
Arthur S. Iberall

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into Eurasia, or more particularly the diffusive spread of Homo erectus across Eurasia, leads to a time table at which the gate keeping entrance into the Americas, as a one time entrance and take over, is keyed by the Bering Strait bridge and the time of arrival of the species over the entire Siberian range. Once you have one, two, a few such gated diffusions, one of them will take.

That is part of the detailed physics of stability transitions and other so-called transport processes. You may wish to think that you are free to wander the landscape of history in seeking out such explanations, that there are many ways to skin cats. The physical sciences limit you to only a number of processes whose relative stability you have to assess, and that is the bridge we have to offer.

P.S. We love this book. It brings us to the sense of a beginning of civilization, e.g., in the Near East right to the time period and processes that one finds between the late Natufian and the Halafian, with agricultural and pastoral beginnings back to the Kebaran. This is our modelling contribution to Mellaart's and the entire UNESCO book of facts.

Arthur S. Iberall

SOVIET CONTRIBUTIONS TO MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATION STUDIES


A Soviet archaeological expedition (Archaeological Institute in Moscow of the USSR Academy of Science) spent twelve seasons from 1969 to 1980 exploring a group of prehistoric mounds in northern Iraq on the Sinjar Plain, which lies between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The region is west of Tepe Gawra and
north of Umm Dabaghiyah. Tepe Gawra and Nineveh are near modern Mosul on the Tigris. At that longitude, shift about 130 miles to the west to land on the Habur River (called Khabar River on National Geographic maps) which is a tributary further S to the Euphrates. It is in that region, between the river and the Sinjar Mountains to the E where the tells lie that the Soviet expeditions explored from 1969 to 1980.

The time frame of the tells that were explored was about nine thousand years ago (kya) for the earliest (Tell Maghzaliyah) to the latest (Yarim Tepe III) of nearly five kya. Datings are all crude radiocarbon dates. Dendrochronological corrections would increase the time scale by about 500 years.

Certainly Klein, in her *Ice Age Hunters of the Ukraine*, 1973, showed that players of whom not much had been heard of in the West, the archaeologists of the USSR, could begin to make significant and useful contributions to world archaeology. Soviet science wasn't all Lysenko; there was a considerable amount of scientific cooperation of East and West by the mid-70s. Yoffee and Clark attempt to show the archaeological value of USSR concern with archaeology in Northern Iraq. No doubt any such exploratory researches, whether those of the USSR from 1969 to 1980, or the earlier British explorations, all mostly had military intelligence purposes behind them; but those purposes may be disregarded. The working scientists, whether experts or hacks, in general had some idea of the mixed character of their missions. God, country, and the military had to be served. So no moral judgments are being made; the sole question is, what did they contribute scientifically, conceptually?

**Interlude - a basic archaeological context for this review:** Walking through the British Museum in 1993, this reviewer noticed that their prehistoric findings within the Fertile Crescent of the Taurus-Zagros arc in the Near East were arranged to display largely the Hassuna, Samarran, and Halafian cultures of 8-7 kya. Their time journey then continued into the Ubaid period in the next millennium, 7-6 kya. By then, agriculture, grazing sheep, goats, cattle, pottery, and metallurgy had emerged. Turning to Sherratt (ed.) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, 1980, I found that a much earlier Mesolithic startup, the Kebaran culture, 17-14 kya, involving an exploitation of wild cereals,
shows signs of existence from Sinai to Syria. This is followed by a terminal period, the Natufian, perhaps 12-10 kya. Seasonally occupied dwellings with considerable stylistic diversity exhibited and implied less mobility than before; heavy stone tool artifacts indicated emergence of cultivation of cereals, and domestication of sheep, goats, and cattle, even though a major animal food staple still remained the hunted gazelle. Past 10 kya, a continuous retreat of the glaciers could be noted.

In Sherratt's Section 16 on the emergence of cities in the Near East, the contributor, Oates, points to the crucial innovation of complex villages of 12-15 acre size in central Mesopotamia in the Samarran phase at about 8 kya, with specialized craftsmanship, trade in luxury goods, communal defense works, and evidence of personal property and central redistribution. In the full Ubaid period, 7 to 5 kya, one finds the development of an urban Mesopotamia, supposedly the world's first urban civilization. A map, Fig. 16.2, depicts 38 major sites in the Zagros and Tigris-Euphrates region, with an additional handful beyond to the east. The cluster includes Tepe Gawra as the most northerly, Sialk as the most easterly, Eridu the most southerly, and Habuba the most westerly.

If we turn to UNESCO's History of Humanity, Vol. 1, de Laet (ed.), 1994, reviewed above, one finds Chapters 24, 36, 37, 38, and 41 of use in pinning down a quite recent, highly authoritative, broad picture of the Mesopotamian startup. These chapters cover Western Asia from the end of the Middle Paleolithic, to the beginning of food production, to the first states, to plant and animal domestication.

The UNESCO history offers, as a marvelous beginning-ending, a summary chapter (41) of the Western Asian history and evolution during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic. The story starts from the Kebaran and how it got to be the successor to the 'last' hunter-gatherer Aurignacian phase and the beginning of settlement and civilization. This reviewer notes that, as a working physical scientist but amateur in civilizational studies, he was first introduced to archaeological epochs by Mellaart, Earliest Civilizations of the Near East, 1965. UNESCO's chapter 41 is Mellaart writing just as authoritatively 30 years later and bringing the story up to date among his peers. But there is more to that
than a 'simple' story of some arcane history: in our opinion, we can use that 1994 UNESCO book as a basis to compare and judge this Yoffee book.

If we repeat Mellaart's 1994 Chronology, from his Table 16, we have loosely:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>kya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Neolithic and Neolithic periods in Western Asia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kebaran</td>
<td>19-14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Kebaran</td>
<td>14.5-12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Natufian</td>
<td>12.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Natufian</td>
<td>11.7-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Pottery Neolithic A</td>
<td>11-10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic B</td>
<td>10.5-9.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B</td>
<td>9.25-8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin Halaf, Hassuna, Samarra</td>
<td>8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Halaf, begin Ubaid 3</td>
<td>7.25-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Yoffee book:* The Soviet explorations focused on the mound sites of Yarim Tepe, Tell Sotto, and Kultepe; but having explored 10-15 sq. mi. around their Yarim Tepe base, they surveyed more than 50 Ubaid, Halaf, Hassuna, and pre-Hassuna sites.

Chapters 3-5. Before the Soviet work, Jarmo (9-8 kya) was the only known aceramic Neolithic site in Northern Iraq. Karim Shahir offered a beginning of food-producing at about eleven kya; Hassuna was a highly developed culture of farmers and pastoralists at about seven kya; but the sequence connection was fragmentary. In 1971-1975 the Soviets explored Tell Sotto (a mile or so west of Yarim Tepe). Below its archaic Hassuna level, they found a small early agricultural settlement involving, also, very primitive ceramics. Their 1976 excavations at Kultepe revealed similar material to Sotto. Those Sotto-type studies pushed the emergence of settled villages in Northern Mesopotamia back in time, but did not reach their origins. Sites earlier than Kultepe, at perhaps 8-9 kya, of an aceramic nature, would be required to answer the issue of origins of the Hassuna and Samarra cultures. No older settlements were found locally; thus they surmised that these Sotto-type settlements were the earliest in the Sinjar Plain studied, and that earlier sedentary activities might be located in
the hilly spurs of the surrounding mountains. This was confirmed in 1977 by discovery of a fortified aceramic settlement, Tell Maghzaliyah - explored 1977-1980. It is a little further north of Yarim Tepe III on the Abra River. Their subsistence economy was a mix of hunting-gathering, and agriculture. Their sedentary character clearly indicated the importance of agriculture. Precise connection from Maghzaliyah to Sotto-type plain farmers, while short in time, is not completely clear. Thus the preceramic groups now include the oldest strata of Jarmo in Shimshara, and Tell Maghzaliyah (i.e., perhaps nine kya). The early ceramic sites include the early oldest strata of Tell Sotto, Kultepe, Umm Dabaghiyah, and the upper stratum of Jarmo (eight kya).

Chapter 6 (written 1987) deals with the earlier British explorations of the upper Hassuna levels at Yarim Tepe I (Lloyd 1938, Oates 1965), and then the Soviet study of the lower Hassuna levels (1969-1971). The latter exhibited settlements of those three "most important early agricultural cultures of northern Mesopotamia," the Hassuna, Halaf, and Ubaid.

Chapter 7 deals with the archaic phase of the Hassuna culture. It discusses a whole wide range of the problems as the Soviet commentator sees them (1982). It attempts an absolute chronology at the end perhaps from about 8-8.5 kya to final Samarran and Halafian phase at perhaps seven kya.

Chapter 8 deals with the Halafian levels of Yarim Tepe II, to its earliest somewhat uncertain start up of seven kya. Chapter 9 continues the Halafian levels examination in Yarim Tepe III (1978-1980 season) - reported on in 1984. The findings of Tepe Gawra, Tell Arpachiayah, and Yarim Tepe III are related, through the Halafian period into the Ubaid. Chapter 10 (1982) deals with burial practices of the Halaf culture.

Chapter 11 (1982) deals with the Ubaid levels of Yarim Tepe III, which culture is the proto-Sumerian, i.e. immediately precedes the beginning of Sumerian civilization proper in Mesopotamia, and is found all through Mesopotamia: this is the Soviet inference asserted in 1982. They date the Sinjar Valley in Northern Ubaid culture at about 6-6.5 kya and regard it as a major route for its western transmission.

Chapter 12 is a chapter on the earliest evidence for metallurgy in ancient Mesopotamia. The authors comment on pushing
copper datings back from seven kya to nine or ten kya at Cayonu. The Soviet authors are confident that their explorations exhibit findings of copper ornaments and tools from perhaps 8-8.5 kya to 6-6.6 kya (1981 report).

Chapter 13 is a 1984 recapitulation of what the Soviet findings achieved in clarifying a history of Northern Mesopotamia.

Chapter 14, written by the American editor, Yoffee, is his 1983 paper on Mesopotamian Interaction Spheres. It was because of that paper, given at a USA-USSR symposium on the archaeology of the Near East, that the editor began to plan to get the Soviets to help interpret their work, e.g. in this volume.

A bibliography covering material of some relevance to both Soviet and non Soviet work referred to by the Soviets from 1936 to 1992 is included

The nonspecialist reader will find it useful to review the modern background in the UNESCO series, especially Mellaart's chapter, for the overall panorama against which the Soviet contributions to Northern Mesopotamia history from nine kya to about six kya were made. We will also remind the civilizationist reader that the trend to urban civilizations has its startup in the late Natufian, according to us (Iberall, White, Wilkinson, Foundations) and that it will pay to know what came before.

Arthur S. Iberall

A TEXTBOOK ON PREHISTORIC MESOAMERICA


The reviewer, as a physical generalist, is undertaking the review of a specialist textbook; the reader is thus forewarned.