and DUISTERMAAT, 1997.

46. AKKERMANS (ed.), 1996.

47. VERHOEVEN, 1999.

Off-site areas, such as open air work spaces as they could be expected on the fringes of the village, are not covered in the areas excavated before 1996.

- Architecture

The architecture of the level 6 burnt village<sup>48</sup> is characterized by large rectangular structures (I-V, X-XII) consisting of small quadrangular/rectangular rooms arranged in long rows (fig. 1). Apparently, these cubicles have been added to each other in an agglutinative way over a longer time span, and there are indices for repair and reconstruction events. Open courtyards are added to these houses, sheltered from the open by enclosure walls. Large ovens are found in the courtyards. The four round structures (VI-IX) are freestanding, only the largest one, building VI, is integrated into a complex structure of small rectangular rooms adjacent to the north.

Circulation between the buildings must have largely happened over the roof since no open circulation areas, alleys or corridors or the like, are provided. Circulation within the houses must also largely have used the roof, since despite high wall preservation only few portholes connecting neighboring rooms were observed.

Architectural features that would set selected areas apart from the standard are extremely rare : one partly excavated room in the northwestern part (XII/1) yielded white wall plaster, and a neighboring room (XII/8) had a pavement made from pottery fragments. Another long room (X/6) had a bench along its wall. Large ovens that must have been in use over a considerable time span cluster in the open courtyards (open areas north and south of building II), single ovens are found in rooms or courtyards (I/2 ; I/3 ; I/12). The clusters of large oven installations north and south of building II stand out against the rest of the settlement : they are the only ones that consist of two or three single ovens, hence indicating that larger amounts of food may have been prepared here. Except for building I that yielded three single ovens, no other houses show a comparable equipment of installations. It should not be forgotten, however, that building II is the only one that was completely uncovered, including the open areas adjacent to it.

Hence, building II seems to differ from the rest of the settlement because of its extensive food preparation installations, but not according to room layout. This may be a hint that building II was a place where large meals were prepared, but not the place where they were consumed. We can only guess as to where those meals may have been consumed : it

may have been the roof area, or an open air environment outside the houses. There is no evidence, whatsoever, that the house II kitchen facilities exceed the requirements of a normal household.

Summarizing, the architectural analysis provides no clear evidence for feasting in Sabi Abyad. The small room size and their restricted accessibility preclude the usage of the house interiors for hosting feasts. Specially furnished buildings are rare, and open air activity zones do not exceed domestic requirements.

- Finds

According to the analysis by M. Verhoeven, the buildings at Sabi Abyad level 6 served a full range of domestic functions<sup>49</sup>. Based on detailed lists of find distributions<sup>50</sup>, he distinguished storage and activity areas within the houses, and garbage dumps that seem to have formed during a secondary usage of the rooms.

Furthermore detailed information concerning the distribution of finds throughout the settlement are available for the sealings<sup>51</sup>, and for the human and animal figurines<sup>52</sup>. Other find groups are presented in the interim report in a selective way without comprehensive find lists<sup>53</sup>, and the major focus of the pottery analysis has been on classification and chronology<sup>54</sup>. Hence, only the presence of certain types in the archaeological record can be listed ; this does not mean, however, that types not mentioned do not exist.

The distribution (fig. 1) of seal impressions is closely restricted to two main areas, houses II and V, with a few singular impressions found in the round buildings VI and IX. Within house II, the largest concentration (n = 201 out of 228 in house II) stems from room II/6 where the material occurs together with large amounts of other find materials such as figurines, labrets, stone and bone tools and the like. The adjacent rooms II/7, II/1 and II/10 yielded only occasional finds. Regarding the motives, anthropomorphic and teriomorphic impressions seem to be almost exclusive to building II. The second concentration of seal impressions (n = 61) from building V is much smaller than the group registered for building II. The bulk of material (n = 57) was found in rooms V/6 and

48. VERHOEVEN and KRANENDONK, 1996.

49. VERHOEVEN, 1999, 2000b.

50. Only available as summary lists, VERHOEVEN, 1999 : appendix 3.

51. DUISTERMAAT, 1996.

52. COLLET, 1996.

53. CAVALLO, 1996 ; COLLET and SPOOR, 1996 ; SPOOR and COLLET, 1996 ; ZLIST and WATERBOLK-VAN ROOIJEN, 1996 ; CAVALLO, 2000.

54. LE MIERE and NIEUWENHUYSE, 1996.

Illustration non autorisée à la diffusion

**Fig. 1 :** *Tell Sabi Abyad. Plan of the settlement with distribution of small finds (after VERHOEVEN, 1999 : fig. 3.1).*



V/7 and occasional finds in the adjacent rooms V/10 and V/3. In building V, a larger proportion of unstamped clay lumps that may have served as simple lids were found. Anthropomorphic or teriomorphic impressions were completely absent from this area. The circular buildings yielded only a minor number of seal impressions (n = 4 from building VI, n = 1 from building IX). The excavators suggest that the limited find area may indicate a controlled information storage in the sense of "archive rooms". In a similar line, Verhoeven classifies rooms II/6 and 7 and V/6 and 7 as archive rooms<sup>55</sup>.

The seal impressions served to close off different types of transportable containers, vessels and baskets. Doors or other immobile objects were not sealed. One join between a stone bowl (S91-55)<sup>56</sup> and its original clay cover could be established: interestingly, the two were found in different find spots, the sealing from room II/6, while the bowl lay in room II/12.

Not surprisingly, the distribution of sealings coincides partly with the distribution of tokens that are abundant in houses II (II/6) and V (V/6 + V/7) and are found occasionally also in other rooms, especially in the round building VI. Equally, schematic human figurines seem to be systematically associated with the sealings. Almost all these figurines have their head broken off and it is assumed by the excavators that this breaking happened by intention<sup>57</sup>. Out of the 31 figurines recorded, 14 were found in building II (n = 11 from II/6) and 11 in building V. This distribution is not as exclusive as the distribution of the sealings, since singular human figurines are also found in other buildings. Noteworthy is room I/11 in building I that yielded five figurines, but no sealings. Animal figurines, on the other hand, are represented by a much smaller sample with a less clearly restricted distribution. Four stem from room II/6, but others are found in the open area north of building II, in building IX, and singular pieces in I/11 and V/5.

One rather enigmatic find group are large massive clay objects of at least *ca.* 50 cm length with concavities or in some cases with the remains of animal bones or horns inserted into them. They were found in building V, rooms V/3, V/5 and V/6. Their find position indicates that they may originally have lain on the roof and have fallen into these rooms when the house was destroyed. Their function and purpose remains unknown. It may be speculated that they served as some kind

of display, either very schematized animal figurines<sup>58</sup>, devices for the mounting of animal trophies, or "monsters" used within a ritual that may have been related to a burial ceremony<sup>59</sup>.

The spatial analysis by Verhoeven provides a detailed mapping of other find materials<sup>60</sup>. He arrives at a distinction of buildings entirely devoted to storage purposes, storage buildings with evidence for limited activity areas, and open area activity areas. Building on his results, the limited space devoted to domestic activity other than storage is obvious. Again, the lack of data from the roof, the area best suitable to domestic activities of any kind, may be responsible for the pattern.

#### • Results

In summary, the burnt village from Sabi Abyad level 6 provides us with a restricted window into the neolithic village structure consisting of independent households with no evidence for a central authority. Clear indications exist for the restricted use of space, be it for storage or domestic activities, and for the controlled flow of goods as is indicated by the sealings and their distribution. Screened against the three criteria that were singled out before for the identification of feasting events, there is no clear evidence for the first two points:

1. Kitchen facilities for the preparation of large meals are attested but seem to remain within the size range expected for a village household. The distribution of different pottery fabrics, fine ware or others, does not indicate any significant preferences<sup>61</sup>.

2. Architectural clues at the existence of representative facilities, gathering halls or reception areas, lack all together. Faint evidence that some of the buildings may have stood apart from the rest could be the white plaster in XII/7, and the roof decoration with enigmatic clay objects in building V. However, given the small room size, it remains doubtful whether the buildings were used for living at all, since the storage and protection of goods seem to have been a major objective. Regarding the architectural record, the lack of preserved activity zones that are assumed to have existed on the roofs or in larger open areas strongly hampers any further interpretation. The large ovens around house II and the related

55. VERHOEVEN, 1999 : 136-141, 152-154.

56. Comp. COLLET and SPOOR, 1996 : fig. 7.6. 3.

57. COLLET, 1996 : 403.

58. SPOOR and COLLET, 1996 : 444.

59. VERHOEVEN, 2000a.

60. VERHOEVEN, 1999 : 107-202.

61. The preliminary state of the pottery report precludes more precise analysis for the time being.

activity areas most probably catered to events taking place outside the limits of excavation.

3. However, some clues can be drawn from the distribution of finds : the sealings indicate a systematically organized flow of goods from, to or within the site. Among the containers sealed, vessels and baskets may have served for staple goods, but *e.g.* the small stone bowl (S91-55, quoted above) may have held some more valuable, resp. prestigious material. In relation with the numerous other small finds, broken figurines, stone celts, labrets, token, the two major sealing concentrations in II/6 and in V/6 + V/7 may perhaps be residues of a ritualized exchange event. This may have taken place on the roof, with its remains swept into a room below afterwards.

In terms of feasting evidence, there are only some indications for ritualized events that included the exchange of goods, among them possibly valuables, the breaking of figurines, and the display of status symbols such as the stone celts. The full extent of these events is, however, lost to us due to the limitations of material evidence.

#### Case study 2 : Değirmentepe Layer 7

The small settlement mound Değirmentepe in the Melitene on the right bank of the Upper Turkish Euphrates is located on a shallow terrace of conglomerate. Rescue excavations under the direction of Ufuk Esin in 1978-1986 have brought eleven building layers to light. The six lowermost building layers (11-5) are of chalcolithic date and present clear links with the late Ubaid culture of Mesopotamia. Layer 7, which has been exposed at large scale, revealed a densely packed building occupation with irregular tripartite buildings in the interior part of the site, and an enclosure wall towards its south. Most remarkable among the many finds are a wide array of seals and sealings, as well as evidence for copper processing.

Information on the excavations at Değirmentepe level 7 is available in the form of detailed preliminary reports<sup>62</sup> and of several thematic articles<sup>63</sup>. Detailed find lists are not yet available.

#### • Architecture

Değirmentepe layer 7 yielded a minimum of 14 densely arranged building units (fig. 2). Judging from the overall surface of the mound, it seems that approximately 2/3 of the settlement has been exposed. The southern boundary of the settlement is marked by an enclosure wall, while the northern limit lacks, probably due to erosion. Eight of the buildings of layer 7 follow the unique construction principle of the tripartite house, with a central hall and rows of side rooms at each long side of the central hall. At least three of these tripartite units obviously had a second floor or an accessible roof, as is attested by narrow rooms that appear to hold remains of a staircase.

In a detailed analysis of the Değirmentepe layer 7 architecture, U. Esin<sup>64</sup> presents a functional distinction of the architectural remains and shows that most of the tripartite houses had been used not only as domestic units, but had functioned as reunion houses or as temples. From the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium onwards, tripartite houses had become the norm for monumental architecture in Mesopotamia<sup>65</sup>. However, the form remains a standard for domestic units until at least the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. as well. Another building (building BC) could be identified as a workshop area<sup>66</sup>. A detailed mapping of seals and sealings, as well as other find materials, proves a close correlation of exceptionally furnished rooms and those materials. Based on these observations, a complex community with close ties to the Mesopotamian Ubaid culture can be reconstructed, with a population that vividly engaged in 5<sup>th</sup> millennium long distance copper trade. Seals' iconography and murals hint at the active role taken by religious personnel in these transactions<sup>67</sup>.

Five of the central halls in the Değirmentepe tripartite buildings (rooms EE, EL, I, DU, GK) have white plastered walls with traces of painted sun- and tree motives, V-shaped symbols and pots. Yet another central hall has white plastered walls without a trace of painting (room FD). All buildings have an oven, either in the central hall (EE, EL, I, probably GK) or in one of the next side rooms (EE, DU, FD, BC). Burials of neonates or, in one case, of a dog are placed next to the ovens. In one oven wall a human mandible was found (DU). Shallow and high *podia* constructed from mudbrick are recorded in almost every central room (EE, EL, DU, FC, FD). In some cases, these *podia* yielded traces of pigment in small

62. ESIN, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983a, b, 1984 ; ESIN and HARMANKAYA, 1985, 1986, 1987.

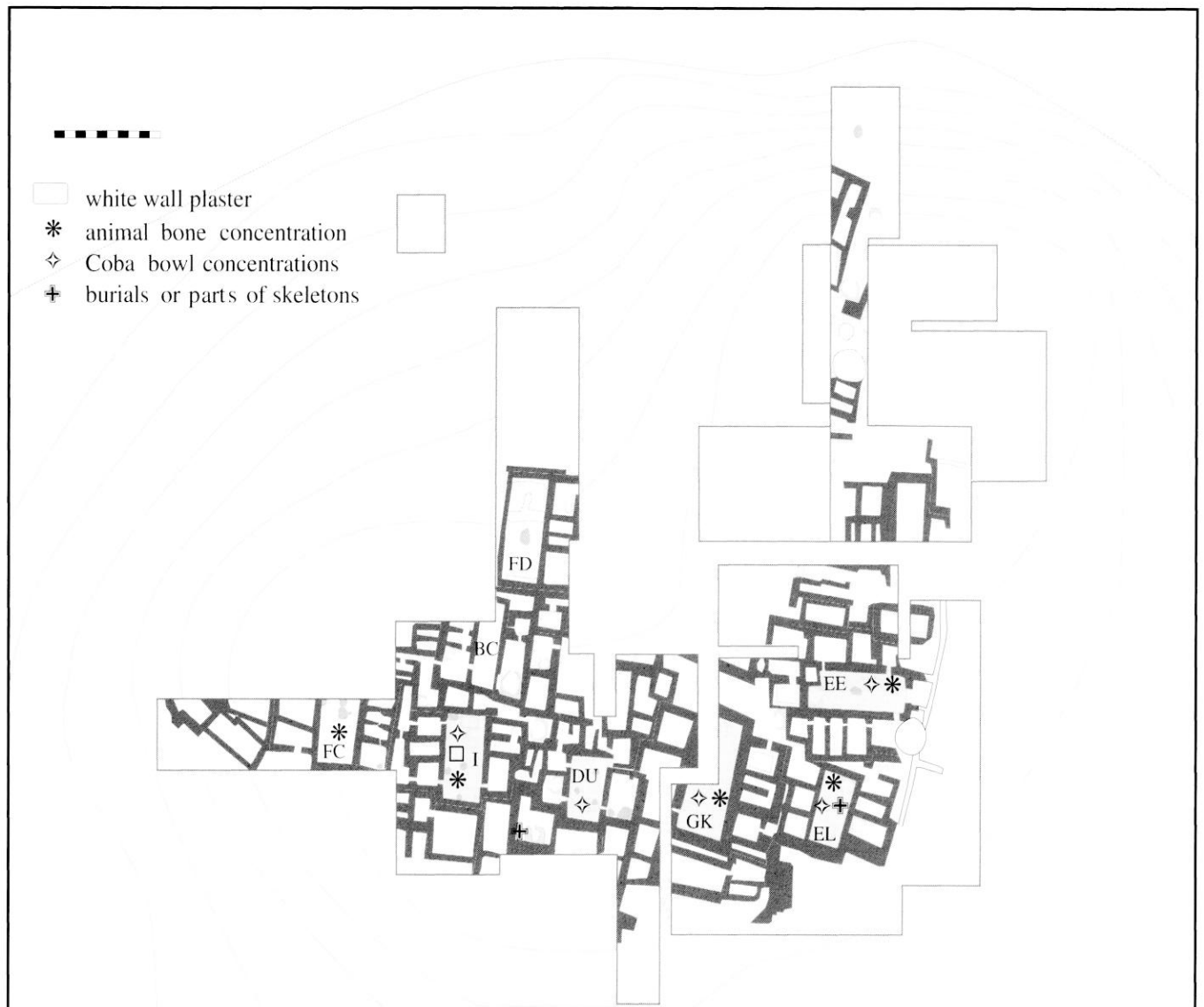
63. ESIN, 1985, 1994, 1998.

64. ESIN, 1998.

65. HEINRICH, 1971, 1982.

66. ARSEBÜK, 1986.

67. ESIN, 1994 : 79 and 1998 : 673.



**Fig. 2 :** *Değirmentepe. Plan of settlement with architectural features indicated (after ESIN, 1998 : fig. 1).*

depressions. It can thus be subsumed that most of the central rooms in Değirmentepe are set apart from the normal rooms by a “better than average” furnishing and some unusual features.

- Finds

This impression is further confirmed by the mapping of significant finds<sup>68</sup>.

68. Since Değirmentepe is published as a series of preliminary reports, not every find group has received the same attention and thus, some important groups may be underrepresented.

Burnt animal bones are found in all five central halls with wall paintings (EE, EL, I, DU, GK). They cluster in pits that are dug in immediate vicinity of the ovens, and are mixed with garbage material such as Coba bowl fragments, slag and seal impressions (EL, I, DU, GK, probably FC). Some of these pits contain exclusive high concentrations of one material, such as slag or sealings (GK, BC). Residues of metal working are found in one building (building BC) interpreted as workshop, together with remains of a flint knapping atelier.

Besides coba bowls, a second significant group of pottery consists of painted “Ubaid wares” that clusters in the central

halls, but also in the neighboring side rooms<sup>69</sup>. Scoops are found in three rooms, two alone in room FD. The remaining small finds cannot be mapped systematically. A schematic human figurine is mentioned for room DU, and room FC yielded many beads.

Most significant is the distribution of glyptic finds (fig. 3a-b) : out of 24 seals that have been recorded in Değirmentepe, 10 come from the central rooms with wall painting (I, DU, GK, EL, EE) and another five from the neighboring side rooms. Two seals were found in the less elaborate central halls FC and BC, another six derive from smaller side rooms, and one was not *in situ*. The seals are obviously concentrated in the workshop building around room BC. It is here, that the largest concentrations of sealings are found as well. Two sealings concentrations from side rooms BB and AU possibly derive from an older, destroyed oven, among them are several with the exceptional motif of a birdman<sup>70</sup>. All sealings stem from moveable containers such as vessels, bags or baskets, or are stamped on bullae. Immobile objects such as doors have apparently not been sealed.

The distribution of finds, especially of sealings, clearly indicates that the western part of the settlement, that is the building with central hall BC and the neighboring building with the central hall I yielded more material than the eastern part of the settlement. This may relate to the specific function of building BC where a variety of raw materials were processed, with the sealings indicating the exchange of raw material.

#### • Results

In summary, these observations provide evidence for an ideal form of a tripartite building. Six of the eight tripartites present an elaborately equipped central hall with white wall plaster and painting traces. In six cases, ovens belong to the assemblage, either in the central hall or in a side room. Only two buildings have not given evidence for ovens. This may be related to incomplete recovery of the building in one case, and to heavy perturbations in the other case. Garbage pits with huge amounts of animal bones, Coba bowls and other residues are found in all buildings. In three central halls both seals and sealings were found. Two further central halls in the eastern part of the settlement present a comparable architectural evidence but the list of finds is incomplete – one hall is missing the seal, the other the sealings (they are found in a side room,

however). Two further halls revealed glyptic finds but are less elaborately furnished. Finally, central hall FD stands apart because of its elaborate finish and should hence be considered a special room with enough space for feasting, although the room lacks murals and was also almost completely empty.

Thus, all eight tripartite buildings yield evidence that special attention has been paid to their finishing and furnishing, although not all of them are furnished equally. One possible conclusion would be that all these buildings were special purpose buildings. Beside these eight buildings, almost no other, possibly domestic unit was found. It may therefore be more appropriate to interpret the tripartite buildings not as special buildings continuously reserved for a specific purpose, but as buildings with a temporary special function such as feasts.

According to the criteria outlined above, all three aspects of the feast are preserved in the Değirmentepe archaeological evidence :

1. Installations such as ovens suitable for the preparation of meals are found, as are remains of lavish consumption.
2. Elaborate furnishing sets most of the central halls apart from normal rooms. Additionally there is evidence for special purpose installations, such as podiums and tables, that still yield residues of special substances such as pigments which may have been used in relation with rituals.
3. Glyptic evidence points at a regular and controlled receipt of goods, among them most probably prestige goods. Such a delivery of goods – or exchange of presents – may occur in the context of a feast but can take place also at other opportunities.

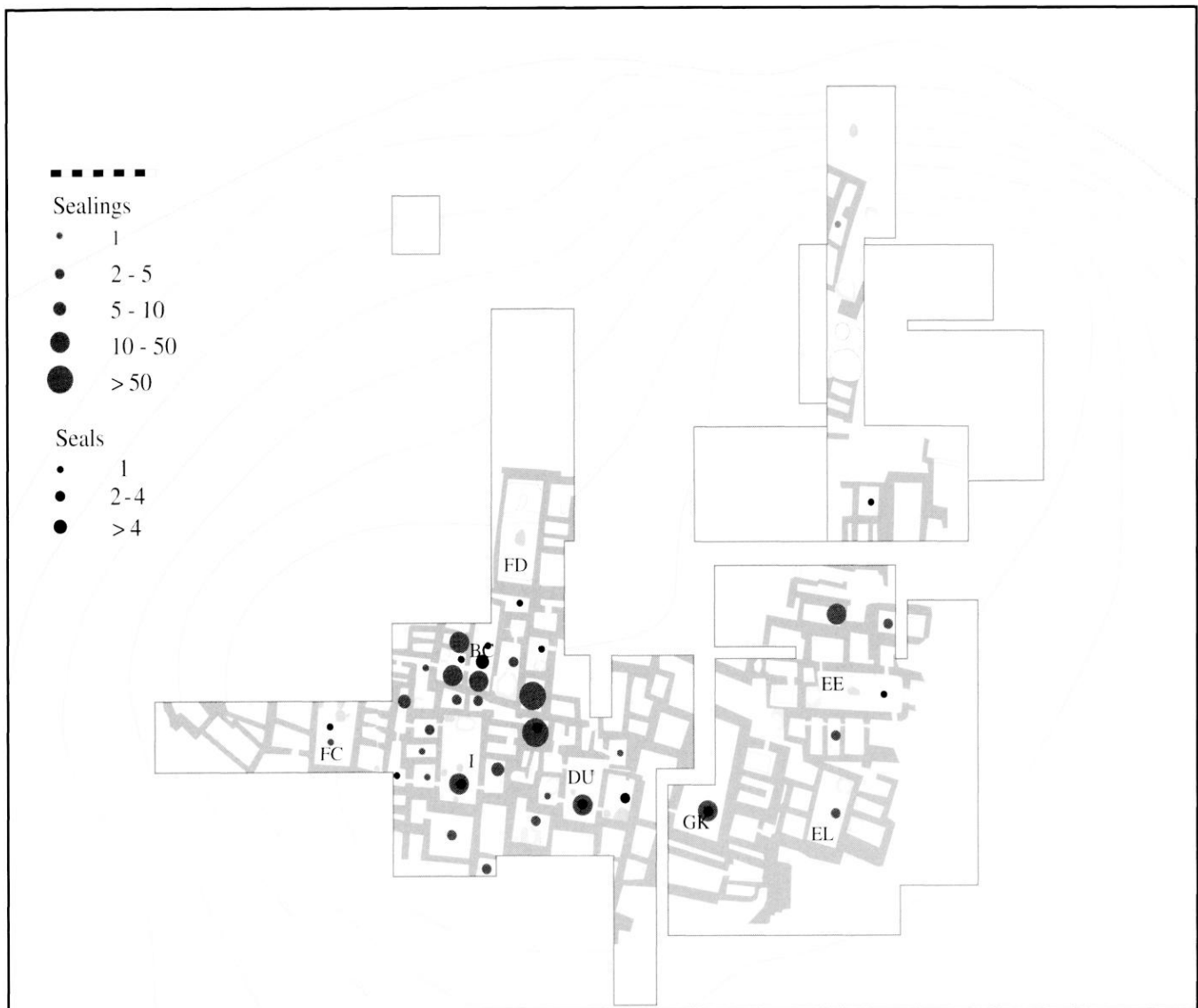
In detail : each tripartite building has a central hall that is perfectly suitable for the reception of guests. This hall has a representative furnishing and provides installations for the preparation of large amounts of food. Garbage deposits with animal bones and Coba bowls in pits within the halls probably stem from elaborate meals. The concentration of painted pottery in especially these rooms may indicate their use as special tableware reserved for the reception of guests. The sealings indicate transactions of goods, perhaps exotic food, raw materials or prestige goods that seem to have been exchanged during the meals.

Almost all buildings in Değirmentepe, with the exception of the workshop area BC and the empty house FD, provide hence evidence for feasting on a household basis. It is possible that the burials, the use of pigments, and the iconography of wall paintings indicate some religious aspect at the same time. The tripartite buildings hence fulfill all the requirements for “multiple elite houses” such as they have been proposed to be

69. Following ESN, 1998 : 672.

70. ESN, 1994 : 78.





**Fig. 3b :** *Değirmentepe. Plan of settlement showing distribution of sealings according to relative amount of sealings (after ESIX, 1998 : fig. 1).*

Period VIII postdates the final Ubaid related layers from nearby Değirmentepe. Period VII consists of several building layers dating to the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and can roughly be correlated with Gawra XI-IX and the Norşuntepe westslope, 35-31<sup>73</sup>. Period VIA marks the final stage of the Chalcolithic and can be equated with the so-called “Late Uruk” period in Northern Syria.

While monumental building structures of period VIA have been known for some time, evidence for public building struc-

tures and administrative features of Period VII have only recently been brought to light. Due to the preliminary character of the reports, discussion of the Period VII remains has to keep to a very general evaluation.

- Architecture of Period VII

Evidence for exceptional architecture stems from two areas on the western part of the mound, where the highest portion of the site must have been located at that time. In the northern part, a large building was exposed that stands out against contemporary domestic structures because of its size

73. DI NOCERA, 2000a, b ; GÜLÇÜR, 2000 ; SCHMIDT, 1996.

and architectural elements such as internal columns added to the walls<sup>74</sup>. Despite its monumental character, the building is not considered an religious or administrative building but an elite residence and is not further discussed here.

In the southwestern part of the mound, immediately north of the later VIA public structures, another large building was exposed (fig. 4) : building XXIX has a bipartite layout with a large central hall and narrow side rooms added at one side. This apparently original Anatolian ground plan<sup>75</sup> remains in use as a standard for public buildings during the VIA period, and is also found in Uruk sites south of the Anti-Taurus, e.g. at Tell Sheikh Hassan<sup>76</sup>. Building XXIX stands on a rectangular platform erected from stones and mudbrick. It must have been visible from far and at the same time overlooked the Period VII settlement. Access to the main room was from four doors in the long walls, one in each corner of the room. The short sides of the central hall are equipped with symmetrically arranged niches. The walls are plastered white and bear several layers of wall paintings in red and black. One motif, painted onto the northern wall of the central hall A900 shows a standing long object with lines attached to its upper part. The preservation state precludes a detailed interpretation, but it may represent a vase with a liquid flowing out of it. In the middle of the central hall, a rectangular podium of mudbrick held residues of a fireplace.

- Finds from building XXIX

The floor in the southern part of the central hall A900, markedly the area around the rectangular podium, was covered by the scattered remains of mass produced bowls with flint scraped or string cut bases. In the narrow side room A932, however, bowls were stacked upside down as if stored ready for future use. In this same side room lay numerous clay lumps with the impressions of stamp seals. Those sealings stem from the closing of containers, vessels, and baskets, while no door sealings were found. Their find situation indicates that some of the sealings were lying on the floor, while a second group was retrieved from a superimposed dump that also contained more bowls, and that may have fallen from the roof or from a high shelf.

74. FRANGIPANE, 1993c, 2002 : fig. 1.

75. FRANGIPANE, 2002 : 124.

76. BOLSE, 1995.

Illustration non autorisée à la diffusion

**Fig. 4 :** *Arslantepe. Plan of period VII architecture with distribution of finds indicated (after FRANGIPANE, 2001a : fig. 3, no absolute numbers indicated).*

- Results for building XXIX

Building XXIX is extraordinary, both in terms of its architectural features, and of the find material preserved. The equipment – podium with fire place – may have served for the processing of food, and hundreds of scattered bowls on the floor may result from meals distributed among the community. M. Frangipane has already pointed out that a ceremonial form of redistribution might offer the best interpretation of this evidence<sup>77</sup>. The wall painting, albeit not completely clear, might depict a vessel for the distribution of drinks.

The numerous sealings clearly indicate that the exchange of goods happened in this building on a regular basis. According to the containers used, food contributions to whatever event took place in the central hall are the most likely goods exchanged here. A scenario, where sealed containers with food are brought to a central place for communal consumption, where the containers are brought to the side rooms and the seals are then broken and the content handed out in mass produced bowls<sup>78</sup>, to be finally consumed in the central hall together with additionally lavish amounts of beverages, can well be imagined. The Arslantepe building XXIX record would hence fulfill all requirements for the identification of a feast in the archaeological record. Compared to the case studies discussed above, however, the scale of the event has radically changed and by far exceeds the household level.

77. FRANGIPANE 2001a : 3, 2002 : 124.

78. FRANGIPANE, 1997 : 69 points out that the mass produced bowls in use during the following period VIA seem to have served rather for handing out goods than for collecting them – the same may apply to the period VII coarse bowls.

Hundreds of bowls have been in use, and hence hundreds of participants may have attended the feast.

- Architecture of period VIA

Archaeological evidence for period VIA in Arslantepe is much better than for period VII. Large exposures on the southern slope of the tell have revealed an agglomeration of large scale architecture held to represent public buildings of the later 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC<sup>79</sup>. A detailed description of the architecture and an analysis of its associated find material, including find distribution tables and charts, is available and provides the base for the following discussion<sup>80</sup>. The data presented there derives from 4 different building units, numbered I-IV.

While data quality is extraordinary, only limited parts of the settlement have been excavated. The exposed area may not be representative for the whole settlement because it consists largely of public buildings (fig. 5). Domestic houses, workshops, and off site areas are lacking in the record. Since one aim of the study was to single out specific areas set apart from everyday life, one must be aware that the data situation already provides a selection for these areas.

A second obstacle results from the superposition of the building layers. A stratigraphic sequence of at least partially superimposed buildings could be established, with building I forming the latest addition, and the street cutting into remains of the older buildings IV and III. Find material from the lower layers may only be partially preserved and hence not fully comparable to the contents of the latest building I.

Period VIA public buildings are arranged at two sides of a paved street that climbs uphill from a gate at the south of the settlement towards the northeast. The buildings form a loosely connected complex, with the main buildings surrounded by several smaller room units, siderooms, or storage rooms. In contrast to period VII, where building XXIX seems to have been freestanding and accessible from all four corners, the VIA buildings are much more secluded and access is mediated through courtyards and siderooms before reaching the main rooms. The four large house units of the complex allow one to single out building I as bipartite building, comparable in principal layout to the larger building XXIX of period VII, and building IV as a bipartite building forming part of a larger building complex with a courtyard. As is the case in earlier

building XXIX, the bipartites consist of one large rectangular main room and two smaller siderooms, and contain platforms, hearths, and niched internal facades. The older building III is not well enough preserved to assign it to any type, but a small platform, a hearth and storage bins are preserved as well.

All buildings in this part of the mound show white wall plaster and in general a careful finish. Niches as interior decoration of the walls exist in buildings I (rooms A42, A46) and IV (main room A450). Building III originally had niches as well in the main room (A127). More elaborate wall decoration was observed in building I with geometric stamped wall patterns in the anteroom (A46) and in building IV (painted decoration in chamber A364). More stamped wall decoration has been exposed on the eastern walls facing the street (A796).

Installations such as platforms and hearths were present in all the main rooms of the large buildings (I/A42 ; IV/A450) and also in some side rooms (III/A111 ; III/A113). Storage bins and jars were usually kept in the smaller siderooms of buildings I and III (I/A46 ; III/A111).

- Finds

Finds from the period VIA public buildings are abundant and have, at least for the larger part of the excavation, been listed in detail<sup>81</sup>. Building I enjoyed best conditions for *in situ* preservation and hence provides the most complete picture.

As is evident from the distribution map of pottery types for buildings I<sup>82</sup>, the large main room (I/A42) had been kept largely empty, with the exception of several stemmed dishes and some coarse bowls standing close to a small square pedestal. More bowls and another stemmed dish stood in the southwestern corner of the room. In contrast to this, the two small anterooms (I/A36 ; I/A46) were crammed full with pottery of different shapes, among them both coarse bowls and stemmed dishes, but also large storage vessels and a singular droop spout bottle considered an import. In contrast to building I, building IV yielded a collection of different jars and pithoi in the northwestern corner of the main room (A450), some of them reminiscent of Uruk prototypes, and a few stemmed dishes were set next to the bank along the southern wall. The small anterooms A809 and A800 were, however, practically empty of pottery. Room A800 held a mill and a mortar, indicating that food preparation must have taken place somewhere in the immediate neighborhood. In the row of

79. DI NOCERA, 2000a : 335-336, 2000b.

80. FRANGIPANE and PALMIERI (eds), 1983 ; PALMIERI, 1985, 1986 ; FRANGIPANE, 1989 ; PALMIERI and FRANGIPANE, 1989 ; FRANGIPANE, 1993a, b, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001a.

81. FRANGIPANE and PALMIERI, 1983 ; FRANGIPANE, 1997.

82. FRANGIPANE and PALMIERI (eds), 1983 ; fig. 19, and charts in table 13 ; FRANGIPANE, 1997 ; fig. 6.



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**Fig. 5 :** Arslantepe. Plan of period VIA architecture with distribution of finds (after FRANGIPANE, 2001a : fig. 3, no absolute numbers indicated).

smaller siderooms south of building B and not directly connected with it, storage vessels are found in the northernmost room A365, while coarse bowls are plentiful in the small southern room A340. This may indicate a different function of the two, with an emphasis on storage for room A365, and on distribution in A 340, as has already been suggested by M. Frangipane<sup>83</sup>. In the only partly preserved building III, the side room (III/A113) contained a group of coarse bowls, while next to a small platform in what was preserved of the main room (III/A127) stood a collection of stemmed dishes. Next to these, a small narrow space (III/A206) was apparently used as a dump area, filled with layers of garbage that held numerous coarse bowls besides sealings and animal bones.

Sealings are the second large find group in the Arslantepe VIA public buildings. Sealings have been dumped preferably in the small narrow spaces that belong to buildings I and III (I/A77 ; III/A206). Those spaces may have been reserved for the deposition of garbage, but they could also well have been unused areas, e.g. below staircases, as the shape of the rooms would suggest. A third sealing dump is found in the corner of

the only partially exposed room A430 east of the courtyard of building IV. Minor concentrations of sealings were also found in two small rooms A340 and A364 separating the courtyard of building IV from the alley, before the entrance to the main room A450 of building IV, and a few pieces also inside that room. The sealings had been applied to different types of transportable containers such as bags and pottery vessels, and also to doors<sup>84</sup>. It seems that some have been in use only for a very short span of time, even as short as a few hours only<sup>85</sup>. Sealings had been applied both from stamps and from cylinder seals. However, so far no seals have been found that would correspond to the seal impressions from period VIA. They must have been stored or discarded in other places. The sealings prove clearly that the exchange of different goods occurred regularly in Arslantepe.

The reason why some of the sealings were in use only for a short span of time is not known. If we think about a staple economy, this is the opposite of what one would expect – a staple economy would need to keep hold of goods and to store

83. FRANGIPANE, 1997.

84. FERIOLI and FIANDRA, 1983 : fig. 81.

85. *Ibid.* : 468.

them away safely for a while. It seems hence that short term safeguarding and the controlled flow of goods was behind the Arslantepe sealings. If we hypothesise a short term redistributive event, consisting of a food and drink delivery to the location of the event, the collection of contributions in one single place and finally the consumption of these goods on the occasion of a feast in the main room, nothing would contradict the archaeological record.

This proposition may be further supported by the results of the botanical and faunal analysis. Residues of vine were recorded in the small sideroom A340, while cereals were largely absent in the storerooms – another argument against large scale and long term agricultural surplus storing as Marcella Frangipane herself has pointed out<sup>86</sup>. Animal bones were abundant in the main room of building I (A42) and in the garbage dumps in buildings I and III (I/A77 ; III/A206). The samples seem to be void of extremity bones, as if only the meat bearing parts had found their way into this area<sup>87</sup>. Also, in comparison to domestic debris, the amount of wild game was conspicuously high, and it is stated that especially the wild animals may have been reserved for consumption or sacrifice (or both) in those buildings<sup>88</sup>.

Noteworthy is also a singular human skull that was retrieved next to the northern wall of the main room of building I<sup>89</sup>.

#### • Results

Arslantepe VIA hence provides a sequence of non-domestic buildings that seem to have served different purposes. The buildings themselves are extraordinary in terms of furniture and decoration, they are set apart from the domestic settlement, and they follow each other in an area clearly distinguished from the rest of the settlement. Their layout keeps to the bipartite plan that is already familiar from period VII although the overall spatial layout has now changed completely. Much in contrast to Period VII building XXIX, a high degree of seclusion is now evident from the fact that the main rooms can only be entered via the mediation of smaller siderooms and courtyards and emphasized by the application of wall decoration in crucial passageways. The main rooms now

seem to be reserved for some kind of offering rituals, while redistributive events seem to have moved to the siderooms such as A340 where many coarse bowls that may have served as distribution containers are found. The concentration of special pottery, sealings and other find material in some other rooms indicates continuous exchange and consumption events at a scale way above the household level. The debris from collective meals and their preparation seem to have been collected orderly in the garbage areas. This may partly reflect a different situation at the time of deliberate abandonment in contrast to the *in situ* situation to be expected if a building is lost to a sudden destruction as was the case for level VII.

The denomination “temple” chosen by the excavators pays respect to all these extraordinary aspects. In these buildings, short term exchange seems to have taken place under close scrutiny, alongside continuous storage keeping in the siderooms. The subsequent distribution and consumption of selected food is indicated by the animal bone assemblages from the garbage areas and may indicate that some type of feasting, although of a different sort than the one in building XXIX, may have taken place. Checking for indicators of feasting, there are indices for all three aspects to be investigated :

1. The area of the period VIA public buildings is clearly set apart from the ordinary settlement. Furnishing and finish of the buildings themselves indicate the status above the ordinary. Installations for the storage and preparation of meals are found.

2. Platforms and small pedestals may have served as altars or offering places. Stemmed dishes seem to occur in a regular association in the vicinity of these altars and underline the character of an offering place.

3. Coarse bowls, animal bone debris and sealings all dumped together into small spaces within these buildings seem to represent residues of past consumptive events, beginning from the delivery of food and ending with the clearing-away of dishes.

According to these indices, the southern slope of Arslantepe during period VIA seems to have been an area where exchange and consumption – hence feasting – took place at a regular scale. Apparently, feasts were by then hosted in a special building and were open only to certain members of the community, and the delivery of food and other supplies happened under close scrutiny.

Therefore, in a diachronic perspective, important changes have occurred since period VII when large scale redistribution during public feasts could be observed. In period VIA, access to the feasting stage is strictly regulated, and both the con-

86. FRANGIPANE, 1997 : 69.

87. BÖKÖNYI, 1983 : 596-597.

88. *Ibid.* : table 5. A similar preference for wild game has recently been reported from Tell Brak, area TW, layer 18 (EMBERLING and McDONALD, 2001 : 30). The building exposed there and its associated finds may equally represent an ancient feasting area.

89. FRANGIPANE and PALMIERI (eds), 1983 : 392.

struction of these special buildings and the close control of goods flow can only be imagined when central institutions acknowledged by all members of the community existed. We can therefore conclude that the Arslantepe VIA public buildings may have provided the stage for restricted and most probably ritually motivated feasts hosted by a central institution and its personnel, most probably a temple.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of feasts as an opportunity for the recurrent negotiation of social relations has been outlined above. Despite the high potential of the approach to illustrate mechanisms of social and historical changes, the archaeological evidence attesting feasts has in the past not yet been fully recognized, at least systematically analyzed. The case studies presented here intend to define and detect traces of feasts in the archaeological record, and to place this evidence into a wider perspective.

Traces of feasts were evident in all three case studies albeit to a different degree. The data from the burnt village at Sabi Abyad, the earliest of the three sites under investigation, yielded no direct residues of feasting. However, glyptic evidence proves the controlled flow – exchange or storage – of goods. Prestigious items have been accumulated in certain rooms, and ritual activity such as the breaking of figurines can be suggested. Those are interpreted as indirect evidence for feasting, the direct evidence of which is lacking due to the fact that social activities seem to have been confined to the roof tops that are not directly attested. We therefore lack the basis for any further interpretation regarding the scale or purpose of feasting.

One millennium later, evidence for feasting is widespread in Değirmentepe. Almost every building unit there has at least one representative room that is suitable as a reception room. Sealing and seals indicate a controlled exchange or storage of goods, and pottery assemblages as well as animal bone accumulations can be interpreted as residues of special meals that were hosted in almost every household on the site. Hence, feasts seem to have been a regular event in the different households at Değirmentepe. These feasts may also have allowed for competition between the different households that would welcome the opportunity to display prestige and to establish alliances and obligations between the hosts and the guests. In this sense, the context of feasts could have provided

emerging elites with a stage suitable for the recurrent re-negotiation of their social relationships.

Lastly, in 4<sup>th</sup> millennium Arslantepe, feasts were evidently hosted in special buildings and by far exceeded the household level. The buildings are constructed according to a general canon around a central main room and held installations such as platforms and offering places. Within the area occupied by these special buildings, the controlled flow of goods is evident from the sealings kept in store. Animal bone assemblages point at the selection of particular animals and of prime quality meat consumed or sacrificed there. Large amounts of coarse bowls may have functioned as one-way containers for the distribution of food and beverages. A wall painting perhaps showing a large vessel with liquid flowing from its mouth may possibly be interpreted as the depiction of a vessel used for the distribution of beverages, *e.g.* beer. It is therefore highly likely that the goods collected in the special buildings were redistributed at the occasion of feasts and were consumed on the spot.

Although these observations apply to the archaeological remains of Period VII and VIA in Arslantepe and a cultural continuity can be stated, important changes especially in architectural layout indicate that the Arslantepe community underwent some crucial transformations. The transition from VII to VIA seems to relate to the period when the local elite, already existent during period VII, managed to monopolize access to material and spiritual resources and to turn into a central institution. This central institution seems to have found wide acceptance within the community and hosted feasts at regular intervals over a longer timespan, probably at the occasion of recurrent rituals with restricted access. The stratigraphic sequence of special buildings for period VIA indicates an unbroken continuity for these activities in the same area. Arslantepe VIA therefore illustrates a new level of social organization, with institutions accumulating power and an established elite, in contrast to the competing elites existing at Değirmentepe one millennium earlier.

As this study intended to show, feasting residues from late Neolithic and Chalcolithic communities in Northern Mesopotamia and Southeastern Anatolia allow one to identify singular and recurrent events that may have played a significant role in the transformation of basic village communities into hierarchically organized complex polities. Instead of abstract processes of centralization and hierarchization, the dynamics set off by human agency and interaction have become visible as one of many factors responsible for this crucial step in human history.

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